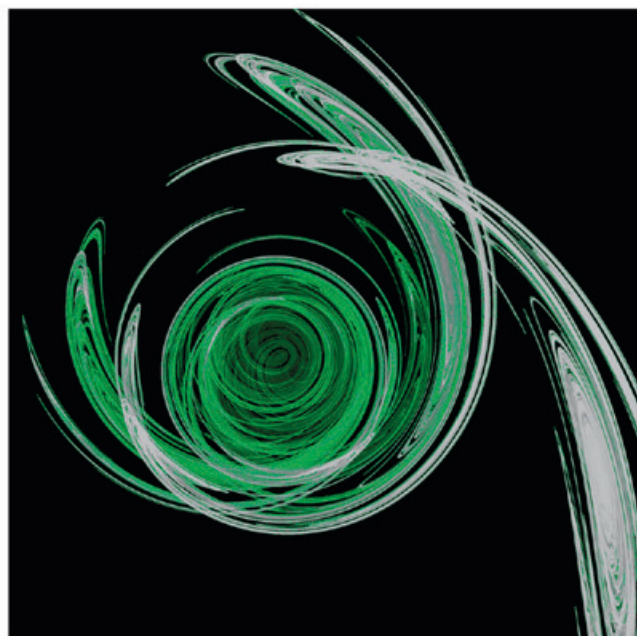


Modernity in Question
Studies in Philosophy and History of Ideas 11

Anna Burzyńska

Deconstruction, Politics, Performativity



PETER LANG

Anna Burzyńska

Deconstruction, Politics, Performatics

In recent years, the terms “ethics,” “politics,” “performativity,” and “experience” have proliferated throughout the discourse of the humanities. However, it is rarely noted that their contemporary understanding has been shaped by the works of Jacques Derrida, who has employed all these concepts since the mid-1960s. The aim of this book is to present the lesser discussed topics of Derrida’s thought – not only as the creator of a specific mode of interpretation called “deconstruction” but also as an initiator of recent ethical and political reflection, a pioneer of performatics, and a precursor of current research on experience. At the same time, the book provides a panorama of the most important changes in the humanities of the last thirty years, and in particular – the ethical, performative, and empirical turns.

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Deconstruction, Politics, Performativity

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Edited by Małgorzata Kowalska

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Introduction. Deconstruction *post mortem*

Half a century has now passed since the birth of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, during which time its death has been pronounced a number of times. Although deconstruction ultimately managed somehow to rise from the grave, it seemed fated to live on as a toothless bogeyman, no longer capable of evoking fear. This is hardly surprising – such is often the case with subversive ideas: they come into their own, quickly gain influence, then slowly enter a dormant phase, ultimately ending up as a museum piece. Deconstruction's early, 'strategic' form,¹ with its aim of 'destabilizing' [*labilité*] fossilized structures by 'shaking' them up and making them 'tremble' [*soliciter*],² was well suited to the turbulent atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s in both France and America. The term itself became a watchword for intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic, providing them with a convenient opportunity for carrying out a 'revolution on paper' in the privacy of their cosy offices, without the need for carrying protest signs or chanting radical slogans. As the main 'critical force'³ behind postmodernism and poststructuralism,⁴ Derrida's project and its subsequent variations, the aims of which often

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- 1 Derrida described his early deconstruction practices as a 'general strategy of deconstruction', which differed from later variants. See e.g. J. Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass. Chicago 1981, p. 41. Hereinafter PO, followed by the page number.
 - 2 Derrida's term, see 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass. Chicago 1982. pp. 1–29. Hereinafter DI, followed by the page number. See also J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass. Chicago 1978. Hereinafter WD, followed by the page number.
 - 3 J. Culler's term. See *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. New York 1982. Hereinafter OD, followed by the page number.
 - 4 Although I consider poststructuralism to be a current within postmodernity (especially given Derrida's views, for which structuralism as a philosophical current was the latest strong accent within the metaphysical tradition); nevertheless, although the issues that most interested many poststructuralists were not always the same ones being addressed by postmodern thinkers, critical postmodernity (postmodernism) undoubtedly enriched the intellectual resource base available for their investigations. Poststructural criticism, broadly speaking, was much more interested in the problems of literature as a discipline (in particular the problematics of modern theory) than the problems of philosophy as a discipline (in particular the problematics of the Metaphysics of Presence, as Heidegger described it). In the thinking of Derrida, these two currents of reflection merged, but this was not the case with many other poststructuralists for whom criticism of the metaphysical philosophical tradition was a tangential concern. Therefore, in most cases, I refer to poststructuralism and postmodernity separately. See e.g. S. Weber,

departed significantly from those of its architect, proved remarkably effective. No one can deny deconstruction's role in arousing a sense of intellectual vigilance in academia by questioning the seemingly obvious, unmasking stereotypes and dogmas, shaking up the institutional foundations of the humanities, and above all, provoking a change in thinking about the shape and duties of philosophy, hermeneutics, and the study of literature. At the time, there was indeed a very real need for 'a profound change in the self-image of Western intellectuals',⁵ which Jacques Derrida and his American disciples strove to effect. The need for such a change had been expressed earlier by Richard Rorty, the author of the passage quoted above, as well as by many others who likewise supported a fundamental reform of the 'human sciences.'

While it would be wrong to trivialize the role that Derrida's deconstruction and its offshoot deconstructionism played during that period, their main achievements are now largely historical events, and can (and even should) be considered an important but closed chapter in the history of twentieth-century humanistic thought. Though deconstruction once provided an effective means for reassessing various intellectual (already 'exhausted') traditions during the early, critical phase of postmodernity and poststructuralism,⁶ now that it has fulfilled its 'mission,'⁷ there is little sense in discussing it further. This is particularly true given that the humanities (along with philosophy and literary studies) today are preoccupied with a completely different set of issues, among them, the search for new ways to draw positive conclusions and build positive projects from the 'fragmented' accomplishments of various earlier 'posts' (postmodernism, poststructuralism, etc.).

'Postmoderne und Poststrukturalismus,' *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 1986, vol. 17, no. 63, pp. 105-122. See also my essays 'Po czym rozpoznać poststrukturalizm?' and 'Podsumowanie (poststrukturalizm w pigułce)' in AT.

5 R. Rorty, 'Deconstruction,' *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 8: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Cambridge 1995, pp. 166-196. Hereinafter D, followed by the page number.

6 I consider the critical phase of postmodernism and poststructuralism to be the period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, sometimes (especially in American terminology) also called the phase of 'critical theory'.

7 I wrote about this in detail in my book *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*. Kraków 2001 (hereinafter DI, accompanied by the page number), particularly in the chapter 'Misja dekonstrukcji'.

This has led to a number of so-called ‘turns’ in the humanities – including the ethical, political, performative, and empirical⁸ turns (followed by many others) – a few of which are discussed in detail in this book. In efforts to diagnose their causes, two perspectives have gained prominence: the first view is that these ‘turns’ are a direct or indirect consequence of earlier critical trends (including deconstruction),⁹ and thus a product of ‘late’ (or ‘very late’) postmodernity and poststructuralism. The second, competing view is that everything that has occurred in thinking in the humanities since the early 1980s has been a reaction against allegedly ‘revisionist’ (and therefore negative) tendencies, a ‘resistance movement’ that arose in opposition to ‘critical theory’, which was already in decline. Proponents of the first view generally value the impact of the critical phase of deconstruction, especially its reexamination of two enormous monoliths – philosophy and literary studies – and stress that without the radical gestures of the thinkers involved in the early phase of this movement, the subsequent transformations that occurred in various disciplines in the humanities would never have been possible. Supporters of the second view, in turn, tend to question the value of the early phases of the ‘posts’, seeing this period in the history of twentieth-century humanistic thought as a strange and incomprehensible interruption, during which a group of fanatical intellectuals were determined to destroy the greatest achievements of humankind, including a cultural heritage that represented the endeavours of countless generations, reaching back to ancient times. Such opinions are still commonly expressed, and deconstruction remains the primary target of these harsh assessments. Another very common view is that the ethical and political turns in the humanities provided the proverbial ‘wooden stake’ that finally put an end to the deconstructive daemon recklessly conjured up by a certain French philosopher.

The mild irony in this last sentence suggests my own inclinations to support the first of these views – a position I will try to defend in this book. I believe that even if so-called ‘critical theory’ (a term often used to designate the early

8 The term ‘turn toward experience’ is more commonly used, but I have chosen to use the term ‘empirical turn’, which possesses a certain elegance, though reservations could be raised against it (especially in the context of Derrida’s thought. For more, see the section in this book titled ‘Derrida and Experience’).

9 This lasted more or less from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. I have written about this in e.g. my book *Anty-Teoria literatury*. Kraków 2006 (hereinafter AT, followed by the page number), and in the chapter ‘Poststrukturalizm’, *Teorie literatury XX wieku*. Kraków 2006, co-written with M. P. Markowski. Hereinafter TL, followed by the page number.

stages of postmodernity and poststructuralism) did not directly shape the positive projects in the humanities that followed deconstruction, it undoubtedly prepared the ground for these subsequent shifts. I also firmly believe that Derrida's thought played a key role in this overall process of reform. Moreover, many currently fashionable terms, such as 'ethics' and 'politics',¹⁰ or 'performativity' and 'experience', terms which today light up the faces of scholars of the humanities, first appeared some time ago, times some today might even call 'prehistoric'. These terms can already be found (being used in way very similar to today) in the earliest period of Jacques Derrida's philosophical project (that is, in the 1960s and 1970s), when, contrary to what is often believed, he was not focused exclusively on sawing off the branches on which the great Western thinkers had been safely perched for twenty-one centuries. I would even go so far as to assert that in many respects Derrida's work still awaits proper interpretation and holds a great deal of unrealised potential. I thus hope that reading his works once again, this time approached from a certain distance and viewed as a precursor to new tendencies in the humanities, will prove interesting to those researching these issues today. Jacques Derrida will thus be the main protagonist of this book, though I am well aware that despite its length, I will only be able to briefly touch upon the rich variety of themes that encompass his gargantuan legacy.¹¹

In my rereading of Derrida's texts, I have deliberately focused on the early stage of the development of his views. This does not mean that I do not value the philosopher's later or very late achievements – quite the opposite. What interests me most here, however, are two things: first, how even in his early critical writings, Derrida addressed ethical and political issues, as well as the issues of performativity and experience; second, the exceptional clarity with which he predicted many of the developments that years later would guide the main directions of thought in the twenty-first-century humanities. The theme of this book will therefore be the participation of Derrida's thought in the ethical, political, performative, and empirical turns, the specifics of which I will try to detail in the pages that follow.

10 Of course, as terms in theoretical and literary discourse.

11 I do not deny that Derrida himself will interest me here much more than the American deconstructionists, whose views I consider to be secondary and not always consistent with his ideas. I refer to the latter's practices only in the first two parts of the book, in connection with their participation in the ethical and political turn in the humanities in America. I have devoted a separate book to the history of American deconstructionism and its complex relationships with Derrida's thought: *Poststrukturalizm w Ameryce* [Poststructuralism in America], currently in press.

From Metaphysics to the Ethical and the Political

Geoffrey Bennington once rightly noted that although ‘Derrida has never written a work of political philosophy’, he is considered today to be the thinker who had the greatest impact on our contemporary understanding of ‘politics’ and on the direction of the political current in the humanities.¹² According to Bennington, this was primarily a result of the radical nature of both the philosopher’s views and of deconstruction as a specific mode of reading and an original means for practicing political criticism. Many researchers of Derrida’s accomplishments, however, claim that he made his first ‘political turn’ in 1985,¹³ and only then began to take up more distinctly political issues. They most often point to books such as *The Other Heading* (1992), devoted to questions of identity (the national and cultural identity of Europe);¹⁴ *Spectres de Marx* (1993), a critical reading of the writings of Marx; and *Politique de l’amitié* (1994),¹⁵ in which Derrida presented the idea of friendship as a relationship with the Other resistant to ‘political appropriation’. It is also commonly believed that the ‘ethical turn’ in the philosopher’s thought first occurred in *Donner la mort* (i.e. in 1992¹⁶), where he deconstructed the relations between philosophy and religion.

Bennington argues, however, that from the very beginning, Derrida’s reflections, especially his deconstructive readings of philosophical texts, were clearly ethical and political in nature, and that the ethical and political

12 G. Bennington, ‘Derrida and Politics’, *Interrupting Derrida*. London-New York 2000, p. 18. The most eloquent confirmation of this opinion was a book published in 2007, after the philosopher’s death, *Adieu Derrida* (referring in the title to Derrida’s *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*, written after the death of the author of *Totality and Infinity*), in which the most important contemporary political thinkers (including Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, and Slavoj Žižek) paid tribute to the philosopher, emphasizing repeatedly that he had perhaps the greatest influence on the shaping of their views. See *Adieu Derrida*, ed. C. Douzinas. New York 2007.

13 Beginning with the text ‘Préjugés: devant la loi’, J. Derrida, et al., *La faculté de juger*. Paris 1985, where he addresses questions related to the functioning of law.

14 In it he addresses, among other things, the problems of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and nationalism in Europe.

15 See Derrida, *Préjugés: devant la loi*; *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, trans. P. A. Brault and M. B. Naas. Bloomington 1992; *Spectres de Marx*. Paris 1993 (English edition 1994). *Politique de l’amitié*. Paris 1994 (English edition 1997). See also *Marx en jeu* (avec Marc Guillaume). Paris 1997 and *Marx & Sons*. Paris 2002.

16 J. Derrida, *Donner la mort*. Paris 1992 (English edition 1995).

implications of deconstruction were always what mattered most to Derrida,¹⁷ but that he began to address these subjects directly only in his later works. This opinion is certainly well founded – although his legacy includes numerous instances where he deals directly with these questions, including his comments on the works of Emmanuel Levinas, Walter Benjamin, Jan Patočka, Carl Schmidt, and Karl Marx, as well as in many other statements in which he addresses such issues as justice, the law, identity, responsibility, intolerance, cosmopolitanism, discrimination, terrorism, etc. However, all of his early reading practices had clear ethical and political implications. These practices, however, could indeed give one the impression of Derrida exhibiting a narcissistic focus on texts themselves, a commonly repeated charge against the philosopher is one of ‘autistically’ separating himself from the problems of the so-called outside world, and even of an ‘active ignoring’ of them.¹⁸ Although he repeatedly denied these accusations, he earned the opinion of a thinker who, as Terry Eagleton ironically described it, deeply believed that ‘there is nothing in the world but writing’,¹⁹ and cultivated a formalism more formalistic than formalism. These accusations intensified, especially in the wake of the ethical and political turn in the humanities (particularly in the US) in the early 1980s, precipitating an avalanche of scathing attacks on deconstruction and deconstructionism, which were even labelled ‘post-structuralist formalism.’²⁰ A particularly radical American left was behind these

17 This was also demonstrated in a volume of essays and interviews with Derrida published in 2002, *Interventions and Interviews 1971–2001*, ed. and trans. E. Rottenberg. Stanford 2002, which included a very important essay by Derrida, ‘Ethics and Politics Today’. See also J. Derrida, *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. P. Kamuf. Stanford 2002.

18 All of these terms come from J. Brenkman, ‘Narcissus in the Text’, *The Georgia Review* 1976, no. 30, pp. 293–327.

19 T. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford 1996, p. 46.

20 See e.g. V. B. Leitch, *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism*. New York–Oxford 1992, p. 50. Hereinafter CC, followed by the page number. This was, of course, American formalism under the sign of New Criticism, and not, for example, Russian formalism, which has always enjoyed great recognition among the thinkers identified with poststructuralism for being much more interesting and progressive than structuralism. Leitch, moreover, was among the most insightful commentators on and historians of deconstruction and deconstructionism, and was as the author of one of the most important mainstream monographs on the topic in the United States, *Deconstructive Criticism. An Advanced Introduction*. New York 1983. However, when he too underwent a political turn (or, more precisely, a cultural turn, of which the political turn became a sub-trend in the 1990s), he gave a very one-sided assessment of the achievements of Derrida and his school.

attacks – its representatives admitted they appreciated Derrida's leftist views, but saw them as insufficiently leftist,²¹ and moreover, wanted political declarations, which were antithetical to Derrida's thinking. The ambiguity and obscurity present in the philosopher's practices, and in his entire intellectual project, were fully intentional, because – as Pericles Trifonas aptly puts it – he considered his 'journey of deconstruction' as a 'curiously convoluted and arduous path of away from the thesis';²² this, however, did not make critical reception of his views any easier, but instead, complicated it considerably.

The situation was made worse by the fact that Derrida (like many other post-modern thinkers) was, above all, a *critical* philosopher,²³ which too many are quick to forget, and that many of his statements were clearly polemical and not meant to be taken literally. The best example of this was the constant confusion surrounding the infamous phrase, 'there is nothing outside the text' [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*], which may go down as one of the most outlandishly misinterpreted statements in the modern history of the humanities. This sentence has been hailed as crowning proof of Derrida's 'textual isolationism' and his supposed separation of the text from everything extra-textual. Of course, taken out of context, this could indeed confirm the explicit *désintéressement* of its inventor towards the 'extra-textual world'. However, just as this phrase never really merited its incredible popularity, it likewise did not deserve all the criticism it generated – criticism which can still be heard today. Derrida's infamous phrase, which first appeared in his reading of Rousseau's *Confessions*,²⁴ did not actually refer to texts themselves, but to methods of reading them, what Derrida

21 As Bennington aptly observes, this also occurred because it was alien for Derrida to consider any arbitrary position, including a political one, as something obvious and unquestionable. Therefore, although he himself defined his views as leftist, he always assumed a sceptical and self-critical stance, undermined by the ostentation of many representatives of the so-called 'politics in the Academy', and especially their tendencies to wallow in self-praise and cultivate the unshakable conviction that they were carrying out the noblest of missions in the humanities. See *Interrupting Derrida*, p. 18.

22 P.P. Trifonas, *The Ethics of Writing: Derrida, Deconstruction, and Pedagogy*. New York 2000, p. 181.

23 See footnote 9 on p. XX.

24 This is found in his book *Of Grammatology*. See J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak. Baltimore 1976, pp. 153–155. Hereinafter OG, followed by the page number.

called 'external methods'.²⁵ As he explained in *On Grammatology*, by means of this concise ('critical') term, he merely wanted to say that the reading process should proceed from text to the world (and not vice versa), because, as he explained, 'what one calls the real life of these existences 'of flesh and bone' (the protagonists of Rousseau's *Confessions* – my comment – AB), beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing' The reason for this is simple – it was recorded in writing, i.e. in Rousseau's text [OG 157–160].²⁶ Derrida's infamous proposition was therefore a concise critical formula targeted at specific methods, rather than a thesis concerning the specific character of texts. Nor did it in any way imply that nothing exists apart from texts ('writing').²⁷ This charge grew at one point into 'crowning proof' of the philosopher's anti-political stance. Derrida explained in many interviews that he was referring to research protocols and their metalanguage, and not to texts,²⁸ but this had almost no effect.

I am drawing attention to these facts primarily because in most negative evaluations of the writings of Derrida and other postmodern thinkers, the critical goals of their achievements – which were primarily metaphilosophical, metatheoretical, and even metacritical in nature – have not been adequately considered. The 'posts' share a common nature, a common set of properties described long ago by their greatest apologist, Jean-François Lyotard,²⁹ and a common project aimed at 'twisting' (in the sense of Heidegger's *Verwindung*) various traditions considered to be anachronistic, exhausted, ideologized, and

25 Especially the theory of literary communication or literary semiotics (e.g. Umberto Eco), or, from other positions, but attacking this division equally strongly, Roland Barthes in his well-known *Criticism and Truth*.

26 'Text' and 'writing' according to Derrida's conception of these terms are synonyms, because in literature what he considered most important was 'what was written' (according to its actual status), not 'speech'. This second tendency – dominant in reflections on literature (and in hermeneutics) since Antiquity and related to the dependence of this tradition on metaphysics – was for him a manifest misuse of thought, especially because it contributed to the recognition of literature as a 'transmission' of content, in which the linguistic (artistic) form functions solely only as a carrier. I discussed this problem in detail in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*, in particular in the chapter 'Jacques Derrida – interpretacja i metafizyka'.

27 I return to this theme in the part devoted to the politics of deconstruction in connection with E.W. Said's critical opinions in regard to Derrida's political stance.

28 See e.g. [PO 97].

29 Particularly in Lyotard's essay 'Note on the Meaning of "Post"', *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982–1985*, Minneapolis 1993.

even oppressive, and subjecting them to critical examination. The numerous formulations put forth by representatives of this trend were, therefore, fully intended as provocations – but as provocations directed at methods, systems of thought, and discourses, and not at their subjects. This aim was also served by certain condensed formulae, which, unfortunately, were likewise too often read in a straightforward manner, rather than in their critical context. Like Derrida's 'text', equally infamous (and bizarrely interpreted) catchphrases like Foucault's 'death of man', Barthes' 'death of the author' or Derrida's 'end of man' were treated in a like manner. These too did not refer to the (human) subject as such, but to a specific form of philosophical, literary critical and anthropological (and humanist in general) discourse, which dominated in western thought. Therefore, these were not calls for the genocide of *homo sapiens* – and as ridiculous as it may seem, such accusations were made against them. Even today, claims are made that these three men (Barthes, Derrida and Foucault) intended to 'destroy' the (philosophical and authoritative) subject; in truth, they sought only to change the position of the subject in philosophical and literary critical *discourse*. More specifically, to use Derrida's term, they wanted to deprive it of the 'punctual simplicity'³⁰ provided by universal and unchangeable theoretical categories that had languished in philosophy since at least Descartes, and to 'situate' it instead.³¹

Such problems in understanding Derrida's critical intentions were particularly evident when the ethical and political implications of deconstruction were at the centre of dispute and discussion, and thus, during a time when enthusiasts of 'politics in the Academy' (America in the 1980s) saw the humanities as being insufficiently 'engaged' in real-world problems, and considered this a cardinal

30 Derrida's term [WD 285], [PO 114]. It first appeared in his essay 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' (included in *Writing and Difference*) in connection with his analysis of the dream in Freud's theory as a certain form of writing, of which Derrida also drew important conclusions for his concept of writing. The full quotation reads: 'The 'subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a *system* of relations between strata: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found.' (p. 285) I believe that Derrida's intentions here are quite clearly visible and are no different from the aims of anti-positivist literary theory, which also attempted to sever the deterministic relationship between an actual author and their work.

31 I refer here to the transcript of the discussion following Derrida's reading of the paper 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' in Baltimore in 1966, which can be found in the book *The Languages of Criticism and the Science of Man*, ed. R. Macksey and E. Donato. Baltimore 1970.

sin. Assessing Derrida's philosophical project proved an extremely difficult task at the time, due to the fact that he programmatically refrained from 'frontal critiques'. This was why he invented a clever way of reading called 'deconstruction': so that all the things he wanted to challenge, and this included oppressive ideologies, the reasons behind various forms of exclusion, and the possibilities for practicing ethics and politics in humanistic discourse, could 'reveal themselves'³² during the course of a text's reading. The assumption that an example works better than a lecture or – to use Austin's well-known terms – that the performative creation of certain 'effects' has a much greater causative power than their assertion³³ – was undoubtedly justified, though few were able to decipher them properly at the time. For many of Derrida's critics, both the 'implicit' style of his practices and their performative character simply went unnoticed. Because of this, in the wake of the political turn in the United States, a shift in popularity began toward another French philosopher, Michel Foucault, although his beliefs did not differ so much from Derrida's reflections, and in many aspects, the ideas of the two philosophers clearly complemented one another.³⁴

However, according to many of those following the changes that have been taking place in the humanities over the last half-century, it was Derrida and his practices that sparked the trend known as the 'ethical and political turn', which so thoroughly transformed the humanities in the US in the 1980s, and whose consequences are still being felt today, not only there, but to a lesser extent also in Europe. After all, even the earliest practices of deconstruction did not consist solely of revealing contradictions between the conceptual project behind a text and its rhetorical 'execution', or – as Rorty once put it – 'between form and intention' [D 200]. In fact, this was only an intermediate stage. What they were above all – as Derrida so often and seemingly ineffectively reminded – were analyses of the covert mechanisms by means of which conceptual hierarchies were constructed in humanistic discourse, and studies of the

32 Derrida often emphasized that the task of deconstruction was to 'reveal' critical places in metaphysical systems, not an open criticism of their assumptions. See e.g. 'This Strange Institution Called Literature (interview with Derek Attridge)', trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, *Acts of Literature*, New York-London 1992, pp. 33-75. Hereinafter TS, followed by the page number. I wrote about this in more detail in [DI 53-56].

33 I wrote on the significance of the 'production of effect' in Derrida's philosophical project also in DI (pp. 57-60). In the present book, I mention only the most important findings in this area (in the chapter 'Textual Performance').

34 I write about this further in the chapter 'America Between Derrida and Foucault'.

hidden ('microphysics' – as Foucault would say) manifestations of repression inherent in the seemingly ideologically neutral great systems of Western philosophy. These analyses were carried out in a very specific way in the course of readings of literary and philosophical texts. Derrida called this 'double practice' [PO 41],³⁵ reminiscent to some extent of the well-known strategy of 'Aesopian speech',³⁶ that is, when someone seems to be talking about one thing, but is in fact discussing something completely different. Derrida's practice of deconstruction was based on a similar principle. While at first glance, it seemed only to be a reading of texts, in truth, it was not aimed at 'destroying' texts – as is so commonly and unthinkingly repeated – but at undermining their conceptual foundations: the metaphysical systems and conceptual foundations that were the basis for their existence. By practicing this kind of reading, Derrida not only challenged the myth of the rhetorical neutrality of philosophical (and theoretical) language, but above all proved that the Metaphysics of Presence (as Heidegger referred to it)³⁷ – the most important intellectual tradition, one that laid the foundations for the humanities – was a kind of 'Great Ideology' that marginalized or eliminated everything that could threaten the conceptual purity of its systems. He showed how these systems had eliminated troublesome categories such as 'body', 'senses', 'emotions', 'matter', 'writing', 'event', etc. – that is, anything considered to be 'other' – because they were perceived as a threat to rationalist, disembodied, idealized and 'aseptic' metaphysical thought. This allowed these systems to sustain their 'theoretical fictions' for centuries,³⁸ especially the idea of the philosophical subject (a product of such thinking) as an

35 See also J. Nealon, *Double Reading. Postmodernism after Deconstruction*. Ithaca-London 1993, p. 27.

36 This comparison is justified especially in the technical sense. Derrida was not concerned here with avoiding the influence of censorship (as was the case in the practice of so-called 'Aesopian writing'), but about the possibility of avoiding speaking directly – which was associated with his need for non-predication, which he attributed to an addiction to the language of metaphysics. I used this well-known example, hoping that perhaps it would help shed light on Derrida's idea.

37 Bearing in mind the tradition of the great philosophical systems from Plato to Husserl, for which the most important category was 'being' understood as presence, and thus 'being' reduced to a theoretical category. See e.g. M. Heidegger, 'Introduction to "What is Metaphysics?"', trans. W. Kaufmann, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 277–290, and 'Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?"', trans. W. McNeill, pp. 231–238. Derrida sometimes also used the term 'thought of presence' [*pensée de la présence*], but also did so in reference to Heidegger. See e.g. [PO 55].

38 Derrida's term, [MP 18], [WD 275].

entity devoid of a body and emotions, one that is asexual, ahistorical, and free of cultural, sexual, ethnic, racial, or other entanglements – in a word, ‘pure’, rising up like a monument to a centuries-long tradition and giving it a desirable but equally utopian stability. He said moreover that these ‘metaphysical bonds’³⁹ burdened all of our thinking, and had specific repercussions in the political and social spheres, where they likewise led to the consolidation of certain hierarchies and exclusions. Seen from this side, Derrida’s deconstruction, as – I repeat once again – an in-depth study of the implicit (philosophical) mechanisms of exclusion and unacknowledged sources of violence present in Western thought, showed not only the philosopher’s keen interest in the ‘extra-textual world’, but can also be easily regarded as the intellectual underpinnings of the ethical and political turn in the humanities.

This fact has been emphasized by many commentators of Derrida’s works, and was also recently recalled by the ‘guru’ of American performance – Richard Schechner. It is worth quoting a somewhat longer fragment of his statement:

To Derrida, cultures are *palimpsests* of official and counter-*hegemonic* graffiti. Every writing is a power struggle [...]. Even simple binaries such as ‘day/night’, ‘white/black’, ‘man/woman’ inscribe power. In Western languages, by reading the term on the left first we perform its authority over the term on the right. To reverse terms is to perform a new power relation: ‘black/white’ is different than ‘white/black’. From this perspective, history is not a story of ‘what happened’ but an ongoing struggle to ‘write,’ or claim ownership, over historical narratives. Yet every narrative, no matter how elegant or seemingly total, is full of holes, what Derrida calls ‘aporia’ – open spaces, absences, and contradictions. Nothing can be totally erased. These aporias leak various pasts and alternatives into the present order of things.

The authorities – ‘those who author’ – attempt to make the present take on the appearance of being the outcome of an inevitable process (fate, destiny, historical necessity). But this ineluctable continuity – a knowable past that determines a stable present leading to an inevitable future – is a fiction. The past is full of holes; the present is provisional, the future not known. All historical narratives are haunted by what/who is erased, threatened by what/who demands representation. The struggle to write history, to represent events, is an ongoing performative process full of opinion and other subjectivities.⁴⁰

The desire to meticulously expose everything that had been ‘erased’ from this narrative, and which demanded to be brought back to the surface, i.e. the

39 Derrida’s term, [PO 35].

40 R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd edition. London-New York 2013, p. 145. Hereinafter PS followed by the page number.

kind of ‘interventionism’⁴¹ that Derrida practiced, had since the early days of deconstruction attracted a wealth of supporters on American campuses to his writings. Although Derrida’s work dealt with the ideological debts of Europe’s most important philosophical tradition, it was possible – especially given the political climate in America in the late 1960s – to carry his thoughts over into different contexts and draw various conclusions from them. I must admit that these implicit ethical and political reasons for reading Jacques Derrida interest me much more than the beliefs he expressed outright. I will also try to prove in the pages that follow the topicality of his reflections for today’s more politically-oriented thinking in the humanities.⁴²

‘Textual Performance’ and Praising Experience

In publications devoted to Jacques Derrida, the ethical and political aspects of his work are among the issues most often discussed. The situation is quite different when it comes to the performativity of his practices and his treatment of the issue of experience. These aspects are rarely discussed, if at all, and only in the form of very general references or casual mentions. Meanwhile, at least in my opinion, the performative mode in the reading and writing practices of Derrida, which in his project are inseparable from the ethical and political ‘effects’ of deconstruction, allows him to be seen as one of the important precursors of the so-called ‘performative turn’. This is not only because of his famous polemic with Austin and Searle, or his remarks on Artaud,⁴³ but, above all, because of the specific shape his gives his texts. Although Rodolphe Gasché once observed that, without Derrida, the performative turn in the United States would not have been at all,⁴⁴ this claim should be treated as an overstatement; nevertheless, the contribution of Derrida’s thought to this trend was certainly much greater and more valuable than can be seen from these examples alone.

41 See e.g. the following quote from Derrida: ‘Why engage in a work of deconstruction, rather than leave things the way they are, etc.? [...] Deconstruction, I have insisted, is not *neutral*. It intervenes’ [PO 93].

42 I write about this in the chapter ‘Politics Today’.

43 See e.g. E. Domańska, ‘Zwrot performatywny’ we współczesnej humanistyce’, *Teksty Drugie* 2007, no. 5, p. 53. Hereinafter ZP, followed by the page number.

44 Cf. R. Gasché, ‘Possibilizations, in the Singular’, *Deconstruction is/in America. A New Sense of the Political*, ed. A. Haverkamp. New York-London 1995, pp. 115-124. Hereinafter DA, followed by the page number.

David Wood, one of the most attentive readers of Derrida's writings, once described his method of philosophizing as 'performative reflexivity'.⁴⁵ I will try to show how Derrida practiced something that could be called 'textual performance' – a specific way of reading literary and philosophical texts that imitates the properties of performance (in today's meaning of the term). Finally, I will attempt to assess the contribution of Derrida's philosophy to current thinking on the problem of experience, seeing in his views a number of 'traces' that anticipated the current interest of philosophy in this category and of literary studies in the empirical dimension of literature. Investigations of these types can be commonly observed today, especially in cultural theories of literature, which postulate a turn in literary studies towards the 'poetics of experience'.⁴⁶ Reading Derrida's work in this light seems to me significant, because one can see in it a number of important, but also previously unnoticed thoughts on this subject. Admittedly, Derrida's path to experience was a complicated (one might even say twisted) one, but from very early on, he devoted a surprising amount of space in his work to this subject. In short, by explicitly criticizing empiricism (which stands in opposition to rationalism in the metaphysical tradition with its dualistic optics that also encapsulates experience), he did not praise experience as much as his did 'experiencing', although he did not begin to express this praise explicitly until quite late. In his readings, he even tried to address (experimentally) the very nature of experience, practicing something that David Wood aptly described as 'the experience of experience'.⁴⁷ I deliberately address this subject in the last part of this book because the term 'experience' (in Derrida's mind as well) combines all of the aspects (ethical, poetic and performative) I discussed earlier, although of course it cannot be reduced only to these.

In an interview given some years back on Polish television, Jacques Derrida said:

I am constantly looking for another place, or, rather, through me other places look for a place for themselves, look for another means of 'occurring', of 'happening', and thus another means of historical or political experience.⁴⁸

45 D. Wood, *Philosophy at the Limit*. London 1990. Hereinafter PL, followed by the page number.

46 R. Nycz, 'Od teorii nowoczesnej do poetyki doświadczenia', *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2. Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje*, ed. T. Walas and R. Nycz, Kraków 2012, pp. 31–61. Hereinafter KT2, followed by the page number.

47 D. Wood, *Thinking after Heidegger*. Malden 2002.

48 Kamila Drecka's interview with Jacques Derrida on the Polish television programme 'Ogród sztuki'. I make use here of the transcript and translation of Derrida's answers prepared by M. Bieńczyk. Hereinafter OS.

I think that regardless of how we judge his achievements today, he was undoubtedly a thinker who was ‘constantly seeking’. Seeking new possibilities for ethical and political engagement, other means of performative action, as well as all the possible benefits that might arise for us from this experience. Thanks to this – even many years after the historical ‘death’ of deconstruction – his work can still provide valuable inspiration. So I have hope that my rereading of Derrida’s writings – which are quite different from my readings a decade earlier – will also present a completely different Derrida: one much closer to our current fascinations, in no way imprisoned in an ‘enchanted circle of texts’, but carefully and patiently tracking the smallest traces of contact between what is ‘written’ and life itself.

Part 1 Derrida and the Ethical and Political

*It is nevertheless a matter of the conditions of an ethics
or a politics, and of a certain responsibility of thought, if
you will...*

Jacques Derrida, 'The Almost Nothing of
the Unpresentable'

The Ethical Turn

Freed from its forced anchorage, postmodern man's faith is adrift in search of new harbours.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays About Postmodern Morality*

In 1987 David Carroll noted:

There have been a number of signs in recent years that we are perhaps approaching the end of what has been labeled [...] the 'poststructuralist' phase of theory and criticism. The gradual demise (or dispersion) of the so-called 'Yale School of Criticism' and its notion of 'deconstruction as literary criticism' undoubtedly constitutes the most obvious of these signs.⁴⁹

In the early 1980s, a very similar tendency toward decline could also be observed in postmodern philosophy, whose critical form by then had been largely exhausted. To many of those witnessing the changes taking place in the humanities at that time this situation no doubt brought a feeling of profound relief. For nearly two decades, the main occupation of philosophers had been philosophy itself (as a discipline), and that of literary theorists – the theory of literature; thus, after years of scholars proving that metaphysical philosophy and its great systems were no longer capable of conveying the complexity and multiplicity of the modern world and, respectively, that theory in its so-called modern guise was no longer of any practical use, and could even be damaging to literature as a discipline, a refreshing sense of change was now in the air. After a long period of giving in to what was sometimes maliciously termed a fatal addiction to 'self-theorization' and engaging in 'discourse about discourse about discourse',⁵⁰ and a melancholic immersion in 'things past',⁵¹ the humanities could finally embark on building positive projects. After years of 'twisting', 'dismantling', and 'disassembling' (for which 'deconstruction' had become an all-encompassing catch-phrase), after a long and exhausting 'session on the analyst's couch' (as Lyotard aptly described

49 D. Carroll, *Paraesthetics. Foucault. Lyotard. Derrida*, New York-London 1987, p. xi. Hereinafter PA, followed by the page number.

50 Term coined by Herbert Blau, cited after [PS 145]. M. Krieger expresses similar views; see *Words about Words about Words*. Baltimore 1988.

51 Derrida's term.

it),⁵² and thus, after patiently working through its complexes and weaknesses, it was clearly now possible to begin drawing constructive conclusions from this process and searching for a new *modus vivendi*. Lyotard's analogy seems quite apt, though at the time it was not intended as a call to break with the legacy of early postmodernity and poststructuralism. The main goal of the critical projects born from them had been to make both modern philosophy and modern theory aware of the 'conceptual madness'⁵³ they had long been slipping into, and point out to theoreticians of literature the resentments they nurtured toward students of the natural sciences, who they clearly envied for the scientific precision and verifiability of their research findings. The critical phases of the 'posts' contributed significantly to subsequent changes in the climate in the humanities, primarily because they exposed as nonsense the fundamentalist aspirations of philosophy and the scientific pretensions of theory ('therrory'⁵⁴ as it was contemptuously labelled), the latter of which in particular displayed a tendency to wrap itself up tightly in a cocoon of systematicity, objectivity, totality, universality, linguistic neutrality, and similar essentialist fallacies that should have been consigned to history long ago. An essential question now arose: what should the study of literature and philosophy look like? Numerous answers to this question were proposed, opening up new currents of thought in various branches of the humanities. In terms of literary studies, the most important of these were subsequently labelled 'a shift from literary theory to cultural theory',⁵⁵ and in the case of philosophy – from discourses of Identity to discourses of Otherness.⁵⁶

The term first used to describe the intellectual changes taking place in the humanities was the 'ethical turn', which was soon subsumed within the 'political turn', and later formed a current within the 'cultural turn'. All of these 'turns'

52 See J-F. Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?' *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Minneapolis 1984, pp. 71–82.

53 J-F. Lyotard, J-L. Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. W. Godzich, Minneapolis 1985.

54 Term coined by J. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 1997. Hereinafter LT, followed by the page number.

55 See *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. M. P. Markowski and R. Nycz, Kraków 2006. In my chapter in this book ('Zwrot kulturowy'), I describe the characteristic features of this concept and explain its consequences. See also the book *Kulturową teorię literatury 2*.

56 This transition is approached synthetically in V. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, Cambridge 1996. Descombes sees the first signs of this transition much earlier, before the arrival of the postmodern phase.

shared a common postulate: the demand for philosophy and literary studies to become 'engaged' in real-world social problems – a call that would ultimately lead departments across the humanities to 'open their doors' to the outside world. In this way, the ethical turn would become the first clearly identifiable step on the road to an emerging activism that was supposed to not merely supersede critical theory, but above all, change entirely our views on the tasks of the writer, philosopher, theoretician, and literary critic. This radical change in the orientation of scholarly research, which could be termed a transition from criticism⁵⁷ to activism, would change the face of disciplines in the humanities for years to come.

Many scholars shared Carroll's diagnosis that deconstruction's critical and polemical energy was waning in the early 1980s, and that this signalled the impending end of an 'era' in America. And while deconstruction still occupied a place on the map of literary studies, it had undoubtedly, as J. Douglas Kneale wrote, 'lost its original radical impact'.⁵⁸ Ralph Cohen, in turn, claimed that the 'aims' of deconstruction had already been achieved, and it could thus now be quietly abandoned.⁵⁹ In particular, those who wanted to see deconstruction dead

57 I do not use the term 'criticism' here as a synonym for literary study, but in the philosophical sense of 'critique' (rooted in Kantian thought) as an approach to exploring and reassessing the foundations of philosophy. Variants of this approach can be found in poststructuralist literary theory, in which the ontological and epistemological status of the discipline are questioned. Therefore, in relation to postmodern philosophy and poststructuralist literary theory, the term 'critical theory' is often used (for more on this, see the introduction to my book *Anty-Teorii literatury* and the chapters 'Między nauką i literaturą' and 'Po czym rozpoznać poststrukturalizm?'), although this is somewhat misleading due to the association with the 'critical theory' of the Frankfurt School (although some scholars see affinities between the two, there are clear distinctions between them). The critical thought underlying postmodernism is much closer to Marx and Nietzsche than to Kant, as these two thinkers expressed an ambivalent attitude towards Kantian critique: while they appreciated the value of his critical project, they questioned his idea of the 'tribunal' as an external organ for determining the rules of inquiry, bestowing them with validity and performing an arbitral function. They therefore rejected everything in Kantian thought related to the arbitrariness of criticism in favour of its emancipatory and revisionist functions in relation to intellectual and institutional dogmatism. Such an understanding of criticism was well-fitted to the early stages of postmodernism and poststructuralism.

58 J. D. Kneale, 'Deconstruction', *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. M. Groden and M. Kreiswirth. Baltimore-London 1994, p. 191.

59 R. Cohen, 'Introduction', *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. R. Cohen. New York-London 1989, p. 12.

and buried as quickly as possible began pointing out – mostly to its American adepts – that it had clearly lapsed into routine. It had lost both its ability to provoke and its character as an ‘event’, as Jacques Derrida referred to its practices⁶⁰ and those of many other subversive projects – its methods had simply become ossified. And as its founder used to say, ‘Deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all.’⁶¹ However, now that the intellectual climate in America had changed markedly, his words sounded more like an ominous warning. The subversive and even ostensibly revolutionary nature of early deconstruction had reflected, in fact, the intellectual atmosphere of France in the late 1960s,⁶² when the philosophical and theoretical views of French thinkers took on a decidedly political colour. In America, Derrida’s deconstruction enjoyed a warm reception – arriving, as it did, in the late 1960s amidst not only an intense ‘theological’ crisis⁶³ in the humanities. This had been brought about by two things: 1) by the lack of a new school of literary interpretation and criticism to supersede New Criticism following its decline, and a closely related need to revisit the interpretive literary traditions that had been perpetuated by the long-standing hegemony of this school of interpretation; and 2) by the growing political radicalism on American university campuses. The views of Derrida – the ‘French connection’, as he was often called over the years – carried with them the spiritual atmosphere of Paris of those times, and were ideally suited to the concepts being espoused then by Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva, the Tel Quel group and many others, to the so-called ‘crisis of mimesis’, and to the renaissance of interest in the ‘Masters of Suspicion’: Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. For Americans this offered the very enticing prospect of a thorough reform of a stagnant discipline. Above all, however, Derrida’s scepticism towards structuralism, well-known at that time, was embraced as an antidote to American formalism, which was

60 J. Nealon, *Double Reading: Postmodernism after Deconstruction*, Ithaca-London 1993. See in particular the chapter ‘The Discipline of Deconstruction’. Hereinafter DOR, followed by the page number.

61 J. Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1, Stanford 2007, p. 23. Hereinafter PI1, followed by the page number.

62 See C. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*; F. Dosse, *Histoire du structuralisme*, vols. 1, 2, Paris 1992. See also H. Rapaport, ‘French Theory and Criticism’, *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. M. Groden and M. Kreiswirth. Baltimore-London 1994, pp. 299–311.

63 This has been noted in, e.g. J. Adamson, ‘Jacques Derrida’, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, ed. I. R. Makaryk, Toronto 1993, p. 26. Hereinafter EC, followed by the page number.

almost universal viewed as a historical relic. This gave rise to what Rodolphe Gasché saw as an incredible and historically unique phenomenon, as poststructuralism became an American speciality, and thus found a home in a country where structuralism had in fact never existed. And while Gasché expressed himself on the subject of poststructuralism with a certain scepticism, he noticed a very important aspect of this trend, namely that it was first and foremost ‘an exclusively American label that reveals more about the departmentalizing spirit *in power* or in search of *power*’ (emphasis mine – A.B.),⁶⁴ thereby drawing attention to the political goals being pursued by its proponents. His diagnosis was supported by the fact that Derrida’s project was much broader than what his first American students had taken from it and applied to their practices. For them, what mattered most was what could be carried over from deconstruction into the current problems of literary studies and what related directly to literature and methods for its interpretation. Yet, from the very outset of his project, Derrida’s interests had been focused on revealing the problematic nature of all ‘centralized’ discourses founded on a concept of truth that privileged notions such as ‘presence’ and ‘origin’, and in shifting the conceptual boundaries of what he called the ‘Metaphysics of Presence’ [EC 25].

More insightful commentators on his work were quick to see Derrida’s project as a challenge to ‘centralized discourses’, metaphysical oppositions, and the hierarchies inscribed within them, and, consequently, as an unmasking of the ideology upon which metaphysical conceptual constructs were founded. They also realised that deconstructive practices were aimed primarily at deconstructing systems, not texts, and thus addressed ideological entanglements found in the fields of philosophy, literary studies, and hermeneutics. Another of the most important (and most influential) discoveries made by the pioneers of deconstruction was that these seemingly neutral systemic constructions, which had been created on the basis of politically neutral, and thus ostensibly ideology-free disciplines – as philosophy and literary studies had been seen since ancient times – were not at all free from various forms of intellectual abuse and even manipulation. On the contrary, it was on this seemingly lofty, sublime stratum that the mechanisms underlying power, and, consequently, intolerance and violence, originated. Telling consequences of this fact could be seen in realms that were seemingly distant from the esoteric problems of philosophy – such as social life, and even our daily choices, where we often divide the world in two, and privilege certain elements within this opposition over others.

64 R. Gasché, ‘Deconstruction as Criticism’, *Glyph* 1979, vol. 6, pp. 177–215.

In his efforts to reveal the hidden neural network operating within Western thought and the humanities (according to Derrida, the term ‘humanities’ itself left much to be desired⁶⁵), Derrida initiated a turn – not so much towards ethics as towards ‘the ethical’, and not so much towards politics as towards ‘the political.’⁶⁶ He criticized all institutional structures – including traditional ethics and politics. Derrida’s consistently practical philosophy also brought about a broad and lasting shift in intellectual interests towards practice, which moved to the centre of humanistic interests following ‘the end of Theory.’⁶⁷ It was here that Anselm Haverkamp, for example, saw the primary significance of the ‘performative influences’ of early deconstructive practices. These practices drew attention to all kinds of ‘totalizing strategies,’ and thus not only provided an opportunity to re-examine and re-think the meanings of key conceptual categories within humanistic discourses, but also undermined the very notion of systemicity – including its place in the realms of ethics and politics. This in turn, Haverkamp argued, later set the general tone for a ‘new sense of the political.’⁶⁸ Yet, while the subversiveness of Derrida’s ‘strategic’ deconstruction was strongly felt in America in the 1970s, the philosopher’s hopes a decade later that the ethical and political implications of his deconstructive reading practices would be recognized just as quickly, and more importantly, put into practice, proved to be in vain. Both the overall picture of research practices in the humanities and the repertoire of basic theoretical terms used were undergoing a radical shift. Where ‘aporias,’ ‘ironies,’ ‘allegories,’ ‘misreadings,’ and ‘plays of meaning’ (associated with deconstruction) had once reigned supreme, there now appeared ‘gender,’ ‘culture,’ ‘queer,’ ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity,’ and every possible grammatical form of the word ‘violence,’ ‘oppression’ and ‘marginalization’ (or ‘emancipation’).

Problems associated with the discrimination faced by minorities and the various manifestations of this discrimination found in literature and literary discourses moved to the forefront. And although these problems also interested Derrida, it was difficult to use his practices to yield concrete ethical and

65 See J. Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,’ *The Languages of Criticism and the Science of Man*, ed. R. Macksey and E. Donato, Baltimore 1970. Hereinafter SSP, followed by the page number.

66 I explain the differences between these terms later in the chapter.

67 That is, following the crisis of modern theory. See, e.g. T. Eagleton, *After Theory*, London 2003.

68 A. Haverkamp, ‘Introduction,’ *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*, ed. A. Haverkamp, New York–London 1995, p. 2. Hereinafter DIA, followed by the page number.

political 'results' of this kind. It was likewise hard to assess the impact of the critical phases of poststructuralism and postmodernity on ethical and political activism. It was equally not easy to see, especially at the time, that a reassessment of the ontological and epistemological status of philosophy and literary studies represented a crucial step forward in their reform. Likewise, it was difficult to reconcile metatheoretical and metaphilosophical deliberations with a more general demand for more active participation in social life. To a great many scholars, such as path toward change simply seemed too long and arduous.

But postmodern and poststructural criticism brought with them more than just a means for seeing the frailty of the foundations of modern thought and theory. They also brought about an awareness that modern thought and theory could simply not function in the absence of any sort of foundations. Even the 'liquidity' that, according to Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most insightful interpreters of modernity, marked the general climate of modern and contemporary times,⁶⁹ required points of reference of some sort. Yet, while the early phases of the 'posts' were approaching a state of exhaustion, the spiritual bedrock of the old order had already lost its *raison d'être*. Modern rationality, the foundations of which were built upon the Metaphysics of Presence and its ideals – reason, totality, progress, secure ontological and epistemological underpinnings – had become exhausted. All forms of dogmatism and fundamentalism, universalism and objectivity, and with them, the autonomy of literature, philosophy and theory, were now considered compromised. Teleological models, efforts to achieve indisputable certainty, and even the very idea of truth, had become subject to doubt. After the critical phase of postmodernism, the world was above all 'contingent' and the multiplicity of the thought expressing this had to be equally 'contingent'. Many of the things we had once placed our faith in – unity, cohesion, systematicity, order – became splintered, fragmented. In lieu of them, we now had pluralism, temporality, event, locality, incidentality, contextuality and situationality, and thus the main features of a new, now post-postmodern 'mind-set' that would eventually replace modern 'consciousness'.

In the 1980s, an urgent need thus arose to furnish the humanities with new 'quasi-foundations' – free of essentialism and much more modest than the previous metaphysical 'foundations' – that could provide some semblance of order. This would involve the introduction of a weaker (or consciously 'weakened') rationality, a *pensiero debole*, as Gianni Vattimo put it, which would be not so

69 Bauman also uses the term 'liquid phase of modernity', which in his texts often acts as a synonym for the term 'postmodernity'. See his *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000.

much anti-metaphysical as non-metaphysical. Metaphysics and its consequences would not suddenly disappear like a bad dream, but rather, having played a starring role as the Greatest of the Great Narratives, it would now give way to other possibilities. This moment was accurately diagnosed by Bauman. In his opinion, what was needed most at present was a new *modus vivendi* suited to today's conditions of constant and irremediable existential uncertainty, a prescription for coexisting among numerous competing ways of living, none of which could claim it was grounded in anything more concrete or unalterable than its own historically shaped conventions.⁷⁰

Such a possibility was first seen in ethics, which – to put it somewhat facetiously – was in accordance with the precepts of ‘political correctness’ then in fashion. Throughout the history of Western metaphysics, ethics had been treated as something of a ‘discriminated minority’: although it had always been a primary component of philosophical systems, it was nevertheless always in the shadow of ‘First Philosophy’. A turn toward ethics had now become an urgent necessity.

The ethical turn, which in the late 1980s began to show itself with increasing frequency, was dictated by the need to find new philosophical underpinnings, a situation necessitated by the destabilization of traditional orders of thought. It seems, however, that this was largely triggered by the increasing influence of neopragmatism,⁷¹ whose proponents expressed their disapproval of the metaphysical tradition almost as vehemently as Derrida. This trend, which drew on the tradition of nineteenth-century American pragmatism, counted among its supporters such thinkers as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Donald Davidson, Ian Hacking, Richard J. Bernstein and Stanley Fish, and its influences were felt in both philosophy and literary studies. In its initial, ‘shock’ phase, it led to an at times extreme sense of flippancy, an almost complete relativization of common principles and criteria, and according to some, to cognitive and methodological ‘anarchism’. Neopragmatist tendencies were expressed not only in the direct manner associated with American thinkers, but were also visible in the American understanding of the ideas of Jürgen Habermas, in Lyotard’s

70 Z. Bauman, *Legislators and interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity, Intellectuals*, Ithaca, New York 1987.

71 Particularly the notorious debate carried out on the pages of the journal *Critical Inquiry* between 1982 and 1984 in response to Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels’ article ‘Against Theory’, described in the book *Against Theory. The Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell, Chicago–London 1985.

'late-Wittgensteinian' pragmatics of language games,⁷² and finally, in deconstruction.⁷³ They quickly gained broad recognition. In *Consequences of Pragmatism*, published in 1979, Richard Rorty drew attention to the inevitable 'pragmatization' of philosophy,⁷⁴ thanks to which the metaphysical search for 'a single truth' would be replaced by effective 'action'. At the time, he was referring in particular to analytical philosophy, but it quickly became clear that the pragmatic path was the evolutionary road to be taken by all thinkers who put language at the centre of their interests, or at least for anyone who, unlike those favouring the analytical tradition, no longer wanted to continue indulging in complacency.⁷⁵ Going beyond the language system towards linguistic experience, language practices or language in 'use', and focusing on the economy of speech and the impact of speech turned out to be a natural consequence of the direction taken by linguistic philosophy.⁷⁶ However, an awareness soon arose without a grounding in ethics, a pragmatic approach could lead in potentially dangerous directions. For example, given the absolute freedom of interpretation proclaimed by American neopragmatists, as expressed in Stanley Fish's (then) widely repeated rallying cry to liberate 'the affective fiction of the reader' or Rorty's equally compelling call to

72 Particularly in *The Postmodern Condition* and *Au Juste*. In terms of Habermas, see in particular *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge 1989; *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston 1984, and vol. 2: *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston 1985. Derrida spoke many times about the pragmatic character of deconstruction, going so far as to call it 'pragmatology'. See J. Derrida, 'My Chances/*Mes Chances*. A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies', [PI1 373].

73 See, e.g. A. Haverkamp and H. Dodge, 'Deconstruction is/as Neopragmatism? Preliminary Remarks on Deconstruction in America', in DIA. Derrida himself repeatedly emphasized the 'value of practice' (see, e.g. [PO 83]).

74 R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972–1980)*, Minneapolis 1982. The 'pragmatization' of philosophy that Rorty speaks of here is meant to refer not only James, Peirce, and Dewey, but also Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, etc.

75 Rorty himself went down this path, transforming himself in just three years (between 1967 and 1970) from an analytical philosopher into an ardent follower and continuator of James, Peirce and Dewey's thoughts, and then moving into 'cultural politics'. For more on this subject, see R. Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Cambridge 2007.

76 For more on this subject, see R. Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Cambridge 2007. See also *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* ed. K. Baynes, et al., Cambridge 1986.

replace methodical criticism with texts that 'serve one's own purposes',⁷⁷ the need for ethical demands (especially in literary criticism) became nothing less than essential.⁷⁸ The notion of 'use' was undoubtedly much more appealing than the age-old concept of interpretation, though it was not free of the risk of 'misuse' or even 'abuse'. It is therefore hardly surprising that the most anti-fundamentalist and at the same time most pragmatically aligned orientations in the humanities in the 1980s began to move steadily towards ethics. This was the case both in subsequent phases of the development of neopragmatism⁷⁹ and in the case of Derrida and the American deconstructionists. At a certain point, it was the neopragmatists and deconstructionists who began to speak out most often on ethical issues. For example, Rorty stated emphatically that '[the pragmatist's] account of the value of cooperative human enquiry has only an ethical base, not an epistemological or metaphysical one.'⁸⁰ The culmination of his philosophical project was to be 'ethical responsibility' and result in 'the appropriate mixture of unforced agreement with tolerant disagreement' in research practices.⁸¹

Thus, just as the pragmatic trend proved to be as much a consequence as a requirement of the earlier linguistic turn, so the ethical turn became as much a requirement as a major consequence of neopragmatism, both in philosophy and in literary studies. More and more often a 'Renaissance' in the system of values⁸² began to be proclaimed, while 'ethics' ceased to be merely a well-known philosophical term, but also one commonly used in literary studies. Yet, as John Fekete has rightly claimed in his book with the telling title *Life After Postmodernism*,⁸³ the ethical turn should not be considered a break with post-modernity, but rather its most important consequence: although it 'derives its

77 S. Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', *Self-consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-century Literature*, Berkeley 1972; R. Rorty, 'The Pragmatist's Progress', *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. S. Collini, Cambridge 1992.

78 I wrote more on this subject in my article 'Od metafizyki do etyki', *Teksty Drugie* 2002, no. 1–2, later reprinted in my book *Anty-Teorii literatury*.

79 This is well illustrated by Rorty, who after questioning the fundamentalist claims of philosophical representationalism, moved on to formulate his own concept of an 'edifying philosophy' and engaged in discourse focused on what is important for the development of culture and the individual.

80 R. Rorty, 'Science as Solidarity', *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers (Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1)*, Cambridge 1991, p. 24.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

82 For more on this subject, see, e.g. B. Smart, *Postmodernity*, London–York, 1993.

83 The full title is *Life after Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture*, London 1988.

present impetus from a series of critical reflections upon modernity,⁸⁴ it ultimately turned out that late postmodernity had not so much provided ethics with an opportunity to finally assume its rightful place, but rather that the ethical turn had provided the humanities with an opportunity when the ideals they had once embodied were in crisis. The questions and doubts that were increasingly being raised ushered in the initial phase of (what was now) 'late' postmodernity and poststructuralism. There was agreement, for example, that the Metaphysics of Presence had lost its creative potential, and could only replicate the success of other 'elegantly' constructed systems that were themselves merely replications of previous, equally 'elegant' ones. It was also undeniable that modern theory had been unable to make good on the promise to express the essence and specificity of literature by means of probable generalizations, or to justify universalistic pretensions to explain everything. There was also no dispute as to the failure of systemic thought and 'strong' notions of truth, nor did anyone question the falsity of belief in the possibility of revealing indisputable truths 'deposited' in texts, or as Rorty ironized, the futility of trying to determine how things 'really' are. There was also agreement that both metaphysical essentialism and a theory of interpretation that creates *a priori* norms of correctness had proven utter failures. The consensus also prevailed that one of the most important achievements of the 'posts' was, using Bauman's terms once again, a rejection of the idea of 'legislation' in favour of the idea of 'translation', and abandoning the search for an ultimate truth in favour of a transition a 'participation in communication between traditions', postulated by Rorty. The accompanying devaluation of the hermeneutics underlying the concept of a 'proper' or 'correct' interpretation, which, as was argued during the 'Against Theory' debate,⁸⁵ was intended to limit the viability of interpretation, and possibly even to govern it, and allow a 'general hermeneutics' to give way to 'local' interpretations.⁸⁶ One question, however, became all the more relevant: how should one conduct oneself in today's conditions of 'an-archism' in order to avoid them developing into anarchism or, more simply, utter chaos? In other words, if the collapse of the humanities' theoretical underpinnings was not to threaten their total collapse, and not lead to a situation in literary interpretation in which every interpretation could not only

84 B. Smart, *Postmodernity*, p. 81

85 This notorious debate was carried out on the pages of the journal *Critical Inquiry* between 1982 and 1984 in response to Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels' article 'Against Theory', described in the book *Against Theory. The Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell. Chicago–London 1985.

86 Fish's terms, see 'Consequences', *Against Theory*, pp. 107 and 110.

be assumed to be possible, but also of equal value, then there had to exist some sort of 'criteria' for assessment. In the face of extreme liberalism and loose or 'weak' norms, it became necessary to find some other form of 'legitimacy', one that would allow choices to be made between interpretations and the competence of their authors to be assessed. The situation was similar in philosophy, where a number of hazards were quickly identified in a 'joyful' neopragmatism now liberated from its former fundamentalisms, leading ultimately to an extreme flippancy. One Polish researcher of these issues rightly noted: 'given the "fiasco in theoretical limitations", the ethical limitations placed on the freedom of interpretation have acquired particular significance.'⁸⁷

The much more modest aspirations of late modern rationality mentioned above, which resulted in new models of literary study, led to the rise of the catchword 'utility' in humanist discourses and reading practices, to which a practical and moral significance was now being attributed based on their ability to inspire potential and real action in the name of good and truth.⁸⁸ Barry Smart, however, claimed that the ethical shift was not really a shift at all, but rather a return. After all, its aim had not been to turn the humanities in a completely new direction, but to bring to the surface and clearly articulate everything that been part of the projects of the early poststructuralists. In the early 1980s, however, this had to be expressed with great force in order to avoid accusations of excessive liberalism (of which neopragmatism was most often accused) or crypto-essentialism (of which Derrida and other deconstructionists were most often accused), and above all, of being blinded by the myth of 'textual autonomy'⁸⁹ (of which deconstruction was also accused). The need for clear ethical declarations in philosophy, literary theory and hermeneutics was soon to yield a true avalanche of publications with 'ethics' or 'values' in the title. In 1988, two such books appeared nearly simultaneously: Joseph Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading*, which summed up the ethical consequences of deconstruction, and J.D. Caputo's *Radical Hermeneutics: Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, which

87 A. Szahaj, 'Granice anarchizmu interpretacyjnego,' *Teksty Drugie* 1997, vol. 48, no. 6, p. 24. The entire issue of the journal was devoted to a discussion on anarchic tendencies in the theory of interpretation. See in particular the responses of Z. Bauman, 'Nad granicami anarchizmu interpretacyjnego,' pp. 35-43, and M. P. Markowski, 'Postęp?' pp. 81-82.

88 A. M. Kaniowski, 'Filozofia po lingwistycznym zwrocie,' *Teksty Drugie* 1990, no. 5-6, p. 99.

89 See H. L. Fairlamb, *Critical Conditions. Postmodernity and the Question of Foundations*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 137-138.

discussed the ethical background of Derrida's philosophy. The following year proved the most bountiful for ethical criticism, with published works including Tobin Siebers' *The Ethics of Criticism*, which described the most important philosophical inspirations of ethics in the study of literature; Wayne C. Booth's *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, in which the author studied the connections between Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and the ethics of reading; Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Contingencies of Values: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory*, containing a project for a new axiology as an inalienable component of 'critical theory'; and Geoffrey Galt Harpham's *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, in which the author sketched out the general perspectives for a 'post-ethics'.⁹⁰ Somewhat later, in 1992, Simon Critchley published *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, in which he analyzed in great detail the ethical implications of Derrida's deconstruction.⁹¹ Denis Donoghue summed up well this 'flood' of works devoted to ethics, noting that ethical concerns are currently the most discussed in the American literary research forum.⁹² By the end of the 1980s, the ethical turn in philosophy and literary studies had become firmly established, and in the years that followed its lasting presence was confirmed by continued efforts to discuss it and sum it up synthetically.⁹³ These efforts revealed the existence of several distinct spheres of interest, which demonstrated the wide range of issues addressed within this problem area.⁹⁴

90 Place of publication, in order: New York 1988, Berkeley 1988, Harvard 1988, Chicago 1988. Booth's book combined Bakhtin's dialogism with the ethics of reading into a paradigm of ethically-oriented conversation.

91 The full title of Critchley's book was *The Ethics of Deconstruction. Derrida and Lévinas*, New York 1992. Hereinafter ED, followed by the page number. Also worth mentioning is a very interesting book by J. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, Bloomington, 1997, which was also devoted in part to ethical issues in the philosopher's thought.

92 See D. Donoghue, 'In Their Master's Steps', *Times Literary Supplement*, December 16–22, 1988.

93 See, e.g. C. Norris, *Truth and the Ethics of Criticism*, Manchester 1994, as well as the January 1999 special issue of *PMLA* (ed. L. Buell) dedicated to ethics and literary study.

94 In his introduction to the January 1999 special issue of *PMLA*, L. Buell focuses on six such trends: a revival of the new critical tradition based on moral reflection (Arnold, Leavis), the ethical orientation in modern philosophy (Nussbaum, Rorty), Foucault's influence and reflection on self-creation problems, Derrida's discussion with Levinas, colonial research expansion and the growing professionalization of scientific research and the resulting reformulation of professional ethics, 'Introduction: In Pursuit of Ethics', *PMLA* (Special Topic: Ethics and Literary Study) 1999, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 7–19.

The transition in the American humanities from 'action' in texts to ethical 'activity' required both Jacques Derrida and deconstructionists still faithful to his views to undertake a decisive shift in their emphasis, and more specifically, to bring to the forefront the ethical implications of deconstructive reading. In the late 1980s, they too began to speak out more and more loudly about the need to confront the 'ethical moment'⁹⁵ in the course reading, and in situations requiring moral choices in reading practices,⁹⁶ although they maintained that their ethical stance could long be seen in their practices and reading style. However, the phrase 'moral choices', which some time ago had begun to supplant 'ethical decisions' in critical discourse, indicated the next step to be taken by the ethics of literature. It was quickly seen that the very concept of ethics had to undergo a fundamental revision, above all, due to the fundamentalism with which it had been burdened by the metaphysical tradition. As a consequence, the ethical return turned out to be a 'return to morality', which was, as Bauman put it, a 'revealed morality' that finds its expression in practice.⁹⁷ It became clear that the ethical thought of 'late' postmodernity could not permit any essentialist tendencies. The only answer to this problem, one suggested by the Bauman, was a transition to a 'morality without ethics'. For Derrida and the deconstructionists, allergic to any form of orthodoxy, such a transition was essential, because, as Martin Jay accurately noted, they had put great effort into forcing us 'to reflect on the costs of moral absolutism',⁹⁸ only to then once again become entangled in rigid ethical codes. It was thanks to them that the ethical trend in the humanities ultimately shifted the focus of its interest from the ethics of reading to the morality of the reader. Late-modern ethics (like philosophy and literary theory) would ultimately prove to be a 'weak' ethics, but this 'weakness' was not marked by any pejorative connotations. Rather it meant minimizing arbitrary ethical demands that would pre-determine the reading process, and was thus another act of elevating practice over theory. The turn towards 'morality' was to be understood as a special kind of practice – practice defined situatively and contextually by moral choices in the reading of literature. This perspective was visible in a sort of 'final statement' written by Michel Foucault shortly before his death in 1984,

95 S. Critchley's term, see [ED].

96 N. Mapp's words, 'Deconstruction', *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, ed. M. Coyle, et al., London 1990, p. 753. Hereinafter DE, followed by the page number.

97 Z. Bauman, *Dwa szkice o moralności ponowoczesnej* [Two Sketches on Postmodern Morality], Warszawa 1994. Hereinafter DM, followed by the page number.

98 Cited in: M. P. Markowski, *Zwrot etyczny*, p. 241.

i.e. at the time when the first signs appeared of the ethical turn in the humanities.⁹⁹ He had already staked out his philosophical path, the end point of which was a moral project situated on the poles of fundamentalist ethics. Foucault even stated categorically that: ‘The search for a form of morality that would be acceptable to everyone – in the sense that everyone would have to submit to it – strikes me as catastrophic.’¹⁰⁰ The Foucauldian call for the ‘return of morality’ found its time at exactly that moment, becoming one of the most important inspirations for those promoting the practicality of ethics.¹⁰¹ The purpose behind the movement to reform ethics, and especially its shifting of the focus to morality, was well expressed in Bauman’s works, especially in the aforementioned *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*, which provide a condensed version of the views expressed by the author later in *Postmodern Ethics*.¹⁰² The most succinct expression of his main idea was a categorical statement made during an interview: ‘morality is never and never can be rigid.’¹⁰³ He also noted that ‘morality appears today as a phenomenon that is no less accidental than the rest of existence – like the rest of existence it lacks foundations, in this case, ethical ones’ [DM 51]. He further argued that at present morality can be only an *ethically unfounded morality*. It must therefore be uncontrolled and unpredictable. It creates itself, but it can also undo what it has constructed and recreate in another form – all of this occurs during the process of establishing and ending interpersonal relationships, as people come together and part with one another, as they communicate and quarrel, and accept or reject old or new bonds and loyalties. [DM 52]

In replacing the term ‘ethics’ with ‘morality,’ Bauman primarily sought to free ethical thought from its past orthodoxy. In proclaiming the need to reject the

99 Foucault’s project, drawing on and the ancient tradition, was formulated in his book *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. R. Hurley, New York 1988 and in his essays ‘Technologies of the Self’, *Technologies of the Self*, Amherst, Mass. 1988, pp. 16-49 and ‘Writing the Self’, *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. A. Davidson, Chicago 1997, pp. 234-248. See also: P. Veyne, C. Porter and A. I. Davidson, ‘The Final Foucault and His Ethics’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 1-9.

100 M. Foucault, ‘The Return of Morality’, *Foucault Live*, ed. S. Lotringer, New York 1989, p. 473. I deal with this issue in more depth in the chapter ‘America Between Derrida and Foucault’.

101 The word ‘ethics’ was replaced by ‘the ethical’ in order to draw attention to its practical dimension, although the term was not used consistently and appeared alongside ‘morality’ or simply ‘ethics’.

102 Z. Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford-Cambridge 1993.

103 Chmielewski, R., ‘Postmodernizm, czyli nowoczesność bez złudzeń: Rozmowa z Profesorem Zygmuntem Baumanem’, *Odra* 1995, no. 1, pp. 19-29.

oversight of 'ethical experts', as he described them, and thus, questioning on ethical grounds the idea of 'legislation', which he strongly criticized in *Legislators and Interpreters*, he called for a conversion to faith in the 'moral competence of the ordinary man', forced to make day-to-day choices in accordance with his own system of values, worldview, and life circumstances. Traditional ethics – based on Platonic and Kantian models – was therefore accused of a lack of trust in the moral instincts of the average person. He also argued that the creation of prescriptive systems only lowered people's vigilance, instilling in them the feeling that a higher authority would solve their problems for them. In his convictions about the destructive effect of ethics on individual morality, Bauman was very close to the views of Derrida, whose aversion to all arbitrary rules and laws imposed from above stemmed primarily from a conviction that, like the entire metaphysical tradition, they simply 'put to sleep' thinking.¹⁰⁴ Richard Rorty also expressed a very similar position, although he wanted to pay more attention to another aspect of ethical thought omitted by the metaphysical tradition. In his essay 'The Ethics of Principle and the Ethics of Sensitivity',¹⁰⁵ he used the term 'ethics' (not 'morality'), though he in fact meant a reform of its traditional model like that proposed by Bauman. For Rorty, traditional ethics (based on Platonic and Kantian systems) was the embodiment of the rigidity and arduousness of 'moral duty' – treated as 'only a duty' – which, in his opinion, weakened the authenticity of the need to do good. Above all, it was deprived of the very important element of 'sensitivity' to another's suffering. As such, it was considered by him to be anachronistic, if not harmful. He argued that we should start to pay more attention to who suffers (and why) as a result of the rigid and arbitrary nature of ethical norms (even if they seem right to us). Or – who is excluded (and why) or even repressed by codes of ethics, because he or she does not fit into existing philosophical and religious models of conduct. The fundamentalism, 'causticity' and general insensitivity to human suffering of Western ethics Rorty blamed most of all Kant, but also Plato, as well. Rorty believed that emotions were not a constant component of human nature, and according to him, this gesture condemned ethical thought in the West to a dependence on reason, 'freeing

104 He said of the language of metaphysics that 'it is language which is sleeping'. See J. Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas', *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 2005 [1978]. Hereinafter VM, followed by the page number.

105 R. Rorty, 'Etyka zasad i etyka wrażliwości' [The Ethics of Principles and the Ethics of Sensitivity], trans. D. Arciszewska, *Teksty Drugie* 2002, no. 1-2, pp. 51-63. This text was translated into Polish based on a typed manuscript provided by the author.

it' from all emotions. Plato and Kant were also largely responsible for the absolutization and universalization of the concept of Good, which according to the philosopher (and in Foucault's opinion, as well) did not lend itself to this kind of unification. There is not just one good that is equally 'good' for everyone – he argued – because doing good is closely linked to the specific life situation of an individual, and it is this individual who is responsible for his/her moral choices. He, too, should be guided above all by sensitivity to the injustice and suffering experienced by others. In Rorty's ethical philosophy we can clearly see not only the influence of the 19th-century American pragmatists' thoughts, but also the views of John Stuart Mill, an English utilitarian, and especially his opinion that 'the limit of our freedom is the harm done to others.' Emotions, or rather the titular 'sensitivity', was in Rorty's opinion even necessary for the new ethics. Just as he described philosophy as a 'reactive' discipline – reacting actively to everything that is current in culture and society – so the 'ethics of sensitivity' he postulated was also to be an ethics that reacted to suffering and was open to the needs of the Other.

Bauman's and Rorty's comments corresponded well with the efforts of Derrida and the deconstructionists, whose aversion to ethical arbitration, was very closely aligned with 'practical morality'. They thus accepted a 'weak', ethically non-codified, morality, which would become not so much a burdensome necessity as a conscious acquiescence, devoid of nostalgia and fear.¹⁰⁶ The turn away from fundamentalist ethics and transition to a 'practiced morality' also entailed 'situating' moral choices, in this case linking them to a specific situation, including the reading of a text. Consequently, in terms of the ethics of deconstruction, the only admissible ethical imperative became the principle of respecting the 'law of the Other' (as the undisputed 'owner' and 'signatory' of the text), and its most important slogan – responsibility in reading. Again, this was in line with Bauman's thoughts, for whom 'moral autonomy' meant 'moral responsibility – irrevocable, but also inalienable' [DM 75]. What interested Derrida and the deconstructionists was the practice of 'ethical experience' in reading – confronting the concrete choices made by the reader. This was particularly emphasized by Geoffrey Bennington, who claimed that in the case of Derrida, 'the non-ethical opening of ethics can be seen straightforwardly and yet intractably in the fact of reading'.¹⁰⁷ Derrida himself also tried (in his own way)

106 See also Bauman's comments on 'the decline of ethical legislation, which does not necessarily mean the collapse of morality' [DM 75].

107 G. Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*. London 2000, p. 35.

to explain this, particularly when in reference to Levinas, he argued the importance of the ‘experience of aporia’ (i.e. the moment when an unresolved meaning arises during reading). This experience made it necessary to take decisions and, consequently, to assume responsibility for one’s choices. This ‘extreme cognitive situation’,¹⁰⁸ ‘hitting a wall’, as it were, could indeed stimulate intense reflection in readers and require them to take concrete action. Moreover, as Derrida claimed, this situation could not be predicted in advance nor could the means for its resolution (if such means existed) be decreed from above. Thus, ‘the passage through aporia,’ as he described it, was in the full sense of the word, a form of ‘ethical experience,’ while ‘aporia’ itself was understood by him as a kind of ‘generator’ of responsibility. The importance he attached to this experience also indicated the direction in which his reflections on reading were moving. It was clearly visible that they were moving away from hermeneutical theories, which placed a correct reading of the text at the hierarchical apex of their regulatory ideals. Derrida, in contrast, was clearly moving toward experience (particularly ethical experience), and was interested mostly in the process (not the ‘act’) of reading, which was free of any external restrictions, and in its, so to speak, ‘energetic’ qualities – how it prompted further readings.¹⁰⁹ The sole essential requirement for determining the course of reading was the responsibility of the reader towards the text and its creator.

Similarly, in speaking about responsibility, Rorty claimed that it is not imposed, and thus, does not *exist*, but *arises* from the necessity to make a ‘choice between two hypotheses,’ meaning that there is ‘nothing to be responsible to except ourselves.’¹¹⁰ For Derrida, demonstrating responsibility in practice would become one of his most important demands, and not only during the process of reading. As he explained in one interview, he was also concerned with something more general, which he referred to as ‘responsibility of ‘thought’’, and which is particularly necessary when one takes up problems of an ethical and political

108 See the chapter ‘Epistemic Trauma’ in the present book.

109 An approach to reading as an ‘act’ was proposed by phenomenology and the German ‘aesthetics of reception’ influenced by it. The act of reading here was a mirror reflection of the act of intentional ‘placement’ of meaning in the work by its author and entailed the necessity of discovering the author’s intention, so in fact ‘reading’ was merely a different name for ‘interpretation’ and was bound by similar restrictions.

110 R. Rorty, ‘Science as Solidarity’, pp. 39–41.

nature.¹¹¹ The convictions of both philosophers can once again be summed up accurately by citing Bauman's conclusions:

Thanks to the dissipation of the ethical smoke screen that obscured the real condition of moral man, we can finally stand face-to-face with the 'naked truth' of the moral dilemmas that arise from our experiences [...] of the dilemmas revealed by the moral self in all their raw, philosophically unbridled and untempered, but most likely immitigable ambiguity. [DM 84]

Simon Critchley also pointed to this problem in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, where he stated that clearing up certain misunderstandings which had arisen in regard to the ethical dimension of Derrida's thought was as one of the most important goals of his book. In the book's Introduction, he wrote:

It is assumed that ethics, conceived of as a branch of philosophy, namely moral philosophy or practical reasoning, is a region of inquiry – like logic or physics – which supposes the philosophical or metaphysical foundation that deconstruction deconstructs. Thus, if the relation between ethics and deconstruction is analogous to that between a branch, or region, of philosophical inquiry and that which puts all such inquiry into question, then one would be entitled to ask, what would deconstruction possibly have to do with ethics, apart from radically putting unto question the possibility of the latter? In this book, I will attempt to respond to this question by arguing that an ethical moment is essential to deconstructive reading and that ethics is the goal, or horizon, towards which Derrida's work tends. This means that the conception of ethics employed in this book will differ markedly from the traditional concept of ethics *qua* region or branch of philosophy.¹¹²

We can see here the difference between the traditional concept of ethics (as a sub-discipline of metaphysics) and the new understanding of it – as an independent discipline, unburdened by metaphysics – yet not so much a discipline as a practice. This new dimension of ethical practice, which, unlike traditional ethics, will be defined as 'the ethical' (or 'practicing morality'), also gives a general character to Derrida's and the deconstructionists' quests. The renunciation of ethics as an 'area or branch of philosophy' will also change the shape of the ethical thought of 'late' postmodernity and give it – in the full sense of the word – the form of practicing the 'ethically unfounded morality' that Zygmunt Bauman

111 J. Derrida, 'The Almost Nothing of the Unpresentable' [an interview with Christian Descamps], *Points...: Interviews 1974–1994*, Stanford 1995, p. 80. Hereinafter AN, followed by the page number.

112 S. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Edinburgh 1999 [1992], p. 2. Hereinafter ED, followed by the page number.

demanded.¹¹³ This is why an ethical shift in literary research would ultimately not only bring about a shift from ethics to morality, so strongly emphasized by Bauman, Rorty and Foucault, but also contribute to opening up literary reflection to the unpredictability associated with encountering literature as a ‘text of the Other’, and to the risk inherent in every act of decision-making by the reader. Derrida and the deconstructionists would also try to consistently implement this in practice, although as Wayne C. Booth in *The Company We Keep* rightly argued, ethical criticism would prove to be the riskiest and ‘most difficult of all critical modes’.

113 One of Derrida’s most important spiritual guides, Emanuel Levinas, also spoke about the need to distinguish between ethics and morality: Emanuel Levinas.

The Law of the Other

I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and 'the other of language'

Jacques Derrida.¹¹⁴

This stance in practice amounted to a rejection of the 'self-assured sciences' (e.g., hermeneutics – the 'useful arts of exegesis', and semiotics – 'textual cartographics'¹¹⁵) in favour of the conscious adoption of a *disposition* toward the Other that does not rule out failure.¹¹⁶ In discussing the specificity of deconstruction, Nigel Mapp summed up the thrust of Derrida's concept as such:

Deconstruction does not serve any system of values [...], but indicates instead the fundamental structure of ethics, a discourse of self-resistance. This ascetic disavowal of method or values, disingenuous or not, lands deconstruction in great problems with institutional literary or philosophical study. [DE 788]

Rodolphe Gasché described its practices in a similar fashion:

Derrida not only pins down a contradiction between the philosophical necessity of foundation and a philosophy's discursive practice, but also specifies certain very precise ethico-theoretical decisions that are responsible for an actual discursive state of a particular philosophy, as well as of philosophy in general.¹¹⁷

114 Interview with Derrida by Richard Kearney's in 1981, published in R. Kearney, 'Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction and the Other', *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind*, ed. R. Kearney, Manchester 1995, pp. 262.

115 V. B. Leitch, 'Hermeneutics, Semiotics, and Deconstruction', V. B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*, New York 1983, pp. 259–263.

116 Derrida speaks about the difference between 'position' and 'disposition' in a somewhat different context in his conversation with R. Kearney in 'Deconstruction and the Other: An Interview with Derrida', *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*. Manchester 1984, p. 120. Hereinafter DO, followed by the page number.

117 R. Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*, Cambridge 1994, p. 36

An even more radical stance was adopted by Simon Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, where he states that deconstruction, as an ‘unconditional affirmation’ of the other ‘is the only way of reading that answers an ethical demand,’ and that ‘only a deconstructive approach [...] is capable of upholding an ethical demand.’ In his opinion, the greatest value of Derrida’s work lies in the fact that it has always been ‘highly sensitive to the ethical modalities of response and responsibility in reading’ [ED 3]. The term ‘responsibility for the response,’ coined by Derrida, consequently became the most important postulate of his ethics of reading, while its primary and essentially only ‘law’ was ‘the law of the other.’ When asked about deconstruction’s ‘ethical phase,’ Derrida most often denied there existed such a distinct phase, although – especially when looking at the history of American deconstructive criticism – it might seem so.¹¹⁸ He argued many times that his achievements never lacked an ethical dimension, and even claimed that questions related to moral choices were what concerned him most. This same view was expressed by many commentators, most ardently by Critchley, who wrote:

Nor am I claiming that the meaning of deconstruction has been so clearly established that one can now draw out its implications and applications: an applied deconstruction at work in the field of practical reasoning. My claim is not that *an* ethics can be derived from deconstruction, like an effect from a cause, a superstructure from an infrastructure, or a second critique from a first critique (while recognizing Kant’s claim to the primacy of practical reason). Rather, I hope to demonstrate that the pattern of reading produced in the deconstruction of – mostly, but by no means exclusively – philosophical texts has an ethical structure: deconstruction ‘is’ ethical. [ED 2]

However, in the early 1980s, both Derrida and some deconstructive critics (e.g. Joseph Hillis Miller) understood that not everyone saw the ethical implications of their practices. In spite of an abundance of self-commentary from these critics, many did not perceive deconstruction’s practices as being directed primarily against various forms of repression and ideological abuse, or against all types of ethical monopolies. They were much more likely to see its main focus as identifying the internal conflict between the conceptual and rhetorical levels of a text and attempting to demonstrate the inconsistency between them. In truth, deconstructionists had been responding to changing trends in the humanities by

118 The so-called ‘ethical phase’ has been recognized as the last stage in the development of the Yale School, which initiated the ethical and political turns in literary studies in America. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that although ethical issues came to the fore in the work of the School only during its last years, they were in fact inscribed in the reading practices of its students from the very beginning.

bringing ethical issues to the forefront and addressing them directly. This greatly affected the reception of deconstruction at that time. Critchley thus continues:

[O]ne might perhaps speak of a third wave in the reception of deconstruction, beyond its literary and philosophical appropriations, one in which ethical – not to mention political – questions are upper-most. Indeed, such a third wave corresponds to the concerns of Derrida's work on Heidegger, Paul de Man, friendship, racism, apartheid, and the debate with John Searle. As part of this third wave, one might consider J. Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading*, about which I shall have more to say below, which sought precisely to challenge the prevailing prejudice that deconstruction, particularly in the form practised by Paul de Man, is a species of nihilistic textual free play which suspends all questions of value and is therefore, so the argument goes, immoral (such also, in essence, is Gadamer's objection to Derrida) [ED 3].¹¹⁹

Although Derrida tried to avoid the word 'ethics' (considering it, like many other philosophical terms, overly burdened by metaphysics¹²⁰), it is not difficult to see that in both the early and later periods of his practices,¹²¹ moral issues play a dominant role – he considers from an ethical perspective not only the question of responsibility towards the other, but also the issues of friendship, gifts, hospitality and death.¹²² The philosopher's views were also expressed in his reading practices and, paradoxically, precisely for this reason seemed so unconventional, as they bore no resemblance to any of the methods or means of explicating meaning then considered part of the canon of textual interpretation. Derrida considered any endeavour to reduce a text to a 'handy format' as an attempt to 'appropriate' it – an indulgence of the interpreter's egoistic temptation to 'possess' another's text and control its meaning, rather than allowing it to speak for itself. He strongly resisted this 'mimetic desire' for a 'correct' meaning, which in his opinion was analogous to the metaphysical desire for the 'being-present'. He was convinced that when such a desire guided interpretive practices, there was always a danger that the individuality and singularity of the text – from

119 Critchley is referring to allegations made by H-G. Gadamer, who considered deconstruction to be merely a 'literary game' that could not be taken seriously from an ethical point of view. See R. Boyne, 'Interview with Hans-Georg Gadamer', *Theory, Culture and Society* 1988, no. 5. See also *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. D. Michelfelder and R. Palmer. Albany 1989.

120 Cf. the philosopher's words on this subject in his interview André Jacob, in J. Derrida, *Altérités*. Paris 1986.

121 More or less since 1987, i.e. after *Psyché*.

122 Because this chapter provides only a general overview of its subject matter, I am unable to analyze this issue here in greater detail.

his point of view its greatest value – would be lost as a result. For him, interpretation was therefore a potentially violent activity, both in relation to the text and towards the other as its absolute ‘owner’, and for this reason, put great effort into carefully avoiding the paths staked out by hermeneutics.¹²³ For the same reason, he constantly challenged its metaphysical foundations, expressing his disappointment with traditional models of interpretation (which in his opinion were unethical because they violated the linguistic sovereignty of the text and treated it as merely a ‘document’¹²⁴). For Derrida the most ethical stance was expressed in a reading practice in which the reader did not try to ‘master’ the text or impose upon it his or her own decisions, ready-made conclusions or language. Geoffrey Bennington noted that Derrida did not promote ethics in the traditional sense, but rather deconstructed them. However, his specific understanding of ethics – his notion of the ‘arche-ethical’ – was itself both a source and an important consequence of ethics. According to Bennington, ethics were at the heart of deconstruction, and this is why Derrida’s project made possible a rethinking of fundamental ethical issues. The most important – not so much category, as duty – within these ethics was responsibility, which ‘preceded’ reading (similar to Levinas’ notion that ethics was prior to ontology), and provided the clearest proof that accusations against Derrida of ‘autonomous textualism’ had been made too rashly. In truth, the philosopher’s ethics presupposed both the contextual situation and the involvement of the reader.¹²⁵

However, reading was not the only source of practical evidence for Derrida’s ethical stance. Ethical considerations appear even in his earliest texts,¹²⁶ such as

123 I write in more detail about the metaphysical critique of Derrida’s hermeneutics (‘onto-hermeneutics’, as he called it) in [DI 277–442], particularly in the section titled ‘Jacques Derrida: Interpretation and Metaphysics’.

124 Cf. e.g. ‘No model of reading seems to me at the moment ready to measure up to this text – which I would like to read as a *text* and not as a document’ [OG 149].

125 G. Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, p. 37.

126 Derrida spoke openly about the importance of Levinas in the development of his views in his 1980 essay ‘En ce moment memê dans cet ouvrage me voici’ [At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume One*, Stanford 2007, pp. 143–190]. This text was for Critchley also one of Derrida’s most important statements on ethical issues. It confirmed that deconstruction had developed from the outset in a specific ethical context. [ED 11–12]. In turn, shortly after the death of Levinas in 1996, Derrida published an essay on him entitled ‘Adieu’ in the journal *Critical Inquiry* (no. 23, 1996) in which he praised the philosopher’s contribution to anti-metaphysical (and ethical) thought in the twentieth century, including of

‘Violence and Metaphysics (an essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas)’.¹²⁷ But Derrida was not the only one to seek inspiration in the writings of the author of *Totality and Infinity*. As Lawrence Buell has noted, Levinas was undoubtedly ‘the most central theorist for the postpoststructuralist dispensation of turn-of-the-century literary-ethical inquiry’. Derrida in turn stated in his posthumous farewell to the philosopher that ‘the thought of Emmanuel Levinas has awakened us’.¹²⁸ The founder of deconstruction, however, had discovered the value of Levinas’ thought much earlier, long before the ethical turn had been decreed, although at the time he wrote ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ (1964), he was much more interested in Levinas’ strategy of questioning metaphysics by means of ethics – his so-called ‘the departure from Greece’ [WD 104] – than in the moral message contained in his writings. He also perceived, as he put it, the ‘trap into which [Levinas] had fallen’ because ‘in his efforts to construct his discourse, he was forced to incorporate everything from which he had tried to liberate himself’ [OS]. This diagnosis also influenced Derrida’s search for a means to free himself not only from the traps laid by metaphysics, but also from traditional ethics, which were subordinated to its demands. Critchley summed this up well:

[Derrida] demonstrated how Levinas’s ethical overcoming of ontology is itself dependent upon the totalizing ontologies it sought to overcome – namely, Husserlian phenomenology, Hegelian dialectic, and Heidegger’s thinking of the meaning or the truth of Being. [ED 13]

Unlike Levinas, Derrida believed that ethics *in practice* (and not merely speaking about ethical issues) could not continue to adhere to their former traditions;

course to his own thought. This essay signalled Derrida’s later book *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas* [*Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Stanford 1999].

127 The text was first published in 1964 and included in 1967 in *Writing and Difference*. Derrida cites many of Levinas’s works, all of which he enumerates in a footnote, see [WD 396].

128 J. Derrida. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Stanford 1999, p. 3. Much has been written about Derrida’s relationship with the views of Levinas. Critchley also considers him to be one of the most important inspirations for Derrida’s ethics of deconstruction. His book *The Ethics of Deconstruction* is largely devoted affinities in the thoughts of these two philosophers. See also E. Wyschogrod, ‘Derrida, Lévinas and Violence’, in *Derrida and Deconstruction*. 1981; C. Norris, *Derrida*. Cambridge 1987 (See Chapter 8: ‘Nietzsche, Freud, Lévinas: On the Ethics of Deconstruction’). See also Levinas’ 1973 essay on Derrida’s work, ‘Tout autrement’. Critchley also believes that both Levinas’ book *Totality and Infinity* and his essay ‘Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence’ were responses to questions raised by Derrida in *Violence and Metaphysics*.

they first required the deconstruction of 'l'éthicité de l'éthique, or, in Nietzschean terms, a calling into question of the value of values' [ED 16]. At the same time, however, in many places one can see close affinities between Derrida's views and those of Levinas, not only in their shared aversion to metaphysics (taking into account differences in how they questioned them), but also in their embracing of difference and *chiasmus*, their recognition of the role of *logos* (and criticism of monological thinking as a means of closing oneself off from 'the law of the Other'), and their attempt to demonstrate in practice ways in which *logos* undermines its own hegemony. Derrida was particularly close to Levinas' idea of unconditionally openness to the Other (our neighbour), which ultimately leads to a rejection of the self. In *Adieu*, for example, he stated that we owe a debt, above all, for 'all the great themes to which the thought of Emmanuel Levinas has awakened us, that of responsibility first of all, but of an 'unlimited' responsibility that exceeds and precedes my freedom.'¹²⁹ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, already in 'Violence and Metaphysics,' very clearly inspired by Levinas' thought, Derrida addressed a topic that would be key for him, one to which he continued to devote himself to a greater or lesser extent throughout his life, and which is succinctly expressed in the essay's title: the origins of the violence in the philosophical tradition of the West. Critchley was correct when he claimed that in this essay deconstruction's practices developed in an intensive dialogue with Levinas' ethics. [ED 9–12]. It was also here that we get our first glimpse of what would later be most important to Derrida, even many years later: the search for ways to go beyond metaphysics (and beyond an ethics built upon metaphysics), the intersubjective 'grounding' of meaning, a deep respect for the alterity of the Other, and our responsibility towards her (also a very important theme in Levinas' writing), as well as the necessity of abandoning the idea of language as merely a tool of description, and returning instead to its ethos. Derrida also stressed that it was Levinas who had most keenly perceived that ethics was not only a complement to or substitute for metaphysics, and that it had become essential for thought, which must consciously assume the risks associated with facing the unpredictable. What is more, it is in this confrontation, he claimed, that real responsibility finds its place. Derek Attridge commented on this in the following way:

Derrida's writing on literary texts arises from a strong response to them which is also a strong sense of his *responsibility* toward them, the registering of a demand which they and their signatories make, of a call that seems to come from somewhere outside the

129 J. Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. P. A. Brault, M. Ness, Stanford 1999, p. 3.

orbit within which we comfortably go about our intellectual business – but an outside which cannot simply be classified as exterior. Although the philosophical discourse of ethics is as much subject to Derrida's de-totalizing interrogation as the other branches of philosophy, there has always been an ethico-political dimension to Derrida's writing, manifesting itself particularly in a respect for *otherness*, be it textual, historical, cultural, or personal [...]. This responsibility toward the other is also a responsibility toward the future, since it involves the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond any of our programs and predictions, can come to transform what we know or think we know. [...] Responsibility for Derrida is not something we simply 'take': we find ourselves summoned, confronted by an undecidability which is also always an opportunity and a demand, a chance and a risk.¹³⁰

The 'topic – or utopics – of responsibility and undecidability',¹³¹ as John Llewelyn once put it, held a very important place in Derrida's writing, although it did not immediately find its own distinct place in his works.¹³² For Derrida, the 'beginning' of responsibility meant (as usual) responsibility towards the 'beginning'. He thus asks in the Introduction to his deconstructive reading of Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties*:

Would it not be more interesting, even if it proves difficult or perhaps impossible, to conceive of a responsibility – that is, a summons to be responded to – which would no longer in the final analysis pass by way of the ego, the 'I think,' the subject, intention, or the ideal of decidability? Would it not be more 'responsible' to attempt to think

130 J. Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. D. Attridge. New York–London 1992, p. 5. Hereinafter AL, followed by the page number.

131 See J. Llewelyn, 'Responsibility with Indecidability', *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Wood. Cambridge 1992, p. 72.

132 He dealt with the issue of the responsibilities of the humanities – which was perhaps alongside *Violence and Metaphysics* his earliest work addressing this issue – in his well-known lecture 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' [published as Chapter 10 of *Writing and Difference*], which marked the beginning in 1966 of deconstruction and American deconstructionism. However, among the many issues raised in the text – in particular, the contradictions found within structuralism – this subject was not raised at all. The topic of 'responsibility' was not clearly articulated in Derrida's works until the mid-1980s. See, in particular: 'The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils' [first published in *Diacritics* 1983, no. 3, pp. 3–20]; 'Mochlos, or the Conflict of the Faculties' [First published in French in *Philosophie* 1984, no. 2, pp. 21–53 (both texts can be found in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, Stanford 2004)]; and 'The Politics of Friendship', *Journal of Philosophy* 1988, no. 85, pp. 632–648. This essay signalled a later book of the same title. See also Kearney's interview with Derrida, cited above, and Attridge's interview with Derrida in [AL 33–75].

the ground upon which, in the history of the West, the juridical and egological values of responsibility have arisen and imposed themselves? There, perhaps, lies a source of responsibility at once 'older' and – to the extent that it is now newly perceived through the crisis afflicting the classical ideal of responsibility – also 'younger'.¹³³

This questioning of sources – the challenging of the first principle, the underlying foundation [*arché*] – might seem suspect, an effort to create confusion in traditional philosophical terminology, leading on a direct path to the principle of 'anything goes' (Derrida was accused of this as well). For Derrida, radical suspicion, criticism 'from the inside out', had awakened consciousness from its slumber, raising issues that had long been effaced, suppressed or relegated to the margins, or so seemingly settled they evoked automatic responses – suspicion became something of 'a vocation – a response to a call', as he described it in one interview [DO 118], carried out in the Socratic spirit of posing uncomfortable questions, a synonym for genuine responsibility. For Derrida, questioning 'the basis of identity' meant showing the deepest respect for otherness. For this reason, in lieu of the *arché*, a stable, unshakeable foundation, he adopted *différance*, a continuous and unending process of 'differentiation'¹³⁴ and deferral. It was a gesture toward the 'legitimacy' of otherness – always evading our appropriationist gaze. The theme of otherness – one of the most important in Derrida's philosophy – and its irreducibility, expressed in various ways and with the help of a variety of metaphorical figures ('signature', 'date', etc.), came into being the moment the idea of *différance* appeared in his philosophical discourse. This was undoubtedly the first step on the way to developing the ethics of deconstruction, which, by preventing the closing off of what was different in a 'ready' sense (through its constant deferral), also prevented its 'assimilation'. However, it was only the late Derrida that revealed his almost obsessive interest in otherness, largely due to his own personal situation – the experience of being different (Jewish) in Algeria and an other (a Jew from Algeria) in France, as he called it, a 'three-fold' otherness. And this is how he ultimately summed up the sense of deconstruction:

I mean that deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call. The other, as the other than self, the other that opposes self-identity, is not something that can be detected and disclosed within a philosophical space and with the

133 J. Derrida, 'Mochlos, or, The Conflict of the Faculties', *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy* 2, trans. R. Rand and A. Wygant, Stanford 2004, pp. 83–112.

134 See Derrida's previously-cited essay 'Différance'.

aid of a philosophical lamp. The other precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin. [DO 118]¹³⁵

As Derrida notes here in his conversation with Richard Kearney, all questioning begins with the recognition of the absolute sovereignty of the other and the need to respect her rights – this is our most important ethical obligation. Derrida's deconstruction of the opposition between decidability and undecidability, as well as between individuality and universality, provided an important impulse for his exploration of the issue of responsibility, his own conception of which became inseparably tied to the notion of 'response.' He did not hide the fact that this 'responsible response' (to the text of the other) was the most difficult demand of ethical reading to fulfil. As Attridge pointed out, it was nothing like the sentimental reactions of the romantic, who bonds with a text in a fusion of the senses and reason [AL 19–20], nor did it refer to some form of 'reader response' (as in the theory of reader-response criticism). These concepts were always linked with efforts to 'master' meaning on some level. Such an attitude was completely alien to Derrida. In his opinion, the only truly 'responsible response' to a text, understood as 'irreducibly other' [AL 20], was responding to 'an event with an event' – responding to the 'event' of the text with the 'event' of reading and writing. Reading therefore needed to demonstrate as much 'invention' as literature, during the reading of which two equal 'individuals' confronted one another – the author of the text and an equally creative reader.¹³⁶ An endless commitment to the text, he claimed, did not mean taking a 'position' (with all its consequences), but rather, maintaining one's constant availability: being fully available to the specificities of the text and constantly ready to respond to them – without imposing pre-conceived assumptions or pre-determined conventions. [K 120]. He thus argued that:

Reading must *give itself up* [*se rendre*] to this uniqueness, take it on board, keep it in mind, *take account of it* [*en rendre compte*]. But for that, for this 'rendering' [*rendre*], you have to sign in your turn, write something else which *responds* or *corresponds* in an equally singular, which is to say irreducible, irreplaceable, 'new' way: neither imitation, nor reproduction, nor metalanguage. This countersigning response, this countersignature

135 Derrida has spoken about the 'other' in countless texts, too numerous to list here. See, in particular, the previously mentioned book *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* and in French *Altérités: Jacques Derrida et Pierre-Jean Labarrière; avec des études de Francis Guibal et Stanislas Breton*, Paris 1986.

136 For this reason, Derrida sometimes described reading as an 'encounter' or even a 'duel of singularities'. [AL 69].

which is responsible (for itself and for the other), says 'yes' to the work, and again 'yes, this work was there before me, without me, I testify'. [AL 69–70]

Derrida made use of various terms to describe the response to the text, such as 'countersigning', i.e. putting one's own 'signature' alongside the 'signature of the other',¹³⁷ as in his opinion, the otherness of two sovereign individuals encountering one another in reading can only be respected when their absolute sovereignty is accepted. The experience of writing-reading ('*lecture-écriture*' or 'reading-writing')¹³⁸ as a response was therefore marked by an ethical imperative, different, of course, from Kant's, but as a requirement equally binding. Derrida claimed that responding to 'an event with an event' meant refusing to repeat, which is always an appropriation (Deleuze, Foucault, Barthes and others would agree), which he equated with the 'highest form of responsibility' [AL 38]. His own writing practices became a practical consequence of this refusal – his engagement in certain 'verbal practices',¹³⁹ Attridge added, would 'shake the foundations of any such mimetic extrapolation' [AL 27]. The writing formula adopted by Derrida therefore contained a clear ethical basis, and an even rigorous adherence to the injunction not to appropriate the text of the other, while his consistency in putting this into practice in the reading of texts placed his practices on the fringes of recognized means of interpretation. This was especially true given that from the perspective of traditional hermeneutics and its 'useful arts of exegesis' this problem did not even exist, while for him it was a pre-eminent and inviolable ethical principle underlying truly responsible reading.

137 'Signature' was for Derrida a synonym for individuality and singularity – 'idiomaticity' (linguistic irreproducibility) – and thus also the event of a text. See e.g. 'Signature Event Context', *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago 1982. Hereinafter MP, followed by the page number; *Signéponge*. Paris 1988 (*Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. R. Rand). Hereinafter SP, followed by the page number.

138 For reasons discussed in more detail in the chapter titled 'Mim versus mimesis', Derrida used the term 'writing-reading' (or reading/writing) instead of the traditional term 'literary commentary'. The phrase 'writing-reading' [*lecture-écriture*] was used by Derrida to indicate that the process of reading and writing (traditionally termed 'writing commentary') were inseparable, thereby removing the exclusive division between understanding and its articulation that exists in traditional theories of literary commentary. See also R. Barthes, 'The Crisis in Commentary'; *Criticism and Truth*, trans. K. P. Keunman, London 1987 and 'Writing Reading'; *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard, New York 1986.

139 What Attridge calls 'verbal action' I continue to refer to here as 'textual performance'.

Derrida's later works touched upon other crucial topics, directly related to ethical issues and equally important for his thinking on the reading of literature, such as the problems of 'friendship', 'hospitality' and the 'gift'. Derrida's philosophical reflections on friendship proved to be among his most beautiful writings, and culminated in his book *The Politics of Friendship*, published in 1994.¹⁴⁰ The title of the book, however, was a bit misleading, because from Derrida's point of view, friendship is the only relationship that can be considered indifferent to either traditionally understood politics or social conditions. 'It must not be at the root of any political action,' he wrote, and any attempt to 'politicise' it only destroys it. Derrida understood friendship as a relationship with the other, based primarily on mutual respect. This relationship was 'primary' in nature, preceding man, it existed 'outside and before words', and a condition for its existence was its 'giving space and difference to the other', but it also indicated a basic (and thus 'minimal') condition for a social community based on the affiliation between language and experiences. Because, as he wrote:

We would not be together in a sort of minimal community [...] if a *sort of friendship* had not already been sealed, before all contracts; if it had not been avowed as the impossible that resists even the avowal, but avowed still, avowed as the unavowable of the 'unavowable community': a friendship prior to friendships, and ineffaceable friendship, fundamental and groundless, one that breathes in a shared language.¹⁴¹

Friendship in his approach was always 'processual' in nature; it could never be determined in advance or considered a given, because, as he claimed, any kind of arbitrariness could destroy it. Therefore, it was not to be considered an 'entity' – because it never 'is', but is instead always 'becoming'. It could only be regarded as a kind of 'movement towards' that constantly undermines itself, and as a result, is constantly being renewed. More primitive and purer than love, and devoid of its narcissistic aspect, friendship also precludes the objectification of the other in the form of meaning or a phenomenon. It was therefore for Derrida (again the echo of Levinas) a dialogical relation in the full sense of that word. Of course, it also assumed responsibility for the Other and a constant readiness to respond to her 'call'. Finally, it functioned in or entered into the realm of ethics rather than ontology, and thus, had the potential to undermine metaphysics.

140 Paris 1994 (*Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins. London & New York 1997). Derrida's article 'The Politics of Friendship' [trans. G. Motzkin], the precursor to the book of the same name, appeared in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Nov. 1988, vol. 85, no. 11, pp. 183–231.

141 J. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins, London 2005, p. 236.

Although Derrida's observations differ from the Aristotelian idea of friendship, one can find influences of the Greek philosopher's views in his thought.¹⁴² In Aristotle's account, this relationship also combines intimacy and separation, it is a process and dynamic in nature, and cannot be decreed in advance; however, he did not recognize it as something fundamental, providing a foundation for humanity, as did Derrida, who in turn did not agree with how Aristotle situated the idea of friendship within the structure of the ideal state. We can also see in Derrida's understanding of friendship, traces of the reflections of the Pythagoreans, who derived their notion from the specifics of the number 'two' – a combination of two 'neighbouring' ones that remain in close relation with one another, yet retain their separateness and sovereignty. Derrida's discussion of the nature of friendship are closely aligned with the views of the philosophers of dialogue, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, and especially with the concepts of Emmanuel Levinas, for whom the encounter with the Other likewise always takes place in 'ethical space', where she can maintain her 'absolute otherness' and it is impossible to reduce the Other to the Same. One can also find in Derrida's thoughts on the nature of friendship traces of affinities with the concepts of Józef Tischner, who in *Philosophy of Drama* introduced the metaphor of the 'dramaticity' of interpersonal relations (contrasted with the metaphor of the 'stage'). By means of this metaphor he tried to express such important aspects of a relationship as its situational and processual and ever unfinished nature.¹⁴³ It is also easy to see that Derrida's considerations on friendship were in full agreement with the ethics of reading, and constituted a major step forward in further specifying the problem areas within it. As the philosopher understood it, reading could only be understood as a relationship of friendship in the full sense of the word: an avoidance of the objectification of the idiom of the Other in reading and writing, which by their very nature are dialogical (as a response), as well as processual and situational.

The concepts of 'gift' and 'hospitality' were also tied to the issue of ethical reading, which Derrida placed under intense intellectual scrutiny. 'Hospitality' meant in his vocabulary an absolute and unconditional openness to the other, and – as he metaphorically expressed it – taking him, as it were, under our

142 Reflecting on the nature of friendship, Derrida also devoted significant space to Montaigne's reflections in *Essays* (1580), where he cites the words of Aristotle: 'O my friends, there is no friend' [Vol. 2, 'Of Friends'].

143 J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*. Kraków 1998.

roof.¹⁴⁴ He spoke about this issue in a lecture in 1997 given during the ceremony conferring him with the title of *doctor honoris causa* of the University of Silesia in Katowice, in which he discussed the ‘ethics of translation’. As he sees it, a translation (which is also a form of interpretation) should be ‘faithful in its absolute respect for another person’s language, but also in the respect that arises from the exemplary form of hospitality we call a translation.’¹⁴⁵ Combining the problem of translation (in the literal sense – as a ‘transference’ from one language to another) with issues related to reading – another type of ‘transference’ – that is, writing the idiom of the text to be read in the idiom of its reader¹⁴⁶ would mean, in consequence, subordinating both types of activity to the same ethical imperative. For just as a translation from one language to another always presupposes a certain relation to the other (towards his ‘idiom’), in reading as well, explained Derrida, ‘we stand in relation to the idiom of the other’. And just as in translation – an ‘exemplary translation’ (as he described it) – we should make sure to respect otherness, in reading we must also do the same. Therefore, ultimately, in both translation in the narrow sense and in the translation of reading, we are subject to the same demands in terms of ‘hospitality’ – it must be unconditional and unconditionally obliging and open. And as Derrida stated in his discussion on politics and friendship at the University of Sussex in 1997, in both of these cases we are obliged to welcome the other into ‘our space’ and ‘to keep it open or try to keep it open unconditionally’, regardless of whether this situation might bring about ‘the best or the worst’ for us.¹⁴⁷ Derrida’s philosophy of the ‘gift’ was also part of this same set of issues. The situation of ‘giving something to another’, Derrida argued, should assume an absolute unconditionality – without an expectation of reciprocity, recompense or benefit. In other words, according to Derrida a ‘gift’

144 The subject of ‘hospitality’ also appeared earlier in the writings of Levinas. See e.g. *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, Dordrecht, 1991.

145 *Jacques Derrida: Doctor honoris causa Universitatis Silesiensis*. Katowice 1997, p. 53.

146 The issues of translation and reading in Derrida’s mind include analogous questions concerning relations with the Other because even in the most traditional understanding of interpretation as ‘mediation’ or ‘transfer’. (Latin *interpretare*), according to Derrida, it was understood as the ‘translation’ from a foreign, i.e. unintelligible language of someone’s text into the intelligible language of the interpreter. Both cases, therefore, concerned the relation to the idiom of the Other. For more on Derrida’s theory of translation, see e.g. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. C. Mc Donald, trans. A. Ronell, P. Kamuf. Lincoln 1988.

147 This discussion can be found online: ‘Politics and Friendship: A Discussion with Jacques Derrida’, Centre for French Thought, University of Sussex, 1 Dec. 1997. See also G. Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, Chicago 2003.

could not be an element of an exchange, sale or calculation. In order to maintain its purity and nobleness, gift giving must be an absolutely disinterested action.¹⁴⁸ It is not difficult to apply these words to Derrida's ethics of reading, in which reading was to be just such a 'pure, disinterested and unselfish relationship of giving.' In truth, there is reciprocity here – because the other gives us his text, and we give our response – but none of the parties should expect such reciprocity, nor anticipate it in advance. For Derrida's ethics and the ethics of deconstruction, what was therefore most important was 'respect for the otherness of the other' – in reading, in interpretation, in commentary or in translation – in any situation into which we enter with her. However, as he showed in his book about Francis Ponge from 1984,¹⁴⁹ preserving the 'absolute otherness' of the text in reading is an exceptionally difficult, and even impossible task, because if we want to 'preserve' or 'archivize' the text of the Other¹⁵⁰ (and thus in some manner 'repeat' it), we immediately become tangled in an ineradicable paradox: the conflict between otherness and identity. The only thing that can be done in this situation is to minimize the temptations of appropriation. Deconstruction found itself penned in within the narrow space between 'the Same', on one side, and 'the Other' and the ethical (ethically grounded) intentions to suppress the 'desire for mimeticism,' on the other.¹⁵¹ I would like to end this thread with the (lofty) words of Derrida: 'My law, the one to which I try to devote myself or to respond, is *the text of the other*, its very singularity, its idiom, its appeal which precedes me.' [AL 66] And so only so much, maybe – so much. All meticulous (sometimes even irritating) bustle of deconstruction, multiplication of gestures and actions (often simulated) – is included in this short confession.

The discussion on the ethics of reading initiated by Derrida and the deconstructionists, which combined the problems of responsibility towards the text with the need to respect its sovereignty, tolerance towards its 'otherness,' and attention to all that had been marginalized or excluded in traditional theories, led us to a rethink literature and to rediscover its basic values. The ethical attitude of the deconstructivist, focused on close reading, also meant – perhaps surprisingly for many people – a return to quiet craftsmanship, to mundane (but effective) and painstaking work on the text, devoid of quick or spectacular

148 See e.g. J. Derrida, *Donner le temps*. Paris 1991 and J. Derrida, *Donner la mort*. Paris 1993.

149 I am referring here to the previously cited book *Signéponge*.

150 This is how he described it in [AL 35].

151 I refer here to René Girard's well-known term.

successes. Work that is closer to the ideals of the Far East than to the Western mind-set, because it is not linked to a goal and not focused on the end result. Very characteristic in this respect were the challenges posed by Derrida himself, who often censored himself during the course of his reading. One can find in *Shibboleth*, for example, a simple warning against ‘rushing’ into a reading, followed immediately by the assertion that this leads to ‘going too fast along a path of too little resistance.’¹⁵² It can thus be seen here that the ethics of deconstruction were created in spite of the need to control and the ‘desire to theorize’ what is experienced during the practice of reading.¹⁵³ It thus became, according to the claims of its supporters, a law above desires, an asceticism required of the reader. It should also be remembered that these ethics were very specific in nature, seemingly closest to Lyotard’s criticism of Kantian ethics (in *Just Games* or in *The Differend*¹⁵⁴). Lyotard likewise steadfastly refused to make ethical judgements ‘from a position of transcendent subjectivity which precedes or stands outside the judgements it makes.’¹⁵⁵ Because, he said, ‘The judge is in the same sphere of language, which means that he will be considered just only by his actions.’¹⁵⁶ Bill Readings summed this up well, noting that for both Lyotard and for Derrida and the deconstructionists,

Art, as the setting to work of the figural, does not produce closure and mimetic representation, but more art, more reading. One way of characterizing this would be to say that the effect of figurality is to place the reader in an ethical situation. Thus, Hillis Miller is entirely right to recognize that deconstruction tends to produce an ethics of reading. [...] The figural evokes an incommensurability for cognition. To put it bluntly, it speaks at least two irreconcilable languages at once. The position of the reader is thus one of having to make an indeterminate judgment, a judgment without criteria, since any criterion would have to belong to one language to the exclusion of the other. No determinate meaning can be assigned to a figure, since figure is precisely the overturning of

152 J. Derrida, ‘Shibboleth: For Paul Celan’, trans. J. Wilner, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. T. Dutoit and Outi Pasanan, New York 2005, p. 4. Hereinafter SD, followed by the page number.

153 R. Cohen’s term. Cf. ‘The Joys and Sorrows of Literary Theory’, *Genre Theory and Historical Change: Theoretical Essays of Ralph Cohen*, ed. J. L. Rowlett, Charlottesville 2017, pp. 94–110.

154 J-F. Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. G Van Den Abbeele, Minneapolis 1988.

155 B. Readings, *Introducing Lyotard. Art and Politics*, London 1991, p. 126.

156 J-F. Lyotard and J-L. Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, p. 28. See also Lyotard’s definition of ethics in the Glossary compiled by Readings, p. XXXI.

the univocal authority of determinate meaning. [...] Thus, reading becomes an ethical activity rather than a process of cognitive recognition.¹⁵⁷

Following this line of thought, one could say that the ethics of deconstruction meant obeying the law of Art, rather than the law of Knowledge. As a result, a 'responsible response' to the text proved itself to be no less an artistic practice than literary language itself – its 'event' inscribed in the text. This was to be an encounter between two unique and peculiar 'idioms': the author and the reader, and likewise, between respect for the specificity and individuality of the literary text written by the Other and its being her inalienable property.

'My law, the one to which I try to devote myself or to respond, is *the text of the other*', Derrida confessed to David Attridge in 'This Strange Institution Called Literature', 'its very singularity, its idiom, its appeal which precedes me.' [AL 66]. In fact, this ethical stance towards the text, as Derrida understood it, meant there was a constant need to defend the same intellectual outposts, in other words, a need to seek respect for the literary form and for the rhetorical level of language, which did not always receive the attention it deserved from the hermeneuts. Put another way, this meant focusing on the unique textual 'idiom', which in Derrida's language became synonymous with a notion he had introduced earlier – '*écriture*' (as 'writing', 'the act of writing' or 'authorship').¹⁵⁸ Of course, this approach was not unknown to the theory of literature or even to hermeneutics, but in the writings of Derrida and the deconstructive critics from Yale (as well as those of Barthes and Foucault, for example) this problem came to the fore, and the need to recognize the uniqueness and peculiarity of the literary 'event' had a profound impact on the shape of their reading practices. The philippic of Derrida's and the deconstructionists (and that of many other poststructuralists) against traditional methods of interpreting literature was therefore dictated primarily by the fear of being reduced to a revealing of the message hidden in the text's contents, very often at the cost of ignoring its form – if I can use such

157 B. Readings, pp. 37–39; See also J-F. Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*, New York 1988.

158 Cf. J. Derrida, section titled 'Writing and Telecommunication' in 'Signature Event Context', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A Bass, Chicago 1982, pp. 307–330. Hereinafter WT, followed by the page number. I have written more on the meaning of the term '*écriture*' in the thought and practices of French poststructuralists in my book *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*, in the Chapter 'Pismo, pisanie, pisarstwo' and in the section titled 'Lekturografia. Derridowska filozofia czytania' [AT]. For the purpose of my analysis I will limit myself to just a few remarks. More on this subject can be found in the chapter titled 'Textual Performance'.

archaic but well known terms. For this reason, they were most interested in those places in literary texts where, according to Rorty, 'form' was in sharp conflict with 'intention', i.e. with the intention of conveying some sort of content. And when Derrida (after Nietzsche) described the history of onto-hermeneutics as the history of forgetting the text [S 131], what he had in mind was precisely its tendency to avoid form, or, as she often called it, to 'erase' it, and therefore, to treat language as merely a means of conveying hidden meanings. The deconstruction of the opposition/hierarchy of speech and writing was also to serve as a means of criticizing this tendency; Derrida saw the consequences of this opposition in theoretical and literary reflection, i.e. in the tendency to deal with the form itself, although at first sight a deconstructive reading focused on the figurative language of literature might seem like such a reversal. It was rather a matter of drawing attention to the fact that from the point of view of Derrida, deconstructionists, Foucault, Barthes, etc. many 'marginal' works of modern literature: in both the most literary and 'valuable' ones as well as in others (though to a lesser extent), there is something like a resistance of the idiomatic form of the text to its 'transformation into meaning'. Not only should we not ignore this resistance, but an awareness of its existence should be our starting point for a truly ethical reading.

In his defence of deconstruction against accusations of irresponsibility, intellectual anarchism, and nihilism, John D. Caputo provided a scrupulous summation of the ethical implications of Derrida's thought, and emphasized that they 'go to the very heart of the deconstruction project'.¹⁵⁹ In his opinion, the deconstruction of the 'first principles' was itself the source of a sense of responsibility, because these principles provided the general conditions that underpin various types of exclusion. Caputo argued that in being a consistent critic of all power as such, and above all, of the power of institutions in the broadest sense (including the 'arché institution' itself and other key metaphysical categories), deconstruction had always acted in defence of the disadvantaged, and thus, on behalf of everything that has been marginalized by dualistic systems. He explained, 'Thinking responsibly does not mean anything irrational but rather asking what has been excluded by what calls itself reason and *arche*.' [BA 63].

159 J. D. Caputo, 'Beyond Aestheticism: Derrida's Responsible Anarchy', *Research in Phenomenology* 1988, p. 59. Hereinafter BA, followed by the page number; see also *Radical Hermeneutics. Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, Bloomington 1987 (in particular Chapter 9: 'Toward an Ethics of Dissemination').

In Caputo's opinion, Derridian 'anarchy' is more like 'responsible an-archy', as it places limits on the power of *arché* and the accompanying repression. The sense of deconstruction's practices is thus defined by the ethical demands arising from its very genesis, i.e., that 'deconstruction arises as a response to the claim of the other', and thus 'opens up an ethics which experiences that claim, not of presence but of absence, not of identity but of difference.' [BA 66] And this subjugation of deconstruction to an ethical imperative allowed him to consider it a form of 'radical hermeneutics'.¹⁶⁰ According to Caputo, traditional hermeneutics (by which he means Gadamer and Ricoeur) also take into consideration 'the presence of the other', but look at it from the perspective of the Hegelian metaphysics of identity, which was 'too quick to assimilate the other to the same.' In this sense, hermeneutics thus became a 'project of repleteness' aimed at effecting 'a fusion of horizons between the same and the other.' The primary difference here is that hermeneutics was primarily about overcoming distance, while deconstruction was about creating space for the other. The former had the aim of 'assimilating the other', and the latter – of simply 'letting the other be'. For this reason as well, says the author of *The Radical Hermeneutics*, if traditional hermeneutics could be called 'dialogue hermeneutics', deconstruction should rather be called 'colloquium hermeneutics'. The most important ethical task of a deconstructivist in relation to the Other is to 'to leave them their otherness.' Caputo was also convinced that this also brought deconstruction closer to the philosophy of Levinas, and in particular, to his criticism of the reduction of 'the Other' to 'the Same', and of his equally persistent arguments concerning the West's 'cultural immanence' and his fight against ecology [BA 68–69].

Simon Critchley similarly described as an 'ethical moment of reading' a situation in which we find ourselves able 'to let the other be', which from Derrida's perspective means that if we deconstruct, we must do so against our desire to reconstruct, against our need to reveal the wholeness, harmony, likeness, order, coherence, etc. in our lives.¹⁶¹ However, it would be worth asking whether Derrida succeeded in implementing this ethical imperative in practice? One can agree that the whole practice of deconstruction, and at the same time its greatest technical difficulty, arose from the need to actively respect the otherness of the

160 Calling deconstruction 'radical hermeneutics' also comes from Caputo. He devoted a book to this topic: *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, Bloomington 1987.

161 See S. Critchley, 'The Chiasmus: Levinas, Derrida and the Ethical Demand for Deconstruction', *Textual Practice*, 1989, no. 3, pp. 91–106.

text, expressed in its 'idiomaticity'. This meant, however, that a question had to be constantly borne in mind: how can we, in 'taking possession' of the Other's text during reading, at the same time preserve both its distinctiveness and sovereignty? And how to write about another text/the text of another without 'destroying' its idiomaticity? In short, how can we express it without taking possession of it? At first glance, we can see that such an attitude requires extreme vigilance, and can even, as Derrida argued, make a particular reading 'impossible for the reader'. In *The Politics of Friendship* he states that:

One responds to the other, who can always be singular, and must in some respect remain so, but one answers before the law, a court, a jury, an agency authorized to represent the other legitimately, in the institutional form of a moral, juridical, political community.¹⁶²

If this statement is translated into the problems of literature and its reading, it can be said that the authentic answer given to the Other in the text may exist before the method, the rules of reading, the criteria of correctness, etc. appears – that is to say, any theoretical framework that hermeneutics has established throughout its long history in order to 'represent legitimately' the Other and her text. Therefore, reading must be done without this kind of mediation, which clearly brings Derrida's thoughts on reading closer to the Nietzschean demand to read the text as a text, without the use of interpretation. However, Nietzsche also expressed doubts about this, indicating that this was probably the 'highest form of internal experience', and perhaps even impossible.¹⁶³ Derrida will therefore not question the value of understanding as an integral part of any interpretative or reading activity, but, in simple terms, will speak out against any methodological approach which in his view (and not only his) that negates the particularity of the text and its various nuances. However, how do we pursue an outright rejection of the commitment to method? Rorty asserted that we should abandon 'methodological readings', which alter our views on literature and life no more than 'the specimen under the microscope changes the purpose of the histologist',¹⁶⁴ and instead be guided in our reading by love or hatred. Derrida would not have said this, of course. For him, the only space where authenticity can

162 J. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 252. See also Derrida's comments on the law in 'Before the Law', in [AL 181–220]. Derrida's reading of Franz Kafka's 'Before the Law' also deals with the problems of literature and the reading of it.

163 About this and many other of Derrida's debts to Nietzsche's philosophy are described in detail in the chapter titled 'Droge wskazał nam Nietzsche', in [DI].

164 R. Rorty, 'The Pragmatist's Progress', U. Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge 1992, p. 107.

be defended is the one in which the 'secret of the encounter' with the other in reading, as he describes it in *Shibboleth* [SD 5], was not a space of affect, but a place where 'invention' was born. This is what gave it the ability to remain 'outside the law', while at the same time providing an opportunity for the equal coexistence of 'idioms'.

Derrida considered his book on Francis Ponge (*Signèponge*) to be his most important practical answer to these questions. The book is special, not least because it is not a lecture on ethical issues, but rather a 'laboratory' demonstration of his *practices* and of an ethical attitude towards the text. This attitude emerges from a confrontation during the course of reading between the reader (Derrida) and the Other and her idiom (in this case Ponge's idiom), which become the 'property' of the reader, who is forced to respond to the 'dictates of the other', and thus confront 'a law dictated [by her] [...] with an intractable rigor, as an implacable command' [SP 12]. Of course, the very concept of 'law' here is important, which is why Derrida makes it immediately clear that this is not a question of the law which 'rules the order of things', the one known to the sciences and philosophy, but the law 'dictated'¹⁶⁵ by the Other – about her 'demands', which need to be respected. The text of the Other, her 'thing', he adds, 'is not something you have to write, describe, know express, etc., by forging within it or within ourselves, according to the alternating circuit of the rut' [SP 12]. You can only, as Ponge instructs (in *Raisons de vivre hereux*), 'circle around it', by constantly ensuring that this 'things' sovereignty is not restricted in any way. And the most important conclusion to be drawn from Derrida's confrontation with the 'right of things' to otherness from an ethical point of view was as follows:

Thus the thing would be the other, the other-thing which gives me an order or addresses an impossible, intransigent, insatiable demand to me, without an exchange and without a transaction, without a possible contract. Without a word, without speaking to me, it addresses itself to me, to me alone in my irreplaceable singularity, in my solitude as well. I owe to the thing *an absolute respect* (emphasis mine – AB) which no general law would mediate: the law of the thing is singularity and difference as well. An infinite debt ties me to it, a duty without funds or foundation. I shall never acquit myself of it. Thus the thing is not an object; it cannot become one. [SP 14]¹⁶⁶

165 According to the Heideggerian understanding. In Heidegger's sense. I will return to this subject further on in the present book.

166 Derrida's use of the term 'things' in connection with Francis Ponge's work is described in the chapter 'Signèponge: When the 'Other' Becomes 'Mine'.

And if Derrida considered the nature of this encounter with the Other so meticulously, with an even irritating meticulousness, it is because, as he claims, 'the ethical instance is at work in the body of literature' [SP 52] – it *always already* exists in the specificity of a literary text. And it is precisely the presence of this 'instance' that obliges us to be particularly sensitive to literature. Derrida's reading of Ponge's works will therefore ultimately turn out to be not so much a reading of them, as the reading of 'a lesson [...] on morals' [SP 52] contained within them.

Derrida's digressions on ethical reading, can therefore lead us to believe that the seemingly worthwhile and useful practice of interpretation can ultimately prove to be a threat to literature. And to some extent this is certainly the case, especially in view of his oft-repeated demand that we overcome in our reading the temptation to 'master' the text [AN 81]. What emerges from these thoughts is an unmistakable warning – especially for hermeneuts – whose 'mimetic' and totalizing temptations he will attempt to unmask on many occasions, perhaps most consistently in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, where he will stage a kind of 'performance', the theme of which will be, as he describes it, 'provoking and disconcerting the hermeneut'. However, it is worth mentioning here that the practical (or even 'experimental') way in which Derrida demonstrates the threat of appropriating the literary 'otherness' of the idiom can be considered a kind of prelude to his examination of the issue of otherness in its social and political contexts. This conviction is confirmed, first of all, by the philosopher's special attitude towards literature, to which he refers many times. On such example was his interview with Derek Attridge, in which he explained that literature 'is' the place or experience of this 'trouble' we also have with the essence of language, with truth and with essence, the 'language of essence in general' [AL 48]. If one were to twist this statement somewhat, we could say that for Derrida literature 'is' the place or experience of this 'trouble' we also have with the Other. Thus, if the specific 'economy' of literature enabled him to confront the otherness of a unique literary event, then it also made possible a confrontation with Otherness in its more general marginalization and exclusion by the metaphysical tradition. For Derrida, literature thus becomes a kind of 'field of experimentation' or 'field of experience' in which – through reading practices – many serious philosophical, ethical, and political problems can be considered. In Derrida's opinion, the close connection between ethics and politics was the easiest to observe, along with the connection between the otherness of the literary idiom (and the Other as the author of the text) and the issue of the Other(s) existing not just in texts, but in the 'non-textual' world, as well. This transition reveals not only the meaning of this idea, one very characteristic of Derrida, based on a continual 'switching between modes', or what he described as the 'metonymization of the argument'.

It also proves that, in fact, regardless of whether he was taking up the problem of the otherness of the literary idiom or the otherness of the Other, or whether he was speaking of a 'literary event' or of an 'event' in general, he continued to address the subject that concerned him most: the possibility of thinking about what is unique and accidental. So whether – despite the impossibility of escaping from language – this servile tool of metaphysics should not so much leave a path open for him, as open one up, or else just 'let him be'. Thinking was supposed to be 'positive', but always open to everything 'that comes', and, above all, open to Otherness, not only to the otherness of the literary idiom, but to all of its possible forms.

The Ethical Preconditions for Politics

Ah, the 'political field'! But I could reply that I think of nothing else, however things might appear.

Jacques Derrida¹⁶⁷

For many intellectuals in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, whose ethical stance towards the literary text (and other artistic phenomena) set the direction for a rebuilding of the humanities in a new, non-essentialistic form, Derrida's reflections on the literary idiom were a great inspiration. However, one of their consequences was for ethics, or more precisely, 'the ethical', to become integrally linked with the increasingly influential notion of 'the political'. This newly found link, not only led the traditional concept of politics (as unethical) to be questioned, but also led the ethical turn to become assimilated in its entirety into the political turn.

It soon became clear that if the politics of literature, art, literary studies, criticism, etc. were no longer to carry the past, negative connotations of the term itself – just as ethics had earlier cast off its metaphysical baggage – politics would likewise need to be completely transformed as a field. Such a new, reformed politics would require it not only to abandon its institutional entrenchment and expand its scope to include numerous new problems previously unaddressed in political thinking, but, above all, to bolster its ethical foundations. The latter issue, in particular, was showing itself to be absolutely critical in relation to the problems of 'Others'. The ethical became no less than a necessary condition for the 'new politics'.¹⁶⁸

167 J. Derrida, 'The Almost Nothing of the Unpresentable' [an interview with Christian Descamps], *Points...: Interviews 1974–1994*, Stanford 1995, p. 86.

168 This is also the direction in which S. Critchley's more recent reflections have moved. (see e.g. *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, London 2007 or 'Is There a Normative Deficit in the Theory of Hegemony?' *Laclau: A Critical Reader*, London 2004) Although Critchley has not abandoned his early belief in the importance of deconstruction's ethical dimension, he argues that in order "for the ethical moment in deconstruction to become *effective* as both political theory and an account of political action, it is necessary to link it to Laclau's thinking, particularly on the question of the decision." ("Is There a Normative Deficit..."; pp. 115–116). In terms

However one judges the achievements of literary ethicists, it would seem – especially if one looks from a distance at the phenomenon of the ethical turn in the humanities in the 1980s and 1990s – to have been a very important transitional stage between the critical phases of postmodernity and poststructuralism, in which metaphilosophical and metatheoretical problems played the most important role, and the next stage in the history of humanistic thought, when broadly understood political issues came to the fore.

If what became most important for representatives of the ethical turn was to answer the question of how to behave towards the otherness of the text, i.e. how to read it without destroying its specificity, and how to respond (in reading) to the idiom of the text, then the problem of how to think positively about the Other,¹⁶⁹ to think in such a way as not to lead to her marginalization, exclusion, or rejection, or conversely, to the expropriation or assimilation by, or forced re-submission to the law of the Same. But as Levinas already asked in the 1940s, ‘how can the same, produced as egoism, enter into relationship with an other without immediately divesting it of its alterity’ and ‘what is the nature of this relationship?’¹⁷⁰ Political thinking had to face a serious challenge: how to engage in positive thinking about the Other in a way that was free of not only revisionist and emancipatory inclinations, but totalizing ones as well. Attempts to respond to this challenge would set the direction for the most important philosophical investigations in the political turn and define the forms its activism took in the social and cultural spheres.

In this sense, the ethical turn can be considered an initial phase of the political turn, as well as both its intellectual foundation and, ultimately, an integral part of it. And although it would not be the term ‘ethics’ that would become the key to opening the doors of offices in the humanities, but the word ‘politics’, this did not mean that ethical issues disappeared from intellectuals’ field of view, although academics were much more absorbed by the problems of the Other and her place in the public sphere than by the question of the otherness of a literary

of Ernesto Laclau’s work, see e.g. his book (co-authored by C. Mouffe), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London 1985.

169 The transition from the ethical problem of the ‘otherness of the text’/its creator to ‘political’ otherness, i.e. one focused primarily on the problems of marginalized ‘minorities’ (gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, etc. otherness) has often (but not always) been inscribed in capital letters into ethical-political discourse. In light of the slightly different scope of the issues taken up within the early ethics of literature and those of its slightly later political ethics, this distinction seems appropriate.

170 E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 38.

text. And if ethical discourse was primarily intended to safeguard the 'individuality of literature' about which Attridge and others have written, and respect the 'absolute right' of the text to its otherness, then it now had to concern itself with protecting the individuality of people's lifestyles by writing and reading literature and to express respect for various 'non-normative identities' (a term most probably coined by Michel Foucault), as well as for attitudes incongruous with generally accepted world views. This return of twentieth-century humanism, known in historical research as 'the next' turn (following the ethical turn), would not be a new turn, but rather a logical consequence of the ones that preceded it. Those promoting the 'new politics' did not reject ethical problems. Quite the opposite, they tried to ascribe an ethical dimension to everything 'political'.

The Political Turn

Deconstruction is different: the action of reading a frozen reality: a closed political, ethical and philosophical reality, as Derrida says, based on oppositions and fixations. Derrida's gesture is a gesture of setting it into motion, of opening; the only gesture that allows it to move towards a truth that does not exist. Truth is in motion, in differences. This is the only thought that allows us not to lie, but to constantly refute.

Hélène Cixous, 'By Definition, Art is a Gesture of Repair'

The popularity of the terms 'ethics', 'the ethical' and 'morality' has been overshadowed by an increased interest in political issues, leading humanists in the United States to close the divide separating the 'world of texts' from the 'real world'. Although many observers of these changes have stressed the very important links between ethics and politics, they have preferred to use the term 'ethical-political' (while the word 'politics' itself was replaced by 'the political'), a pairing that undoubtedly played a role in ennobling the 'new politics'. Yet, it has also become apparent that behind the demands for 'political criticism' are hiding other problems, other obligations, and, of course, other responsibilities than those imposed on humanists by the idea of ethical reading.

First of all, there was a change in the understanding of 'responsibility' itself, which was now to indicate a (political) responsibility for Others – signs of whose presence had been removed from various social and cultural narratives, including philosophical, literary and critical discourses, by both those in power and systems that made false claims to universality. The focus on the 'otherness of the idiom' and the Other as the 'signatory of the text' now moved towards Others in sensitive areas of public space. The main imperative for literary studies was no longer to be an obligation to respect the law of the Other, which, as Derrida put it, places 'a signature' under its 'text', confirming its uniqueness and individuality. Thus, it was no longer a matter of expressing resistance to simplifying and reductive ways of interpreting literature which 'blurred' its particularity. Now the most important slogan, one that also represented a demand incorporating many different and sometimes incompatible positions, was the call to study the discrimination and violence against Others – individuals marginalized or excluded

by society – inscribed in systems, discourses and texts.¹⁷¹ The most important questions being asked then were: ‘why write/interpret/read/research literature?’ The only (politically) correct answer to these questions was to actively intervene by means of these practices in the social sphere and in the political sphere in its narrow sense (limited to political institutions). More specifically, this meant opposing all forms of injustice, discrimination, domination, exclusion, and violence. And if reading practices focused on a careful analysis of the processes taking place inside literary or philosophical texts, it was in order to perceive, reveal, and criticize the power structures and tools of oppression hidden within them. As one deconstructionist, Barbara Johnson, put it, this meant moving from textual ‘internal differences’ toward the ‘world of differences.’¹⁷² All reading methods that focused solely on a rhetorical analysis of a literary text were now considered anachronistic. Even more outdated proved to be belief – already strained by the ‘first’ poststructuralists – in the autonomy of literary studies, theory, and criticism, and of literature itself. The same was true of belief in the autonomy of philosophy. However, the proponents of the political turn were no longer interested in continuing the work of questioning the theoretical (modern) paradigm that had declared this autonomy. Instead they strove to transgress it in practice, resulting in a specific form of critical activity. Researching, reading, interpreting and writing literature was now supposed to take the form of ‘political criticism’, while the most important term in humanistic discourse (including, of course, literary studies) was now to be ‘engagement’. This shift in emphasis from ethics to politics, and the changes this brought to the mood in the humanities in America began to be evident as early as the mid-1980s, when feminist, gender, and queer criticism and research, New Historicism, ethnic, racial and post-colonial criticism, and cultural studies, which over time ‘absorbed’ other politically oriented trends, all become prominent in departments of literature. Philosophers, on the other hand, were now to practice political thought in the new meaning of the term, i.e. oriented towards the problems of the Other in the social sphere. Although many of these orientations had been influenced by Derrida and the deconstructionists, it was clear that a changing of the guard had occurred. Deconstruction ceased to arouse the passions it had a decade earlier.

171 In the United States, the most frequent voices heard in this context were those of women and national, ethnic and racial minorities. With time, the slogan ‘LGBT’ began to be used to identify those marked by sexual difference/otherness: lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals.

172 B. Johnson, *The World of Difference*. Baltimore 1987. Hereinafter: WOD, followed by the page number.

Now a new issue had assumed a position of prominence – the new political direction being taken in the humanities.

Although it had earlier antecedents,¹⁷³ by the late 1980s the political turn had become a widely acknowledged fact, and its sphere of influence was encompassed a significant area of the humanities in America; this could be best seen in the changes that took place in how the writing, researching, and reading of literature were viewed. Jonathan Culler expressed the sense of these changes somewhat sarcastically, when he remarked that a professor of literature, when asked about the subject of his or her studies, no longer replies: ‘Shelley’s *Odes*’, ‘Virginia Woolf’ or ‘origins of Shakespeare’s comedies.’ More likely, the reply would be: ‘narcissism’, ‘construction of sexual difference’, ‘politics of interpretation’ or ‘woman’s body in the nineteenth century.’¹⁷⁴

Herbert Lindenberger later wrote in a rather ecstatic tone about these changes in the May issue of *PMLA* in 1990 (devoted entirely to ‘The Politics of Critical Language’). In his opinion, ‘the latest revolution in literary study’ marked the end of the era of ‘unspoken values, unexamined ideologies, and stable, unquestioned canons’, and made those in the humanities ‘self-conscious about the historicity of [their] central assumptions and practices.’¹⁷⁵

Louis A. Montrose (a representative of New Historicism) and Vincent B. Leitch (an important chronicler of and commentator on deconstruction) tried to express the significance of the political turn somewhat more concretely. According to Montrose, this ‘general reorientation’ in literary research was mainly expressed in

a renewed concern with the historical, social, and political conditions and consequences of literary production and reproduction [...] its shift of emphasis from the formal analysis of verbal *artifacts* to the ideological analysis of discursive *practices*.¹⁷⁶

173 Hillis Miller, for example, dates the first signs of this ‘changing of the guard’ to around 1979; see [TNT 385]. Paul de Man, in turn, as early as 1973 drew attention to the phenomenon of literary study turning away from the ‘inner’ sphere of text and towards the non-textual sphere. See his article ‘Semiology and Rhetoric’, *Diacritics* 1973, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 27. Neo-Marxist researchers, especially Jameson and Eagleton, are also precursors of the ‘political’ turn in theory.

174 See J. Culler, *Framing the Sign. Criticism and Its Institution*, Oxford 1988, p. vii.

175 H. Lindenberger, ‘Introduction. Ideology and Innocence: On the Politics of Critical Language’, *PMLA* 1990, no. 3, p. 406

176 L. A. Montrose, ‘Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture’, *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veese, New York 1989, pp. 15 and 26.

Meanwhile, in Leitch's opinion, the 'essentials of literariness' were being replaced by 'social codes, conventions, and representations.' He noted that as a result

Literary works are increasingly regarded as communal documents or as events with social, historical, and political dimensions rather than as autonomous artifacts within an aesthetic domain.¹⁷⁷

The slogan 'politics in the Academy'¹⁷⁸ very quickly became a very fashionable watchword, uniting researchers from a wide variety of often quite diverse university campuses and departments. The problems of politics in the broad sense pushed aside issues concerning poetics, while the concept of 'ideology' became an important theoretical and literary term.¹⁷⁹ Semiotic and rhetorical analysis gave way to analyses of the ideological conditions of literature and literary studies and criticism. The 'text' had to make room for 'discourse' (Foucault) and 'discursive practice' (Foucault and Kristeva). The main imperative for the writer, author and reader was to be actively 'engaged' in the socio-cultural sphere. It was therefore proposed that scholars become actively involved in the problems of minorities and in criticizing sexism, racism, imperialism, etc., and, of course, engage themselves in efforts to fight various forms of oppression, stereotypes and ossified orders. The almost universally accepted assumption that language and discursive practices were 'political' in nature triggered an avalanche of publications devoted to 'the politics of literature', 'the politics of interpretation', 'the politics of theory', and 'the politics of critical language'.¹⁸⁰ The relationship between literary studies, literary theory, literary criticism, and the 'real world' was also the focus of attention. Barbara Johnson said the following on the subject:

There is, of course, no guarantee that to speak of the gender or race of an author (including one's own) is to situate the literary-theoretical activity in the 'real world.' But

177 V. Leitch, *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism*, New York 1992, p. ix

178 Or 'academic politics'; see e.g. Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, p. 18.

179 For example, the general dictionary of theoretical and literary terms published during this period, *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. F. Lentricchia and J. McLaughlin, Chicago 1990. In addition to traditional terms such as 'representation', 'structure', 'author', 'interpretation', 'intention', 'rhetoric', etc., it also included 'gender', 'race', 'ethnicity', etc., as well as 'ideology'.

180 See e.g. the special edition of *Critical Inquiry* 1982, vol. 9, no. 1 devoted to 'the politics of interpretation', the previously cited 1990 special edition of *PMLA* (*The Politics of Critical Language*), as well as e.g. the books: D. Cottom, *Text and Culture: The Politics of Interpretation*, Minneapolis 1989; J. Merod, *The Political Responsibility of the Critic*, Ithaca 1987.

then, the very prevalence of the view the 'theory' is a turning away from the world needs to be reexamined. [WOD 3]

The demands being made on literary theory escalated equally quickly. As early as 1982, neopragmatists were inclined to accuse literary theorists of abandoning reading practices and studying the processes of meaning 'taking place' in literary texts. Now in contrast they were being accused of 'political abnegation' and hiding from real-world social problems. It was no longer enough to write, read, interpret, or research literature – all of these activities were now to be aimed at awakening an awareness of the existence of social 'differences' and at defending the rights of those who were repressed. The need to change the model of literary research and literary criticism, now understood as a living, active and transforming process of participation in the social sphere was signalled by works such as Edward Said's *The World, the Text and the Critic* and Jerome McGann's *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*.¹⁸¹ Johnson likewise emphasized the necessity of this transformation, and tried to express its specificity through the diversity of topics addressed in her books, while at the same time, drawing attention to the need to reformulate the tasks of deconstruction:

While *The Critical Difference* seemed to say 'Here is a text; let me read it'; the present volume [*A World of Difference*, 1987], adds: 'Why am I reading *this* text? What kind of act was the writing of it? What question about it does it itself not raise? What am I participating in when I read it?' [WD 3–4]

Thanks to Johnson's books, which are considered to be 'exemplary' of the transition from 'critical difference' to 'a world of differences' and from 'textual' practices to 'world' practices, it is possible to comprehend this change, which set the general tone for literary studies in America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It has been described in many ways, including as a transition from *ratio* to *actio*, from poetics to politics,¹⁸² from theoretical and critical concepts to 'action', from 'contesting' theory to 'working' theory, from 'critical' theory to 'political' theory, from formalism to ideology, and from 'textualism' to 'activism'. According to Jonathan Culler, the political transformations in the humanities, combined with the 'turn toward history', left literary studies with a very specific set of tasks to fulfil. This was firstly to consider the consequences of criticism and theory assuming responsibility for the historical situation of their respective

181 In order: Cambridge 1983; Chicago 1983. See also J. McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory*, Oxford 1985.

182 I have written on this subject in my article 'Poetyka po strukturalizmie', *Poetyka bez granic*, ed. W. Bolecki and W. Tomasik, Warsaw 1995, later reprinted in AT.

communities and working to bring about change within them. The second was to accept the premise that a literary work must be studied as a product of historical circumstances. The third was the conviction that literary study needed address its own historical character as a product of the society to which its culture belongs.¹⁸³

Needless to say, neither Jacques Derrida nor the deconstructionists repudiated such demands, let alone those calling for active engagement in the problems of society, claiming once again that these kinds of political implications (like ethical ones) were an essential component of the project of deconstruction. Yet, this was not entirely clear or self-evident, neither to many of its opponents nor to many of its supporters. In fact, in the opinion of many, the political turn ultimately contributed to the end of the 'era of deconstruction' in American literary studies. In truth, its twilight had already arrived when its previously mentioned 'critical' phase came to an end. Now, however, many argued, it was possible to declare a real 'end'. This diagnosis was in part accurate: various forms of the watchword 'politics' (including 'the political') now aroused just as much emotion as the slogan 'deconstruction' had in the early 1970s. Although following the first wave of excitement, many commentators came to appreciate the valuable contribution of deconstruction – and especially of Derrida – to these changes, at least for some time its practices would be overshadowed by the expansion of political manifestos. While some continued to maintain that the project of deconstruction had always manifested ethical and political implications, and that the 'political deconstruction' (as it came to be known) practiced by successive generations of deconstructionists¹⁸⁴ was simply a natural consequence of the development of the 'deconstructionist movement' in America,¹⁸⁵ and the practical implementation of Derrida's call for deconstructive practices to 'intervene' in conservative institutional and political structures. However, the vast majority of thinkers involved in the deconstruction dispute saw nothing of the sort. What they did notice, however, was that the ethical and political implications of deconstruction's practices were being articulated by the philosopher only now, on the wave of a

183 J. Culler, *Framing the Sign*, p. 58.

184 Above all, by the students of the 'Yale critics' (especially B. Johnson, M. Ryan, G. Chakravorthy Spivak, M. Levinson, A. Parker and others). Proponents of the belief that 'ethical-political' accents had always been present in deconstruction would probably not agree with such an arbitrary division into 'classical' and 'political' deconstruction, but the analyses of Hillis Miller or de Man from the 1970s undoubtedly differed greatly from the later practices of B. Johnson and G. Chakravorthy Spivak.

185 Rorty's term [D 185].

political turn. This in itself provided a pretext for suspecting that ethics and politics had suddenly been taken out of the proverbial 'box', which in turn gave rise to accusations of opportunism.¹⁸⁶ In this way, however, Derrida and his school once again became the subject of discussion and debate, despite a clear weakening of deconstruction's critical position. But the discussion about whether deconstruction meant the destruction or salvation of philosophy and literary studies was no longer as important as it had been when it divided American literary scholars so badly in the 1970s. What was most important now was to decide whether deconstruction's practices are (were) truly engaged or politically indifferent. This very harsh – this time political – dispute about deconstruction marked yet another clear dividing line among American academics in the humanities.

186 Indeed, in the 1980s, Derrida's declarative statements on ethical and political issues were much more pronounced, especially in his interviews during that period. However, this was mainly due to his fears of misunderstandings about the assumptions underlying his philosophical project.

The Politics of Deconstruction

The strength and vitality of the deconstructionist movement cannot be understood without an understanding of its political ambitions.

Richard Rorty, 'Deconstruction'

Although the conversion of the humanities in America to a new religion – the 'New Politics'¹⁸⁷ – was more evident in its demands than in concrete 'actions',¹⁸⁸ deconstruction's political engagement had now become a central topic of debate, especially among literary theorists. At the heart of this dispute was the question of whether deconstruction's practices, focused on the processes by which meaning was produced in literary and philosophical texts, could have a 'causal' function, i.e. whether or not they had a significant impact on the non-textual sphere.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, criticism of Derrida's thoughts and practices at the Yale School took had assumed a completely different face from that of years past. Initially, this trend was attacked mainly by so-called traditionalists – Meyer H. Abrams, Eugene Goodheart, Walter Jackson Bate, Denis Donoghue, E.D. Hirsch, Robert Scholes, Renè Wellek and others.¹⁸⁹ Whether or not Derrida's actions and those of other deconstructionists made sense was not always clear

187 Deborah Esch's term. See her chapter 'Deconstruction', in *Redrawing the Boundaries. Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. S. Greenblatt, G. Gunn, New York 1992, p. 387.

188 M. Clark drew attention to this in his article 'Political Nominalism and Critical Performance: A Postmodern Politics for Literary Theory', *Literary Theory's Future(s)*, ed J. Natoli, Urbana 1989, pp. 221-264. This work deals with the relationship between literary research and political action.

189 The history of the criticism of deconstruction and deconstructionism is very rich and encompasses its own separate research topic. I would like to mention here just some of the most important works on this subject: G. Graff, 'Fear and Trembling at Yale', *American Scholar*, 46 (Autumn) 1977 and *Literature Against Itself. Literary Ideas in Modern Society*, Chicago 1979; M. H. Abrams, 'How to do Things with Texts', *Partisan Review* 1979, vol. 46, no. 4 and 'The Deconstructive Angel' (on Hillis Miller), *Critical Inquiry* 1977, no. 3; W. Jackson Bate, 'The Crisis in English Studies', *Harvard Magazine*, Sept.-Oct. 1982; B. Leitch, section titled 'Interpellating Deconstructive Criticism', in *American Literary Criticism From the Thirties to the Eighties*, pp. 302-306. See also

to them, but they did see them posing a threat to traditional literary studies, to the established ethos of literary researchers, and to the fundamental ideals upon which the humanities rested. Now, however, the strongest accusations were being made by 'politically minded critics', as Louis Menand called them. Not only by followers of Foucault's ideas, but above all, by neo-Marxists, left-leaning New Historicists, and scholars of feminist and cultural criticism.¹⁹⁰ These researchers, in particular, Jeffrey Mehlman, Gerald Graff, Paul Lauter, Frank Leentricchia, Edward Said, Stephen Greenblatt, and Catherine Gallagher (the editors of *Representations*), as well as British left-wing critics (Eagleton, Anderson, Williams, and others¹⁹¹) stressed the ahistorical nature of the school of deconstruction, its lack of interest in social issues, its practice of 'autistic', politically neutral literary criticism, its tendency to 'fetishize'¹⁹² intra-textual language mechanisms, etc. Although, as they admitted, deconstruction had grown out of the spirit of the left-wing views of its creator, it did not make full use of its political potential. Left-wing critics accused the Yale deconstructionists, in particular, that their belief in the 'irreconcilability of meaning', would inevitably lead to political Quietism. These allegations were summed up very astutely by Barbara

W. E. Cain, *The Crisis in Criticism. Theory, Literature and Reform in English Studies*, Baltimore-London 1984.

190 Cf. V. B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties*, New York 1988, pp. 297-302. This text summarizes, among other things, the most important threads concerning the relationship between deconstructive criticism and feminist criticism.

191 They had already attacked the school of deconstructionism previously, but in the 1980s this criticism intensified markedly. See e.g. F. Leentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change*, Chicago 1983; T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory, Introduction*, Minneapolis 1983 and *The Function of Criticism*, London 1984; E.W. Said, 'Reflections on Recent American "Left" Criticism' *The Question of Textuality: Strategies of Reading in Contemporary American Criticism*, Bloomington 1982. See also M. Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation*, Baltimore 1984. Slightly later, fundamental works were published attacking deconstruction from a radically leftist position as well. These included J. Ellis' previously cited *Against Deconstruction*; M. Zavarzadeh and D. Morton, *Theory, (Post)modernity, Opposition: An 'Other' Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Washington, D. C. 1991 and *Theory as Resistance. Politics and Culture After (Post)Structuralism*, New York-London 1994 (a characteristic criticism, with its authors attacking the 'pluralist liberalism and anti-theory' of deconstruction). See also W. Corlett, *Community without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance*, Durham 1989.

192 Both of these terms appear in J. Brenkman's article 'Narcissus in the Text', *Georgia Review* 1976, no. 30, pp. 293-327.

Johnson, who noted that attacks on deconstruction came from both 'the literarily conservative, which accuses deconstruction of going too far, and the politically radical, which accuses deconstruction of not going far enough' [WD 11]. The accusations of the political radicals were particularly directed at the style of deconstructive criticism typical of Derrida and his closest disciples, de Man and Hillis Miller. The conservatism of the 'old' Yale School and the progressiveness of other, newer varieties of deconstruction were duly noted by critics; however, in their view, these too were dominated by the 'classical' model. They also drew attention to the fact that there had long existed a 'political current' among deconstructionists (which mainly included feminists from Yale, e.g. Barbara Johnson, Shoshana Felman, and Margaret Ferguson, as well as John Brenkman, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Michael Ryan). Their work, however, had always remained on the periphery of the 'centre', which was occupied by 'classical deconstruction'. Critics also noted that these researchers had been trying to broaden their deconstructive reading practices to include historical, social, and political contexts since at least the mid-1970s.¹⁹³ Brenkman and Ryan found such an opportunity in combining deconstructionism and Marxism, Spivak with Marxism and feminism, Johnson with feminism and gender criticism, as well as with issues of 'sexual difference'.¹⁹⁴ Spivak and Ryan the first to be accused by the Yale deconstructionists of practicing 'a new kind of analytical formalism' and of political conservatism,¹⁹⁵ based on charges that they had completely ignored the implications for Marxism of Derrida's project.¹⁹⁶ Feminists, noted Richard

193 Among those who wrote on this subject were: R. A. Barney, 'Uncanny Criticism in the United States', *Tracing Literary Theory*, ed. J. Natoli, Urbana 1987 and (critically) B. Foley, 'The Politics of Deconstruction', *Genre* 1984, no. 1–2. See also V. B. Leitch, 'Left-Deconstructionist Criticism', *American Literary Criticism...*, pp. 392–394.

194 See e.g. J. Brenkman, *Culture and Domination*, Ithaca 1987; M. Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation*, Baltimore 1982; G. Spivak and M. Ryan, 'Anarchism Revisited: A New Philosophy', *Diacritics* 1978, no. 2; G. Spivak, "'Draupadi" by Mahasveta Devi', *Critical Inquiry* 1981, no. 8; 'Revolution That as Yet Have No Model: Derrida's *Limited Inc.*', *Diacritics* 1980, no. 4; 'Marx After Derrida' *Philosophical Approaches to Literature*, ed. W. E. Cain. London 1984; 'Speculations on reading Marx: after reading Derrida', *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, pp. 30–62; B. Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays on the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*, Baltimore 1980. I would also like to refer to Barney's essay, which contains a much longer list of publications on the subject.

195 Barney, p. 199. The *Johns Hopkins University Dictionary* also includes a scrupulous list of all the politically engaged American deconstructionists.

196 The relationship between deconstruction and Marxism is a very complex issue and is thoroughly described in a great many publications. I would like to highlight three

Rorty, immediately picked up on Derrida's references¹⁹⁷ that the logocentrism of the western Metaphysics of Presence could be viewed as 'fallogocentrism' and that Derrida's critique of logocentrism provided numerous inspirations for their research. For Derrida, however, this was precisely an argument for recognizing the political engagement of 'classical' deconstruction:

Feminist readings of canonical texts in philosophy and literature have supplied the most persuasive evidence for the claim that deconstructive criticism can bring to light a hidden 'logic' of power and domination, one which must be exposed as a precondition to effective political action. [D 196]

Barbara Johnson, by far the most 'politicized' deconstructionist from Yale, saw important links between deconstruction and the American and Western European left (and Marxism), yet she was much more interested in 'concrete political action,' which she considered an absolutely necessary implication of deconstruction.¹⁹⁸ Already in *Critical Difference*, she stressed that 'indecisibility' cannot be the 'last word,'¹⁹⁹ since there were very strong links between the 'intrinsically contradictory' structure of texts and the social milieu in which they come into being, and that the detection and description of these ties should be the main task of deconstructive criticism. In her book *A World of Difference* Johnson showed how to put into practice a strategy of transferring analyses of 'differences' from a textual to a 'global' level into practice, although, as she admitted, from the very beginning: 'It would be falsely progressive, however, to see in these essays an itinerary that could be labelled "From Deconstruction to Feminism" or "From White Mythology to Black Mythology"' [WD 4].

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in turn, in a much-discussed review of Derrida's *Limited Inc.*, defined deconstruction as a 'persistent critique of the

main variants here: the one presented briefly above, which sees a clear link between deconstructionism and Marxism; a second which firmly rejects such a link and criticizes deconstruction from a Marxist perspective (For more on this topic, see e.g. B. Foley's article, 'The Politics of Deconstruction,' *Rhetoric and Form: Deconstruction at Yale*, ed. R. Con Davis and R. Schleifer, Norman 1985, pp. 113-134), and finally, a third that uses a deconstructive critical strategy to 'dismantle' Marxism (e.g. S. Aronowitz, *The Crisis in Historical Materialism: Class, Politics and Culture in Marxist Theory*, South Hadley 1981).

197 E.g. in *Margins of Philosophy or Dissemination*.

198 She spoke about this, for example, at the symposium *Marxism and Deconstruction*, pp. 78 and 83.

199 *Critical Difference*, p. 146.

hidden agenda of ethico-political exclusion,²⁰⁰ however, she strongly rejected the deconstructionists' tendency toward *regressus ad infinitum* and their auto-telic discourse, especially when it sought to 'delay' the process of interpretation merely for the sake of criticizing hermeneutics. She stressed that the aspect of deconstruction that most interested her was

its disclosure of complicities where a will to knowledge would create oppositions; its insistence that in disclosing complicities the critic-as-subject is herself complicit with the object of her critique; its emphasis upon 'history' and upon the ethico-political as the 'trace' of that complicity – the proof that we do not inhabit a clearly defined critical space free of such traces.²⁰¹

In her opinion, the consequences of deconstruction should be more far-reaching than those of other critical (literary or philosophical) schools – not only because of its proverbial 'changes in consciousness' it provokes, but above all, because of its potential to affect a broad range of social relations through deconstructive readings. Johnson and Spivak both strongly emphasized the 'causative force' of Derrida's deconstruction, namely the 'effects' it yielded that went beyond the text itself and its reading. However, they also noted critically that the 'stalling at the beginning is called *différance* and the stalling at the end is called *aporia*,²⁰² which they saw primarily in classical ('male') versions of deconstruction practices. Vincent B. Leitch agreed with this assessment, arguing that with 'the exceptions of leftist and feminist deconstructors, leading American followers of Derrida and of de Man were studious in their avoidance of political criticism and engagements with social history.'²⁰³ The controversies surrounding the political spirit of deconstruction (or its absence) at one point heated up even more intensely than during earlier arguments for and against deconstruction. Derrida and the deconstructionists were even reminded that, contrary to the hopes once placed in them, they ultimately proved to be formalists. Others pointed out that Derrida's views owed their popularity to his radicalism in the fight against oppressive ideologies and institutions.²⁰⁴ In their view, history had come full circle: what had been a major reason for deconstruction's popularity

200 G. C. Spivak, 'Revolutions That as Yet Have No Model: Derrida's *Limited Inc.*, *Critical Inquiry* 1981, vol. 8, no. 2, p. 49.

201 G. C. Spivak, "'Draupadi" by Mahasveta Devi', pp. 382–383.

202 See G. C. Spivak, 'The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern critic', *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veese, p. 283.

203 V. B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism Since the 1930s*, New York–London, 2010, p. 257.

204 Rorty also writes about this problem: [D 198–199].

early in its career in America, could now be regarded as an aftermath of Derrida's philosophy.

In the dispute over the politics of deconstruction there were just as many voices arguing that deconstruction could not be understood without the ethical and political tradition it drew upon, nor could the specificity of the ethical and political turn be understood without the achievements of Derrida and his followers. In their opinion, deconstructionists had been engaged in ethical and political criticism before anyone could imagine that 'ethics' and 'politics' would become entries in dictionaries of literary studies. Jeffrey Nealon claimed, for example, that 'precisely because it is never concerned only with signified content, deconstruction should not be separable from this politico-institutional problematic' [DR 26]. Others stressed that it was the involvement of the deconstructionist movement in the problems of the humanities as a discipline and in the issues concerning the status of literary studies that had made American scholars aware of the need to take concrete action to make changes in their disciplines and open them up to reality. Mastering the deconstructive 'double' reading model,²⁰⁵ made them aware of the possibility of engaging in ethical and political discourse during the reading of literary texts. One major argument in support of deconstruction's political commitment was found in the early days of its American career. After all, the rapid assimilation of Derrida's thoughts in the United States was not caused by his fondness for bizarre language games, but above all, by the political character of his philosophy. At that time, deconstruction won its battle with New Criticism precisely because the representatives of the latter were considered too conservative. Derrida, in contrast, even if his concepts were initially not fully understood, seemed more like a revolutionary.

Recalling those distant times, Richard Rorty also drew attention to the political origins of Derrida's assimilation of thought in America:

The associations of the New Critics with conservative political movements (Eliot's royalism, the Southern Agrarians' nostalgia) counted against them. An increased interest in leftist political ideas led students first to Marxism, and then to realize the existence of a European intellectual tradition which had never ceased to read Marx, but had learned to read him against the background of Hegel and in the light of Nietzsche and Heidegger. The appearance in English translation, during the early 1970s, of Foucault's *The Order of Things* and Jürgen Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests* helped American students to realize that there was an intellectual world in which the study of literature had never

205 This is analyzed in detail by Nealon in his book *Double Reading*. See also J. Derrida on a 'double science' in 'The Double Session' [LD 221]. See also [PO], in particular, pp. 41 and 65.

been disjoined either from philosophy or from social criticism. So, even though Derrida did not subscribe to any particular leftist programme, he was treated as an honorary radical. [D 178]

He recalled likewise that

In the English departments of American universities during the 1970s, it was often taken for granted that the deconstruction of literary texts went hand in hand with the destruction of unjust social institutions – and that deconstruction was, so to speak, the literary scholar's distinctive contribution to efforts toward radical social change. [D178]

Moreover, he believed that this important dimension of deconstruction's practices, thank to which it had become a 'political force', had continued to be an active part of both deconstruction and deconstructionism throughout their history in America, even if it had been explicitly addressed by Derrida and the Yale critics only in the late phase of its development. Rorty even claimed that the 'strength and vitality of the deconstructionist movement cannot be understood without an understanding of its political ambitions' [D 192]. And recalled that those who 'practice deconstruction typically see themselves as taking part in an activity which has much more to do with political change than with the 'understanding' (much less 'appreciation') of what has traditionally been called 'literature' [D 193]. For Rorty, Derrida's statements about political deconstruction's 'engagement' were convincing, as was his frequently expressed conviction that important ethical and political problems could also be seen in a careful analysis of language. Paul de Man's statements also appealed to him, such as when he claimed that 'I have always maintained that one could approach the problems of ideology and by extension the problems of politics only on the basis of critical-linguistic analysis'.⁵⁸ To this Rorty added:

The claim that 'close reading' is of great political utility is taken for granted by most deconstructionists. So is the claim that the chief function of literature departments is to be politically useful in helping students set aside received ideas, the metaphysical ideas presupposed by 'humanistic' ways of reading the traditional literary canon. [D 194]

Joseph Hillis Miller particularly deplored the accusations of 'hermetic textualism' lodged against Derrida, and repeatedly expressed how profoundly unjust were charges that deconstructive criticism was 'elite', 'reactionary', and 'apolitical', for which the crowning evidence was said to be the alleged analytical 'sterility' of its reading practices [TNT 314]. Hillis Miller even claimed that the ethical and political premises present both in Derrida's 'strategic deconstruction' and even in the most 'classical' works of the Yale deconstructionists had never been recognized or properly appreciated. As feelings towards Derrida and his school grew more unfavourable, at one point in the early 1990s, Hillis Miller felt compelled to

respond to those questioning deconstruction's political engagement. Although he personally believed that the basic obligation of deconstruction (towards the text) was primarily ethical and not political,²⁰⁶ he stressed that the accusations made both by the left and the right of deconstruction having established an artificial division between the study of literary language and ethical and political responsibility resulted from a lack of understanding of the meaning of Derrida's and de Man's intellectual accomplishments.²⁰⁷ He reminded critics that neither of them had 'ever sequestered his enterprise from politics or history' [TNT 315], and that it was 'not the case that the work of de Man or Derrida is entirely 'intrinsic,' entirely concerned with language as such, limited to language in rarefied isolation from the extralinguistic' [TNT 387]. He concluded by noting that deconstruction 'is not nihilistic, nor anti-historical, nor mere play of language in the void, nor does it view literature or language generally as free play of language,' and describes it instead as, citing de Man, 'a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations' [TNT 366].

Hillis Miller had also defended deconstruction earlier in his 1986 Presidential Address with a spectacular, but ultimately not very well-received speech at the annual meeting of PMLA. In his speech, he drew attention to the wider context of the political dispute, and how important issues were now being raised that had previously been absent from literary studies:

[L]iterary study in the past few years has undergone a sudden, almost universal turn away from theory in the sense of an orientation toward language as such and has made a corresponding turn toward history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base in the sense of institutionalization, conditions of production, technology, distribution, and consumption of 'cultural products'. [TNT 313]

He also accused 'politicians' of (especially the New Historicists) a tendency to turn away from the literary theory, that is – drawing on an analogy made by de Man in *Resistance to Theory* – of a resistance to reading texts, a resistance to 'text-oriented rhetorical theories,' and a lack of interest in language in favour of external factors [TNT 317–319].²⁰⁸ In his discussion of the current 'shift to history and politics' [TNT 313], he particularly emphasized the antagonistic

206 He also spoke on this subject during the symposium *Marxism and Deconstruction*, pp. 78–79.

207 'Joseph Hillis Miller' [interview], in I. Saluszinsky, *Criticism in Society*, London 1987, p. 213.

208 Cf. P. de Man, *Resistance to Theory*.

methodological division in American literary research between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ methods in the study of literature. His main goal was to show that such disputes about whether internal or external methods²⁰⁹ (though clearly favoured by literary scholars) should be used in literary studies were anachronistic, sterile, and led nowhere. Instead, Hillis Miller said, scholars should merge these two research directions (which in his view was what Derrida’s anti-dualistic thought was aiming for). Although he certainly had a point, his overly emotional address was not well received. According to some, contrary to his intentions, he merely confirmed the accusations of immanence made against the deconstructionists. Adding to this was the belief that in countering these charges Hillis Miller claimed that such immanence was a virtue and accused the ‘politicians’ of harbouring positivist inclinations. Ultimately, his speech became subjected to severe criticism, and the already tense relationship between deconstructionism and New Historicism was aggravated.²¹⁰

Louis A. Montrose responded immediately, defending the New Historicism against the accusation of having retreated from the study of literary language. He also questioned Hillis Miller’s ‘categorical opposition of “reading” to cultural critique, of “theory” to the discourses of “history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender.”’ This opposition, he emphasized

seems to me not only to oversimplify both sets of terms but also to suppress their points of contact and compatibility. [...] [W]hat Miller calls ‘an orientation to language *as such*’ [...] is itself – always already – an orientation to language that is being produced from a position *within* ‘history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions.’²¹¹

209 The anachronism of the division into ‘internal’ and ‘external’ methods, as well as the possibility of avoiding this opposition in literary research using the principles of communication theory were described by M. Głowiński, ‘Od metod zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych do komunikacji literackiej’, *Poetyka i okolice*, Warszawa 1992.

210 In other statements from that period Hillis Miller also criticized the establishment of an opposition between rhetorical analysis of the literary text and its ethical and political aspects. See e.g. *The Ethics of Reading*, pp. 4–5, although Vincent B. Leitch, among others, accused him of doing precisely this; see V. B. Leitch, *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism*, New York–Oxford 1992, pp. 13–18. On the tensions between deconstructionism and New Historicism, see e.g., D. A. Wayne, ‘New Historicism’, *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, pp. 791–792; see also G. Ch. Spivak, *The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic*, p. 280.

211 Montrose, pp. 15–17. New Historists, in turn, defended themselves from Hillis Miller’s charge of their having abandoned the close reading of texts. D. A. Wayne, *New Historicism*, p. 801

It was very clear that both men did not understand each other, because, in fact, they were both after the same thing. Moreover, this dispute was in truth an empty one, especially given the fact that what Montrose had to say about the study of literary language corresponded closely with the ideas of deconstructionists. Recognizing the desire to remove artificial boundaries in their own reading practices, it is clear that neither Montrose nor Hillis Miller wanted to see this in their opponent's practices. Such misunderstandings, as the author of *The Ethics of Reading* argued in his final speech, were mainly due to the fact that the 'politicians' failed to recognize the 'performative' aspects of deconstructive practices, and interpreted deconstructive readings superficially, without considering the secondary, much more important, level on which they operated [TNT 301].

However, regardless of his polemics with Hillis Miller and unlike many of his Berkeley colleagues, Montrose perceived the plane of understanding between deconstructionism and New Historicism. In 'Professing the Renaissance,' for instance, he emphasizes: 'The propositions and operations of deconstructive reading may be employed as powerful tools of ideological analysis.'²¹² This observation coincided with the opinions of a number of defenders of deconstruction's engagement in 'real-world' problems, who considered the political turn in the American humanities to have been not so much an effective antidote to the formalistic inclinations of Derrida (and his students), as one of the most important consequences of such thinking. This conviction was expressed in particular by Rorty, who claimed that Derrida's deconstruction as a source of inspiration for political 'activism' was extremely valuable, and that all those who wanted to practice a truly engaged human sciences should 'appeal to the experience of the *activity* of deconstructive criticism, an activity felt to be inseparable from a political outlook.' Moreover, he believed that the school of deconstruction (due to its historical origins, but not only) should be regarded as a sign of 'a groundswell of suspicion and impatience with the status quo among the intellectuals' [D 196]. Rorty argued that without the inspiration of Derrida's thought, especially that derived from his new style of criticism, all the transformations and turns in the humanities in the US, especially the ethical and political turns, would have never taken place. Therefore, present-day assessments of the consequences of deconstruction should not accuse him of addressing only specific philosophical issues, such as the requirements of 'the appearance-reality distinction.' Rather, the much deeper changes initiated by his practices in terms of social, political, and cultural

212 'Professing the Renaissance,' p. 15.

awareness should be appreciated. In his deconstruction project, Derrida concluded, the most important thing from the very beginning was to bring to light a hidden 'logic' of power and domination, which is 'a precondition to effective political action' [D 196]. Ultimately, therefore, it is deconstruction, and especially Derrida's project, that should be attributed as the precursor to the current political tendencies in the American humanities and the new writing styles that have emerged recently in literature.

Rorty's diagnosis was based on a thorough knowledge of Derrida's and his fellow deconstructionists' work, which he followed faithfully since the arrival of their thought in America. But the pioneering role that Derrida's thought played in ethical and political terms has also been appreciated by many other researchers, although largely based on the distance of hind-sight. This was largely based on the huge number of comments and analyses of his practices, which have made his unclear intentions and, above all, his complicated reading methods, more understandable. At some point (mainly as a result of a significant widening of the scope of the meaning of Derridian *différance*), the notion of 'deconstruction', which in America probably had its greatest successes, began to be used to describe almost all forms of active contestation of various forms of discrimination (racial, ethnic, sexual, etc.). This ennoblement of the anti-totalistic character of Derrida's thought, although long overdue, eventually led to recognition of deconstruction as a synonym for the 'new politics'. Yet while it was claimed at the time that he was the one who should be given priority in promoting 'political criticism,' it was clear even to the naked eye that Derrida's star had been fading since the late 1980s. Another French philosopher had become the symbol of truly political and equally engaged thought. Though he had been known earlier in the US, he was only now being called the spiritual leader of the 'new politics'. As a result, the American humanities were once again divided into two conflicting camps: the Jacques Derrida camp and the Michel Foucault camp, although in fact, the two thinkers were not as different in their views as they might have seemed. Their practices, however, were indeed different. What Derrida expressed implicitly was formulated directly by Foucault. This was of major importance to the reception of their visions of politics.

America Between Derrida and Foucault

The least glimmer of truth is conditioned by politics.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Even the slightest linguistic nuances can result in serious political consequences.

Jacques Derrida [OS]

The political and ideological ‘obsession’, as Louis Menand described it,²¹³ that gripped American literature in the 1980s and 1990s was undoubtedly marked much more strongly by the influence of Foucault than by Derrida, although it was in fact a typically American mix of beliefs, incorporating the ideas of Althusser and Habermas, various reinterpretations of Marx, the concepts introduced by Macherey and Kristeva, the theoretical writings of British and American Marxist critics (especially Eagleton and Jameson), and many others. Foucault undoubtedly enjoyed the greatest success.²¹⁴ American intellectuals had been familiar with his ideas since at least the 1970s, and more specifically since 1970 (the year he assumed the position of Chair of History of Systems of Thought at Collège de France²¹⁵), when he travelled to the United States and held lectures on a number of campuses (most notably at UC Berkeley²¹⁶). However, it was not until the rise of the political turn that Foucault’s ideas acquired their greatest resonance. When collections of Foucault’s interviews and writings (including many devoted

213 L. Menand, p. 39.

214 I treat the section on Foucault’s views in a rather sketchy and selective way, because these are things that are quite well known, i.e. only from the point of view of the American reception of his views, connected with the political turnaround.

215 The exact date was 2 December 1970; see M. Foucault, ‘The Discourse on Language’, trans. R.Sawyer, in: *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York 1972, pp. 215–237; hereinafter AK, followed by the page number.

216 In 1970 one of Foucault’s most important books, *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966), was also translated into English as *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*.

to political issues) were published in English in 1984 and 1988,²¹⁷ they quickly became bestsellers and were widely discussed. Joseph Hillis Miller accurately observed at a symposium on the links between Marxism and deconstruction that the options in such theory are ‘often seen now as a choice between Derrida and Foucault.’²¹⁸

For Americans, Foucault’s reflections on the relationship between knowledge and power, and especially his influential idea of the ‘microphysics of power’, proved to be particularly inspiring. The philosopher focused particular attention on the fact that the repressive actions of the authorities manifest themselves not only in the functioning of institutions established specifically for the exercise of such power, but in everything around us – in the smallest aspects of life, and especially in various discursive practices. These discourses were among the most dangerous because through them the authorities exerted their influence in a covert and camouflaged manner, and above all, without the awareness of those under their control. Foucault’s meticulous material analysis showed, for example, that seemingly ideologically neutral discourses, among them psychiatric, clinical, sexual and penitentiary discourses²¹⁹ – were, in fact, forms of violence or even sophisticated forms of oppression aimed at the ‘subjection’ (*asujétissement*) of the individual by systematically subjecting them to normalizing procedures. These ‘matrices’ established arbitrary divisions (e.g. into healthy and sick, healthy and mentally ill), determined individual and social behaviours, and defined an obligatory (heteronormative) model of sexual identity. Foucault’s Foreword to the US edition of Giles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari’s famed *Anti-Oedipus* (1977)²²⁰

217 *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow, New York 1984, as well as *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interview and Other Writings. 1977–1984*, trans. A. Sheridan et al., ed. L. D. Kritzman, London 1988.

218 ‘Marxism and Deconstruction: Symposium at the Conference on Contemporary Genre Theory and the Yale School, 1 June 1984’, *Genre* 1984, vol. 17, no. 1–2, p. 95. Hillis Miller even saw here clear territorial divisions: with the West Coast being ‘pro-Foucault’ (i.e., the New Berkeley Historians strongly influenced by Foucault) and the East Coast, ‘pro-Derrida’ (e.g. the New Haven centre); *ibid.*, p. 95.

219 The repressive functioning of these discourses was related, in turn, to Foucault’s famous books: *The History of Madness*, trans. J. Murphy and J. Khalfa, London–New York, 2006; *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York 1973; *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York 1995; *The History of Sexuality*, vols. 1–3, trans. R. Hurley, New York 1978–1988.

220 G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *L’anti-Oedipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris 1972. English translation: *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem and H. R. Lane, New York–London 1977.

was seen in the 1980s as a true political manifesto, warning against the seductive forces of totalization and totalitarianism, which he unflinchingly labelled ‘fascism’, not in the sense of the ‘historical fascism [...] of Hitler and Mussolini’, but of something much broader:

[...] the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.²²¹

The watchwords used in the manifesto, which the philosopher called ‘a guide to everyday life’ corresponded perfectly with the mood in the humanities in America at that time. Foucault’s postulates quickly gained great popularity and were repeated like a mantra. These included calls to

- Free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia.
- Develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction, and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization.
- Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.
- Do not use thought to ground a political practice in Truth [...]. Use political practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of the forms and domains for the intervention of political action.²²²

And a demand that had the greatest appeal to the imagination – ‘Do not become enamored of power’ – and which hung on the walls of many students’ rooms on university campuses.

A year later, Foucault’s inaugural lecture, delivered at the Cathedral of Collège de France following his appointment to a new chair position, was published in English as ‘The Discourse on Language.’²²³ This small book, as well as many other of his declarations, provided clear indicators as to why he would become the champion of the political turn in America, and why the category of ‘discourse’, so crucial to his views, was soon to dethrone the previously omnipresent notion

221 M. Foucault, ‘Preface’, G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. xiii.

222 *Ibid.*, pp. xiii–xiv.

223 The text of *L’Ordre du discours* was published in France in 1971, and in the United States was translated by Robert Sawyer as ‘The Discourse on Language’ and published in the journal *Social Science Information* in 1977 (no. 1–2). The essay was reprinted under this title as an appendix to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York 1972, pp. 215–237); this more widely available reprint is the version cited in the present book. A second translation was also published: ‘The Order of Discourse’, trans. I. McLeod, *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*, ed. R. Young, Boston 1981, pp. 48–78. This book, however, has long been out of print.

of 'text'. Foucault first introduced the term in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963²²⁴), and presented it in a more mature and developed form in his highly acclaimed *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). Generally speaking, 'discourse' as he uses it 'is made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written), in their dispersion as events and in the occurrence that is proper to them' [AK 26-27]; its meaning was complemented by the concept of 'discursive formations', that is, a 'group of statements that belong to a single system of formation', allowing us 'to speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse' [AK 107-108]. Even more interesting, however, was the description of discourse Foucault proposed in another work, *Birth of the Clinic*:

To speak about the thought of others, to try to say what they have said has, by tradition, been to analyse the signified. But must the things said, elsewhere and by others, be treated exclusively in accordance with the play of signifier and signified, as a series of themes present more or less implicitly to one another? Is it not possible to make a structural analysis of discourses that would evade the fate of commentary by supposing no remainder, nothing in excess of what has been said, but only the fact of its historical appearance? The facts of discourse would then have to be treated not as autonomous nuclei of multiple significations, but as events and functional segments gradually coming together to form a system. The meaning of a statement would be defined not by the treasure of intentions that it might contain, revealing and concealing it at the same time, but by the difference that articulates it upon the other real or possible statements, which are contemporary to it or to which it is opposed in the linear series of time. A systematic history of discourses would then become possible.²²⁵

Of great importance to the American adherents of Foucault's ideas was the fact that unlike the Derridean text, which (in their opinion) was limited to internal 'language games', discourse by definition referred to the outside world and always functioned in a specific historical, social or cultural reality and at a specific point in time. The meanings generated within it were 'communicative events', created through interactions between the internal structures of speech and the context in which they function. Foucault's writings also presented the mechanisms involved in the creation and accumulation of knowledge through speech, i.e. how meaning is ascribed to material objects and social practices, and how various discursive practices assign a hierarchical value to them, and 'brings them

224 The book was published in an English translation by Alan Sheridan Smith in 1973.

225 *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. xvii.

into view,' as the philosopher wrote in *The Order of Things*.²²⁶ The external and internal regulation of discourses defined what could and could not be said, and thus, discourses also determined who enjoyed privileges and who was excluded. The main area of Foucault's analysis was therefore the space of speech – all kinds of statements, both present-day and past. However, his aim was not a simple historical analysis, or even an 'archaeological' one. His most important goals were political, because, as he explained in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

The analysis of the discursive field [...] must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it *excludes* (emphasis mine – A.B.). [AK 28]

Meanwhile, in 'The Discourse on Language' he concluded: 'We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them' [AK 229]. Similar goals were pursued by proponents of the political turn in the humanities. Equally important to them, however, was the fact that Foucault paid close attention to the processes of 'disciplining' discourses, i.e. the specific ways in which 'what is spoken' is regulated and the restrictions imposed on 'who speaks'. The repressive actions of those in authority are particularly evident in this area. For example, sexual discourse – one of the philosopher's primary areas of research (especially in *The History of Sexuality*) – introduced strictly defined disciplining techniques; through 'correct training' (as he described it in *Discipline and Punishment*), the individual body (which is not subordinate by nature) is transformed into a 'docile body', which can easily be subjected to various schemas, models, norms and principles, and through such forms of cultural regulation 'produce' individuals well-suited to the order favourable to those in power, thereby constituting, perpetuating and reproducing it.²²⁷ A close examination of

226 See M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York 1970, pp. 121–127.

227 Cf. also: M. Foucault, 'Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry* 1982, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 777–795; *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other writings, 1977–1984*, New York 1988; 'Society Must Be Defended': *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. D. Macey, New York 2003; *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. G. Burchell, New York 2007; and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979: Lectures at the College de France*, trans. G. Burchell, New York 2008. See also the following commentaries: G. Deleuze, 'A Portrait of Foucault', *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin, New York; P. Veyne, 'Foucault Revolutionizes History', *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. A. I. Davidson, Chicago

the mechanisms underlying sexual discourse provided a particularly convenient means for unmasking the rigours imposed on individuals by society, since human sexual behaviour has always been subject to various taboos. For this reason, Foucault in announcing in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* his intention was to write a history of sexuality, explained that²²⁸

There is, for example, the archaeological description of 'sexuality' [...] [but] instead of studying the sexual behaviour of men at a given period [...], instead of describing what men thought of sexuality [...], one would ask oneself whether, in this behaviour, as in these representations, a whole discursive practice is not at work; whether sexuality, quite apart from any orientation towards a scientific discourse, is not a group of objects that can be talked about (or that it is forbidden to talk about), a field of possible enunciations (whether in lyrical or legal language), a group of concepts (which can no doubt be presented in the elementary form of notions or themes), a set of choices (which may appear in the coherence of behaviour or in systems of prescription). Such an archaeology would show [...], how the prohibitions, exclusions, limitations, values, freedoms, and transgressions of sexuality, all its manifestations, verbal or otherwise, are linked to a particular discursive practice. [AK 192-193]

One can also find here politically important comments by Foucault on the 'discursive formation', in his discussion of mental illness, the characteristics of which he had described three years earlier in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*:

The unity of discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object 'madness', or the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time: objects that are shaped by measures of discrimination and *repression* (emphasis mine – A.B.), objects that are differentiated in daily practice, in law, in religious casuistry, in medical diagnosis. [AK 32-33]

This excerpt not only demonstrates the breadth of the research area defined by the philosopher as 'discursive formation', but also indicated the philosopher's

1997, pp. 146-182; S. J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, London-New York 1990; S. J. Ball, *Foucault: His Thought, His Character*, Cambridge 2010; C. C. Lemert, G. Gillan, *Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression*, New York 1982; Y. Sato, *Pouvoir et résistance. Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Althusser*, Paris 2007; G. Le Blanc. 'Être assujetti: Althusser, Foucault, Butler', *Actuel Marx* 2004, no. 36; and J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford 1997.

228 The first volume of *Historie de la sexualité*, titled *La Volonté du savoir* was published in Paris in 1976.

main interest – revealing ‘discriminatory and repressive actions’ sanctioned in the social functioning of discourse. In his view, discourse was not a representation (reconstruction) of reality, but a way of ‘disciplining’ it. The practical dimension of this research was presented in the *History of Madness*, in which Foucault was particularly interested in evidence of the ‘erasure’ of mental illness, i.e. its removal from discursive practices during the ‘highly rational’ Age of Enlightenment. The exclusion of the mentally ill from the area of speech by ‘rational’ society had certain consequences in the social sphere – in this case, the isolation of ‘madmen’ in specially designated places of isolation, usually located far from major population centres. In this way, psychiatric hospitals and shelters for the mentally ill were born, which in disappearing from the field of view of people who considered themselves healthy, at the same time removed the uncomfortable problem of mental deviations. Thus, the author of *History of Madness* not only proposed a cognitively prolific method of analysis, through which unseen procedures of exclusion could be revealed, but also showed how something as seemingly innocent as discursive practices affected specific means of regulation in the public sphere. This type of approach, which combined the study of speech with actual changes in social life, was an excellent model for the practices of the politically engaged humanities. Moreover, as Foucault explained in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he rejected a uniform model of temporality, i.e. presenting discursive events in chronological order, ‘in order to describe, for each discursive practice, its rules of accumulation, exclusion, reactivation’ [AK 200]. Of course, the small but telling word ‘exclusion’ would play a key role in the American reception of Foucault’s thoughts.

One manifestation of the political turn was the aforementioned lecture *The Order of Discourses*. Foucault began here with a relatively simple observation, but one that was extremely important from a political point of view, namely, that in every society and at every historical time the process of creating discourse was subject to control and selection by means of special procedures, in particular, the exclusion or creation of orders and prohibitions. According to the philosopher, there were three such ‘great systems of exclusion’ in history that determined discursive practices: a system prohibiting the use of certain words, a system recognizing certain types of expression as irrational, and finally, a system of knowledge. The latter was the most important, because the ‘will of knowledge’ (the pursuit of truth) encompassed all three systems. Knowledge turned out to be the most important discipline controlling the ‘production of discourse’, and its creation and accumulation, as Foucault proved, had never been innocent – as it might seem – but had always been guided by certain tools of coercion – ‘secret instances of power’. He therefore added:

I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. In a society such as our own we all know the rules of *exclusion*. The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is *prohibited*. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like [...]. [S]peech is no mere verbalisation of conflicts and systems of domination, but that it is the very object of man's conflicts. [AK 216]

And further on:

I believe that this will to knowledge, thus reliant upon institutional support and distribution, tends to exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse. [AK 219]

As a consequence, and here again we have a very eloquent formulation by the thinker: the creation of discourses and their regulation, and thus also, the pursuit of truth takes within a 'system of institutions [...] acting not without constraint, no without and element, at least, of violence'. [AK 218]. What is more, we are in 'truth' only when we obey the rules of the discursive 'police', which we must to activate in each of its discourses. Thus, Foucault's 'discourse' turned out to be the main tool used for 'disciplining' reality, producing individual disciplines of knowledge, and at the same time, controlling their subjects. Knowledge was created by the authorities, and vice versa – thanks to knowledge the authorities were able to exercise 'police' supervision over objects of knowledge. Revealing the mutual relationship between knowledge and power was extremely important, especially since Foucault made clear that when he spoke about the 'disciplining' of discourse by the authorities (and at the same time, reality by discourse), he was not talking about special institutions set up for this purpose, which act more or less openly (such as institutional censorship). Using this term 'discursive police', which has a very strong impact on the imagination, he meant specific tools of control that work almost everywhere – especially where we don't expect them, for example, in the area of knowledge, which has traditionally always been respected. This concept was the starting point for one of Foucault's most influential theses – the idea of the 'microphysics of power', according to which various forms of power were not only manifested through their respective institutional structures (state bodies and institutions), but also in a dispersed and covert manner in all spheres of life. This includes the writing of literature, literary commentary, and all research practices associated with it. Foucault's ideas, which were widely interpreted and eagerly pursued in the United States in the

1980s, were so popular above all because they could not only provide a richer intellectual resource base for the political turn, but could also help thinkers arrive at a definition for the new concept of ‘the political.’²²⁹ Although in many works from that period the term ‘politics’ appeared much more frequently than ‘the political’, it was clear that this did not refer just to a narrow understanding of institutional politics. Something else was going on here, something which could be ascertained from Foucault’s reflections, especially from his views on disciplining the subject in the Western philosophical tradition and his famous parable of the Panopticon, which in yet another way reflected the idea of the ‘microphysics of power’.

Foucault spoke about the subject on many occasions, taking up the issues of the philosophical subject, the author or creator as subject, and finally ‘man’ (as a category), whose symbolic ‘death’ he proclaimed with his most controversial slogan, leading to (especially in France) many harsh criticisms and accusations.²³⁰ However, the philosopher’s most ‘political’ statement about the subject, a statement which gained the greatest resonance in American political thought in the 1980s, was undoubtedly his book devoted to penitentiary discourse – *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975).²³¹ The book concerned not only the history of the prison system, but also something much more general: the process by which the modern intellectual tradition had created a ‘prison’ for the subject, subjecting them to various forms of oppression throughout history. Foucault did not want to define the subject as a category of philosophical discourse, or to reconstruct the history of the concept in philosophical reflection, as Heidegger had done earlier. What he wanted to do, above

229 Somewhat later, a number of collections of Foucault’s essays were published in the United States, e.g. *Foucault Live*, ed. S. Lotringer (1996); *The Politics of Truth*, ed. S. Lotringer (1997); *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works Vol. 1)*, ed. P. Rabinow (1997); *Aesthetics, Method, Epistemology (Essential Works Vol. 2)*, ed. J. D. Faubion (1998); *Power (Essential Works Vol. 3)*, ed. J. D. Faubion (2000); *The Essential Foucault*, ed. P. Rabinow and N. Rose (2003).

230 This thesis appeared in *Words and Things*, and although Foucault was concerned with the death of ‘man’ as a category and not with his physical demise (in short, Foucault was concerned with the disappearance of true humanity in the process of its categorization as a subject), it was often incorrectly interpreted, and the slogan began to live its own life, far removed from the intentions of its author, leading to an infamy that equally the fame he deserved. I write about this in more depth in the chapter ‘Kres ‘mitu nadzorcy’ in *Dekonstrukcji i interpretacji*.

231 M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York 1977.

all, was to show how the subject became a 'subject' – a process of 'empowerment' that, in his opinion at least, had been violent since the very beginning of Western thought. Moreover, it was the 'great enclosure' of 'madmen' in the age of rationalism, as he wrote in *History of Madness in the Classical age*, that is, the act of their exclusion from society, that created a convenient basis for the emergence of the modern Cartesian subject: one that identified with, and was fully aware of and fully controlling his thought operations. In line with this, Descartes explained in *Meditations* that in dreaming he saw 'the same things or sometimes even less probable things, than do those who are insane in their waking moments.' Thus, already at the time of its historical birth, modern subjectivity was an effect of the repressive action of discursive power, and this gesture, in Foucault's opinion, had a bearing on the whole history of the subject in the modern Western intellectual tradition.

His starting point was the observation that both in French and in English the word 'subject' [*le sujet, the subject*] meant both 'topic' (as a category), and 'vassal' (in the political sense); this diagnosis had far-reaching and, of course, political consequences. He proved that the process by which modern Western culture was created was largely a consequence of transferring various techniques of supervision and discipline that were born on the grounds of the penitentiary system to all areas of social life. In this way, 'imprisonment' proved to be a kind of 'metaphor' for basic social and cultural mechanisms. The ability of the human individual to speak (discursive practices) and his identity (defined by Foucault as 'normative identity') were subject to macrophysical and microphysical actions of the authorities. Modern subjectivity was thus born in a process of 'subjection' [*asujetissement*], that is to say, the construction of a valid, generally accepted model of subjectivity, the characteristics of which had to be in line with the requirements of the authorities at a given stage of history. This mechanism was clearly illustrated by of the 'Panopticon', a concept used by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* as a parable of the mechanisms under which the subject functions in modern society, and from which he derived his vision of 'panoptism' ('all-seeing-ism'), which defines a specific form of violence used by the authorities, i.e. the exercise of permanent control over society. Here, Foucault used an authentic 1785 prison design by Jeremy Bentham. The principle of this prison was brilliant in its simplicity, everywhere in the prison, the prisoners were under the constant supervision of a guard whose presence they were fully aware of but who they could never see. When they left the prison, despite the fact that this freed them from the watchful eye of their guards, they interiorized it – it remained with them forever. Foucault wrote: 'the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent

visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power,²³² because in order to function efficiently

this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert, a long, hierarchized network [...].²³³

By transferring this model to society, Foucault once again and in a new way tried to say make an important statement about unseen mechanisms of control, about the covert actions of those in power, even (and especially) when we think we are completely free of such influences. Meanwhile, he made clear that virtual supervision and the forms of coercion it involves never cease. The philosopher's diagnosis was therefore very pessimistic: the possibility of freeing oneself from power simply did not exist. And just as the subject was ultimately a product of power, dispersed in the tiniest nuances of life practices, so discourse was also used by the authorities as a tool of control, dominance and violence, i.e. the progressive 'carnalization' of the subject.

All of these views gave rise to some very important premises of fundamental importance for the proponents of the political turn in the humanities, and from which practical consequences could also be drawn. According to Foucault, all discursive practices – including literature and related disciplines (the history of literature, literary theory and criticism), as well as the acts of reading and writing – could be considered manifestations of the covert actions of the authorities who exercised 'total control', but were themselves beyond its reach. There was only one way to oppose this – by revealing their mechanisms as recorded in discourse. This meant that all methods for researching literature (as well as for its writing, interpreting, reading, etc.) could no longer be treated as something neutral and detached, based on objective aesthetic judgements. All such practices had to be treated as 'political interventions', a means of resisting the unseen efforts of the authorities to control individuals. The recognition of literature as a collection of discursive practices, rather than of works or texts, opened up the possibility of specific political activity – a means of counteracting the procedures used to 'domesticate' the subject and, in consequence, to perpetuate violence against the Other. This and many other implications of Foucault's thought played a decisive role in shaping the face of the political turn, and individual elements

232 Ibid., p. 201.

233 Ibid., p. 214.

of the philosopher's theory provided his followers with a number of key terms. Equally influential were the theses he formulated about 'thought', which needed to abandon the 'theoretical' and instead promote real 'action' in the social and political spheres. This was reflected in his statement that 'Thought is no longer theoretical [...] [it] is in itself an action.'²³⁴ Also influential were his views on the duty of (literary) theory to fight against power,²³⁵ and to address the mechanisms underlying linguistic and non-linguistic repression. Jonathan Culler accurately summed this up, emphasizing that thanks to Foucault theory has placed us in an openly understood historical and political sphere: in the space of power relations. Moreover, the philosopher's four most important books, all devoted to discursive practices, not only revealed the mechanisms used to exclude individual social groups, but also opened up the perspective for their emancipation through the very act of describing their existence in discourses. Thanks to these reflections, a new understanding of 'the political' took on more defined form. According to Foucault's concepts, politically oriented literary studies was to focus primarily on the study of various 'manifestation of power', both inscribed in literary practices and in all discourses (research, interpretation, criticism, etc.). The knowledge of literature was to be used as a basis for the study of the 'manifestation of power'. In particular, we should look for various forms of exclusion, marginalization and violence, i.e. all possible means used to deny Others a voice – and in this way, give them a voice.

When a volume of Foucault's essays and interviews was published in 1977 in the US under the title *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, he had not yet made the 'splash' he would make a few years later, when his work became something of a Bible for politically oriented humanists. The third part of this book, entitled 'Practice: Knowledge and Power', proved to be the most important at the time. It contained essays based on the lecture course 'History of Systems of Thought' Foucault had delivered at the Collège de France in 1970–71, as well as two

234 See *Language, Counter-memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. D. F. Bouchard, Ithaca 1977. Foucault quotes himself in the epigraph to this volume.

235 'Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze', *ibid.*, p. 208. See also *Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–77*, ed. and trans C. Gordon, New York 1980. S. Greenblatt also wrote about the significant influence of the French philosopher on his own research practice in 'Towards a Poetic of Culture', *The New Historicism*, p. 1. See also F. Leentricchia, 'Foucault's Legacy: A New Historicism?' in the same volume, and B. Allen, *Truth in Philosophy*, Cambridge 1995.

important interviews with the philosopher, both considered fundamental for the politics of literature in the late 1980s: 'Intellectuals and Power' (A conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze from 1972), and 'Revolutionary Action: "Until Now"' (an interview with Michel Foucault conducted by the editors of *Actuel* in 1971²³⁶). The exchange with Deleuze included a very important statement by Foucault, the message of which would definitively change thinking about the tasks of literary theory. He told Deleuze that theory was not something that can only be applied to practice, but that 'it is practice'. What kind of practice? The philosopher's response was equally resolute: 'This is a struggle against power, a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious.'²³⁷ If, as he explained, power acted through discursive practices, then opposition to power could also be manifested through discourses that unmasked it. While fully agreeing with this position, Deleuze made a statement that was no less important in its message and whose primary metaphor would become canonical:

A theory is exactly like a box of tools. [...] It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician), then the theory is worthless [...].²³⁸

The general nature of the political mission of the intellectual was therefore very clearly defined by both philosophers: the value of their achievements was now permanently tied to the demand for the 'practical usefulness' of all humanistic disciplines. An aversion to traditionally understood speculative theory, which has been ousted and replaced by the ennoblement of practice,²³⁹ had resulted in a tendency to refrain from attempts to conceptualize literature, or to create theoretical models of relevance only to modern-day theorists (such as the structuralists). Instead, in line with Derrida's intentions, it contributed to making the practice of reading and commenting on literature the most important responsibility of literary scholars.²⁴⁰ In the second of these published interviews, Foucault accused Western humanism of having always had a 'desire for power'

236 This conversation was published in France in the journal *Actuel* 1971, no. 14.

237 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

238 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

239 Also applicable to Derrida, who repeatedly proclaimed the superiority of practice over theory. See e.g. his statement that 'I have always insisted on the value *practice* [...] We must be on guard indefinitely against the 'reappropriation' of the value 'practice.'" [PO 89-90].

240 I describe this transition in detail in *Anty-Teoria literatury*.

present within it, most evident in its very heart – in humanistic theory of the subject. According to the philosopher, the concepts of both ‘humanism’ and ‘the humanities’ demanded a thorough revision – a disclosure of the ways in which freedom, both within and outside the discipline, was restricted, and how this can be seen in discursive practices within the so-called human sciences.²⁴¹ During the era of the political turn, a very important ethical message was noted in Foucault’s philosophy.²⁴² The extremely enthusiastic reception of his thought in the 1980s was confirmed by the many publications printed on the subject, while the most eloquent testimony to the direction of this reception was the book *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, published in the United States in 1986.²⁴³ All the works contained in it, including essays by Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, Ian Hacking, Edward Said, Barry Smart, Martin Jay and others, almost exclusively addressed and commented on the political motifs in the French philosopher’s work, while also designating him the current spiritual leader of the political turn. And as the editor of the volume argued in the introduction, the humanities in America would follow in his footsteps.

And this would, in fact, be the case. In the early 1990s, the political turn and the influential slogan ‘politics in the Academy’, like the ethical phrase before them, were being ‘absorbed’ by successive, new slogans. Another watchword was on the rise, one which due to its substance and capacity was able to accommodate all the phenomena that had thus far been labelled as ‘politics’. This term was ‘cultural,’ and in this case, too, Foucault’s advantage over Derrida was clearly visible. In 1990, for example, when the University of Illinois held an enormous conference titled ‘Cultural Studies Now and in the Future,’ attended by more than nine hundred participants from all over the United States, it became clear that from this point on not only would the term ‘cultural studies’ be an influential catchphrase in the humanities, but that the patron saint of this new discipline would be the author of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and not the creator of deconstruction. Among the articles included in an equally enormous post-conference publication printed two years later,²⁴⁴ which would be recognized

241 *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, p. 222. Much earlier, in his well-known published lecture from 1966 ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,’ Derrida first drew attention to the problematic nature of calling these sciences the ‘humanities’. This lecture was later republished as Chapter 10 of WD.

242 The ethical perspective in Foucault’s thought on this subject has always been present in his writings, but it is most clearly visible in those published since 1982.

243 Ed. D. Couzens Hoya, New York 1986.

244 *Cultural Studies*, ed. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. A. Treichler, New York–London 1992.

as the historical beginning of the era of cultural studies that continues to this day,²⁴⁵ Derrida's name appeared only twice, while there were repeated references to Foucault and equally numerous references to his most important works. Not everyone, however, saw such a radical difference in the two philosophers' ways of thinking²⁴⁶ – and quite rightly because the views of Derrida and Foucault not only shared many similarities, they were also mutually complementary.

245 Such research practices first developed earlier, but they did not take on a form as pronounced as in the 1990s.

246 See e.g. F. Leentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, Chicago 1980, pp. 208–210, and also A. Wordsworth, 'Derrida and Foucault: Writing the History of Historicity', *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, pp. 116–125. Richard Rorty also stressed that from the very beginning – i.e. from the late 1960s and early 1970s – the influence of Derrida's and Foucault's thought was equally intense and contributed equally to the emergence of American deconstructionism; note, for example, his statement that 'Derrida providing the philosophical programme and Foucault the leftwards political slant.' [D 166].

Against 'Metaphysical Correctness'

What is most decisive [...] is what Husserl called 'subtle nuances', or Marx 'micrology'.

Jacques Derrida, *Positions*

What is most important is that power manifests itself in the smallest nuances, in its microphysics.

Michel Foucault, 'Des suppliques aux cellules'

As discussed earlier, one advantage Foucault had over Derrida was that Foucault openly addressed ethical and political issues, while Derrida made a conscious attempt to avoid this. Derrida avoids 'frontal critique' in order to, as he put it, 'escape metaphysics' [PO 17]. In one interview, Derrida observed that:

Frontal and simple critiques are always necessary; they are the law of rigor in a moral or political emergency, even if one may question the best formulation for this rigor. The opposition must be frontal and simple to what is happening today in Poland or the Middle East, in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Chile, or Turkey, to the manifestations of racism closer to home and to so many other more singular things that do not go by the name of a State or nation.

But it is true – and these two logics must be understood in relation – that frontal critiques always let themselves be turned back and reappropriated into philosophy. Hegel's dialectical machine is this very machination. It is what is most terrifying about reason. To think the necessity of philosophy would perhaps be to move into places inaccessible to this program of reappropriation. [AN 82]

Derrida occupies 'inaccessible places' in order to avoid 'reappropriation',²⁴⁷ because he knows very well that explicit formulations can be questioned, challenged, or rejected. For this reason Derrida values, as he puts it, the 'economy' and 'performativity' of deconstruction – after all, the ethical and political 'effects'

247 Derrida also often pointed out that, since one of the most important topics addressed by the resistance of literary and philosophical texts to too easy and obvious interpretations, and moreover, he considered as the most valuable the texts that were most based on this 'conversion to meaning', there was no reason why his own texts should be so easily simplified, so it was the philosopher's fully intended and consistently implemented strategy.

produced in the course of reading resist 'machination.' Unlike many of his famous predecessors, including Nietzsche, Heidegger, and even Levinas, Derrida is careful *not* to use the language of metaphysics in order to subvert binary oppositions. The philosopher believes that ethical and political issues should not be 'discussed,' observing in one interview that '[e]thics and politics command an action.' The question 'What should I do?' therefore demands a decision be made and concrete action taken.²⁴⁸ That is why Derrida defines deconstruction as an 'action' – 'it "is" only what it does,'²⁴⁹ and asks (in *Positions*): 'Now what can be the 'efficacy' of [...] all this deconstructive practice, on the ideological scene?' [PO 90]. He believed that 'impractical' actions like reading and writing about texts should lead to practical results – they should constitute 'interventions' that go beyond the textual. Such an approach is what makes Derrida's philosophy so unique and, at the same time, so misunderstood. The notorious 'difficulty' of Derrida's language, overflowing with paradoxical formulations, metaphors, puns, and 'metonymic substitutions,'²⁵⁰ has made many people categorize his writings as incomprehensible. He has often been compared with Foucault (especially by the advocates of the political turn in the United States) and fared badly in such comparisons. Even such renowned scholars as Edward Said, who in 'The Problem of Textuality'²⁵¹ compares Derrida and Foucault, unfairly criticizes Derrida for focusing on 'textual traits' and thus separating texts from the world. In turn, Foucault, who discusses textuality in a social and cultural context, is praised by Said for re-establishing a link between texts and reality. Respectively, Said criticizes Derrida for disregarding more in-depth social and institutional determinants of logocentrism and praises Foucault for adopting an opposite approach (laying a sound foundation for cultural studies). Said argues in 'The Problem of Textuality':

For if everything in a text is always open equally to suspicion and to affirmation, then the differences between one class interest and another, or between oppressor and oppressed, one discourse and another are virtual in [...] the finally reconciling element of textuality.²⁵²

248 J. Derrida, 'Ethics and Politics Today,' *Negotiations. Interventions and Interviews 1971–2001*, Stanford 2002, p. 296. For more on deconstruction's engagement, see: J. Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars*, Sydney 2001.

249 J. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, Evanston 1988, p. 141.

250 E.g. 'event,' 'signature' and 'date.'

251 E.W. Said, 'The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions,' *Critical Inquiry* 1978, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 673–714.

252 *Ibid.*, p. 703.

As Said further observes, Derrida only explains the inner workings of texts, while Foucault explains the inner workings of power inherent in every discursive practice. According to Said, 'Derrida's criticism therefore moves us *into* the text, Foucault's *in* and *out* of it.'²⁵³ Derrida would say 'there is nothing outside of the text' (*il n'y a pas d' hors- texte*) [OG 158]; Foucault would respond: 'Of course there is. History. Power.' The main controversy here centres on Derrida's notorious declaration that 'there is nothing outside of the text.' This statement has been misinterpreted ever since it first appeared in *Of Grammatology* in 1967. In my opinion, Derrida has been criticized unfairly, because, to paraphrase Said, Derrida's practices also 'move us in and out' of the text. Derrida also examines the links between 'history' and 'power', but does so on a different level than Foucault. The divide in the American humanities in the 1980s between the proponents of Derrida and the proponents of Foucault was thus not only artificial, but also, as Joseph Hillis Miller observes, based on 'binary oppositions.'²⁵⁴ Indeed, in reality Foucault's study of microphysics of power and Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics complement one another. Richard Rorty²⁵⁵ is wrong to say that Derrida's early texts 'only occasionally touched on political topics' (and that only Derrida's late texts 'had a distinctively political cast' [D 166]), because in fact Derrida was always been political.

Of course, Derrida also commented directly on politics and ethics – for example, in his numerous works on Marx and Marxism (mentioned in the Introduction), as well as in his 'open letter' on apartheid,²⁵⁶ his writings on the autonomy of the university,²⁵⁷ his debate with Giovanni Borradori about philosophy after 9/11,²⁵⁸ and in many other texts. Derrida may even be described as a *bona fide* political activist. He took part in the protests of May 1968 in France (although he was somewhat sceptical about the 'anti-totalistic euphoria' on university campuses²⁵⁹). In 1981, together with Jean-Pierre Vernant, he helped to

253 *Ibid.*, p. 674.

254 Despite their differences on some issues, the philosophers themselves showed solidarity in their views.

255 In which, with a typical charming nonchalance, he denied what he proclaimed in many other places.

256 J. Derrida, 'But, Beyond... (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)', trans. P. Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry* 1986, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 155–170. See also: *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort*. Paris 1997; *Moscou aller-retour*. Paris 1995; *L'université sans condition*. Paris 2001.

257 *L'université sans condition*. Paris 2001.

258 This is a reference to the previously mentioned book *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*.

259 G. Bennington drew attention to this in his book *Derrida*, New York 1991, p. 332.

organize the Jan Hus Association, aimed at helping Czechoslovakian universities and dissident scholars (he was also the vice-president of the Association).²⁶⁰ He openly opposed apartheid in the Republic of South Africa and supported Palestinian intellectuals (he met with them in 1988 during his visit to Jerusalem). He openly criticized the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, the death penalty, all forms of discrimination, nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism, intolerance, and terrorism. Undoubtedly, however, it is his original 'indirect' way of engaging in political criticism that is of most interest to us here, in which Derrida 'demonstrates'²⁶¹ various sensitive issues and thus encourages reflection, while avoiding ready-made conclusions. The cover of *Without Alibi* aptly sums up his philosophical practice: Derrida is always focused on 'performativity', going beyond 'mental acts'. Unfortunately, many commentators of Derrida's early texts believed that metaphilosophical and metatheoretical criticism did not go hand in hand with political commitment. However, Derrida managed to combine both perspectives in his writings. Because, contrary to what Said and many other critics say, Derrida has never been interested in studying only the 'internal play of meaning'. He would only analyze this for the sake of 'double' reading. As Derrida puts it, '[w]e must measure this gap between the description and the declaration' [OG 217] present in philosophical texts. We must discover what is 'written' in these texts irrespective of the intentions of the author, bringing to light the artificial binary oppositions on which they are based. Derrida challenges 'theory' by means of 'practice', 'demonstrating' that philosophers are unable to defend the theories behind their systems. He also explains how philosophers hide, or even efface, all manner of (logical or rhetorical) shortcomings in order to defend established binary oppositions and hierarchies.²⁶² It could be said that

260 In the same year, during a conference in Prague, he was arrested and then charged with drug trafficking, and it was only after Francois Mitterand's intervention in January 1982 that he was released and given permission to return to Paris.

261 This is what he said about deconstruction, saying that he 'shows' and not states. See e.g. [TD 201]

262 The best example of such a reading is the deconstruction of Plato's system in 'Plato's Pharmacy', where Derrida not only shows that Plato misguidedly rashly states that the values of writing and speech are undeterminable, but then puts significant effort into ultimately discrediting writing for the sake of speech. I discuss this reading in detail in my book *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* (Kraków 2001). Other examples of such readings, such as the deconstruction of the systems of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss (whom Derrida considered to be the last great metaphysical philosopher) and Rousseau, were also provided in his book *Of Grammatology*.

every great metaphysical philosopher is relentless in his efforts to safeguard 'metaphysical correctness,' and thus the interests of metaphysics. Indeed, metaphysical philosophers are even prepared to achieve 'coherence in contradiction,' which, as Derrida puts it in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the discourse of the Human Sciences,' always 'expresses the force of a desire.'²⁶³ Derrida treats philosophical texts as 'symptoms' or 'signs' of something more profound – Nietzsche observes in *Nachgelassene Fragmente* that 'every great question is a symptom';²⁶⁴ while Freud (in reference to 'slips of the tongue') urges: 'Therefore, let us not undervalue small signs; perhaps by means of them we will succeed in getting on the track of greater things.'²⁶⁵ Derrida also often draws on the works of the Greek symptomatologists,²⁶⁶ who believed that in the structure of the symptom (the sign), 'content' did not always correspond to 'form,' such as when something (a signal) appears weak on the outside,²⁶⁷ but proves to be a serious problem within. The symptom simultaneously masks and unmasks the manner in which it operates (as Nietzsche puts it, it marks 'the hidden powers').²⁶⁸ According to Derrida, such 'symptoms' or 'signals' discovered in text are a testament to the abuse of metaphysics.

The political significance of Derrida's early thought is clearly visible here. At the beginning of his philosophical career, Derrida focused on phenomenology (especially Husserl²⁶⁹). His careful reading of the works of the founding father of phenomenology leads him to a discovery that will define his philosophy, namely that the binary oppositions within metaphysics are false and illusionary. For example, Derrida discovers in one of Husserl's manuscripts a note scribbled in the margin. In it Husserl observes that the written sign combines in itself both the material and the ideal,²⁷⁰ thus inspiring Derrida to conceive of writing as a

263 'And, as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire.'

264 Cited in M. P. Markowski, *Nietzsche: filozofia interpretacji*, p. 271.

265 S. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. G. S. Hall, New York 1920, p. 12.

266 I discuss Derrida's strategy of 'symptomatic readings' (on the example of his reading of Plato's dialogues) in detail in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*.

267 For example, a slight increase in fever could be a sign of a serious illness.

268 See also M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context*, ed. G. L. Ormiston, A. D. Schrift, Albany 1990, pp. 59–67.

269 Derrida debuted in 1962 with his translation of Husserl's *Der Ursprung der Geometrie* and an extensive commentary to that book titled 'L'Origine de la géométrie.'

270 J. Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. L. Lawlor, Evanston, 2010.

particularly revelatory symptom. In the metaphysical tradition, the written sign ('writing') has always been valued less than speech. For Derrida, writing is a 'virus' that destroys metaphysical binary oppositions from the inside. Once the binary opposition between speech and writing is exposed as artificial, numerous other, much more 'prominent' metaphysical oppositions can be challenged.²⁷¹ Derrida demonstrates that in the metaphysical tradition 'essence', 'spirit', 'reason', etc. have always been valued more than marginalized concepts like 'phenomenon', 'matter', 'body', 'senses', etc. He also proves that every metaphysical philosopher has his designated 'other',²⁷² which has to be eliminated from the system in order to preserve its conceptual 'purity.' By privileging certain 'convenient' terms, metaphysics exerts, to paraphrase Foucault, 'disciplining pressure' on everything that might be a threat to it. Derrida thus demonstrates that metaphysics, as the most important Western philosophical tradition (often identified with philosophy as such), is not an esoteric 'religion' for the chosen few, but a determinant in how we perceive the world and, more importantly, how we divide the world into good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, etc. Derrida proves that the Western metaphysical tradition is the most powerful repressive ideological system conditioning our perception of reality. He clearly shows that metaphysical systems condition our discriminatory perception of the world, because they are the primal unconscious cause behind our repressive practices. The roots of discrimination and intolerance towards the Other lie in metaphysics. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and other postmodern thinkers are obviously aware that there is no escape from metaphysics – we cannot literally 'close' or 'end' it – but we can achieve this symbolically through critical re-examination. We should raise awareness of its hidden 'actions' and avoid thinking in terms of binary oppositions. In his 'early' deconstructive practices, Derrida wishes to expose the ideological influences of metaphysics, demonstrating that when we establish arbitrary binary oppositions (e.g. in social, political, and religious life), we speak in the language of metaphysics and use its 'clichés', thereby perpetuating the hidden 'violence of metaphysics'.²⁷³ As Derrida observes,

271 Such as, for example: essence/phenomenon, spirit/matter, mind/body, reason/senses, substance/accident, rational/irrational, truth/falsehood, the previously mentioned inner/exterior, etc.

272 In Plato's system this was e.g. 'madness' and 'writing', in Descartes – 'madness' and 'body', in Kant – 'body' and 'senses', in Husserl – 'writing', etc.

273 Here we can again see clear traces of the thought of Levinas, for whom even the language of metaphysics – the indicative mood – carried with it certain dangers and

To 'deconstruct' philosophy, thus, would be to think – in the most faithful, interior way – the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine – from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnameable by philosophy – what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression. [PO 6]

We can see at this point that Derrida's meta-philosophy is clearly political, thus complementing the writings of Foucault. Derrida writes about the violence inscribed in the metaphysical hierarchy of concepts ('subtle nuances' which, as both Derrida and Husserl observe, we should not take for granted), while Foucault analyzes the 'microphysics of power', a notion that resembles Derrida's concept of 'micrology'. Derrida claims that microscopic, chaotic, and almost unnoticeable forms in which power operates may be discovered in the course of careful analysis – one sensitive to seemingly insignificant details. Foucault focuses on the analysis of discourse, while Derrida focuses on the analysis of the text. Both philosophers, however, come to similar conclusions. For Foucault, discourse reflects the history of systems of thought – the inner-workings of every system reveal the rules according to which it is governed. For Derrida, texts are of importance because, due to their material durability, they are a testament to what was written in them. Discourse is a construct (it is a cross-section of the historical testimonies that comprise it); similarly, the 'Metaphysics of Presence' is a construct as well (it is based on the study of philosophical texts). Both Foucault and Derrida are primarily concerned with exposing the 'regulatory mechanisms' by means of which power is exercised. For Foucault it is the power of knowledge, while for Derrida it is the power of philosophy. It could even be said that Derrida goes deeper than Foucault (though, of course, I do not mean to discredit Foucault's achievements). I would argue, however, that Derrida's study of the 'microphysics of power' of metaphysical systems operates at the most basic level – not just at the level of discursive practices (which after all are the products of metaphysics), but at the level of the underlying concepts. Deconstruction begins at this basic level. In this sense, Derrida complements Foucault, providing a more general context for his practices. Contrary to what Said claimed, Derrida is not really interested in how Western logocentrism was created, sanctioned, and finally institutionalized. Instead, he seeks to expose the hidden operations and conditions of logocentric ideology, discovering the metaphysical sources of violence. Foucault, on the other hand, investigates the ways in which

about which he claimed: 'Predication is the first violence.' See Derrida's essay on Levinas 'Violence and Metaphysics', cited above.

this violence manifests itself in discursive practices. And although Foucault finds his inspiration in clinical and psychiatric discourse, and Derrida in his insightful reading of Husserl, they both come to very similar conclusions.

In *Positions*, Derrida describes deconstruction in terms of reading: 'philosophemes – and consequently all the texts of our culture – as kinds of symptoms of something that *could not be presented* in the history of philosophy' [PO 7]. Derrida further explains that his deconstruction of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical system is basically a practice of reading – he reads Rousseau's texts carefully, paying attention to everything that the author of *Confessions* 'wrote' but did not 'intend' to say, because it would be at odds with the oppositional structure of his system. In turn, Foucault writes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

[...] all manifest discourse is secretly based on an 'already-said'; and that this 'already-said' is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a 'never-said', an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark. [...] The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say (emphasis mine – AB); and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said. [AK 25]

According to Foucault, the above means that historical analysis is the 'interpretation of "hearing" of an "already-said" that is at the same time a "not-said"' [AK 25]. Thus, the analysis of discourse and the deconstructive analysis of the text share many similarities. The main difference is that the analysis of the text focuses on the study of what (contrary to the intention of the author) is inscribed in the text and the traces it hides within itself. Thanks to these traces, the text not only talks about something, but also assumes the function of a historical document – it is the 'already-said' and at the same time the 'not-said'. 'The repressive presence of what it does not say', as Foucault puts it, is also something that Derrida writes about. Although Derrida uses the notion of 'text' and Foucault uses the category of 'discourse', both scholars essentially aim to expose the ways by which acts of speech (writing) conceal all that challenges them. Derrida would certainly agree with Foucault when he says that 'this "not-said" is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said' [AK 25], although he would probably say that it is the testimony of 'writing' that undermines from within all that is said. It is worth noting, however, that Derrida also uses the notion of 'discourse', although he is most interested in one of its subtypes – the discourse of metaphysics that conditions the discourse of the humanities. Indeed, in 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida speaks of 'an original, transcendental violence' [WD 156] and 'the original violence of discourse' [WD 166]. In 'Structure, Sign and Play

in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in turn, he reveals the oppressive mechanisms of structuralist discourse,²⁷⁴ which back in 1966 determined the discourse of the humanities by reducing humanistic reflection to purely theoretical and 'inhuman' speculation. Derrida is particularly interested in the fundamental categories of this discourse, such as the 'structure' and 'sign' of the essay's title, defining them as totalizing tools. Structure, he says, by its very definition, organizes, unites, and arranges (inherently rebellious) literary phenomena. The sign, defined in de Saussurean terms as composed of a signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*), not only separates language from reality, but also provides a 'micro-model' of interpretation. It demonstrates how the signifier becomes transparent (or undergoes effacement) so that the signified may take centre stage. According to Derrida, therefore, the 'age of the sign' [OG 14] limits the practice of interpretation because it is focused on to the 'ultimate *signifie*.' or this reason Derrida's essay ends with his famous statement about 'two interpretations of interpretation' [OG 178]. Derrida adds elsewhere: 'The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin,' while the other, 'to which Nietzsche showed us the way,' affirms free-play' of language [SSP 264]. In humanistic discourse in the 1960s, 'structure' and 'sign' played a regulative function – they 'disciplined' literature and interpretation, 'dehumanizing' both.²⁷⁵

As I have already mentioned, although discourse is a construct based on various, not only written testimonies, the 'written,' as Derrida would put it, constitutes its foundation. The author of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, meanwhile, conducts his analyses on the basis of the 'archived' articulation of speech. Interestingly enough, Derrida also talks about 'archiving'; however, by this term he means the various ways in which literary texts can be 'repeated' in commentaries or translation.²⁷⁶ For Foucault, the 'archive' is a starting point for constructing a discourse, while Derrida is much more interested in 'archiving', and especially in the following paradox inherent to it: the 'eventness' of the singular text (its 'first time') is destroyed in archiving, but it is archiving that preserves the text over time, opening it up to various recontextualizations. Derrida thus seeks to

274 It is worth mentioning that Derrida considered structuralism to be the apogee of the development of Western metaphysics, mainly due to its conceptual dualism (especially visible in de Saussure's and Lévi-Strauss' thought) and extreme rationalism. He wrote about this in detail in *Of Grammatology*.

275 For this reason he said at that time that the term 'human sciences' is itself problematic. [SSP 265].

276 For more on this subject, see J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz, Chicago 1996.

preserve in archiving the 'idiom' (singularity) of the text. Foucault is concerned with other problems. For him, like for Derrida, the term 'archive' does not mean just a collection of texts. Foucault states this in his definition of the term:

By this term I do not mean the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity [...]. On the contrary, it is rather the reason why so many things, said by so many men, for so long, have not emerged in accordance with the same laws of thought, or the same set of circumstances [...]; but they appeared by virtue of a whole set of relations that are peculiar to the discursive level [...]. The archive is first the law of what can be said, the *system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events* (emphasis mine – AB). [...] [It] is that which defines the mode of occurrence of the statement-thing; it is the system of its functioning. [...] [T]he archive defines a particular level: that of a practice that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated. [...] Archaeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive. [AK 128-131]

By 'archive' both Derrida and Foucault do not mean a standard (static) sum of texts, but a (dynamic) process of 'archiving' (discourses or texts). Foucault, however, is more interested in how systems of social control determine this process, or, to put it differently, he is interested in the social and institutional mechanisms responsible for making certain statements 'appear' in public space. Consequently, he conceives of the 'archive' as an intermediary between active speech and a passive sum of texts. Derrida, in turn, is more interested in something more basic, in something that precedes the archive – the properties of archiving as such. By analogy with 'the paradox of the reader' and 'the paradox of the translator', he is interested in 'the paradox of the archivist.' (Re) writing the text of the Other, its 'archiving', involves repeating what by its very nature is singular. And that is the greatest challenge for Derrida: how to repeat the 'event of the text' in writing so as not to destroy its 'idiom.' Both Foucault and Derrida characterize the 'practices of archiving' as violent (although in different terms). For Derrida, this violence is connected with destroying the singularity and uniqueness of the text. For Foucault, violence arises in the initial selection of statements found in the social sphere of speech. Derrida is interested in the conflict between the 'event' of the literary text and the process of 'archiving' it. He pays particular attention to the fact that interpretation tends to objectify 'singular events' of literary texts, demonstrating that the 'eventicity' of literature is pacified by theory. Hermeneutics, rooted in metaphysics ('onto-hermeneutics'), acts as a discourse which regulates the 'appearance' of literary events. The process of 'archiving' obliterates their uniqueness and singularity. In turn, for Foucault, 'archiving' 'causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as

so many regular events' [AK 130]. It is at this level that the initial selection of permitted and forbidden statements takes place.

However, it should be added that Foucault is also aware of the paradoxical nature of the commentary (as 'archiving'). He refers to it as 'the principle of commentary' [AK 221]. In many of his works, he expresses views that are very similar to those of Derrida. In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault writes:

in what is broadly called commentary, the hierarchy between primary and secondary text plays two roles which are in solidarity with each other. On the one hand it allows the (endless) construction of new discourses: the dominance of the primary text, its permanence, its status as a discourse which can always be re-actualized, the multiple or hidden meaning with which it is credited, the essential reticence and richness which is attributed to it, all this is the basis for an open possibility of speaking. But on the other hand the commentary's only role, whatever the techniques used, is to say *at last* what was silently articulated 'beyond', in the text. By a *paradox* (emphasis mine – AB) which it always displaces but never escapes, the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said. The infinite rippling of commentaries is worked from the inside by the dream of a repetition [...]. Commentary exorcizes the chance element of discourse by giving it its due; it allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is the text itself which is said, and in a sense completed. The open multiplicity, the element of chance, are transferred, by the principle of commentary, from what might risk being said, on to the number, the form, the mask, and the circumstances of the repetition. The new thing here lies not in what is said but *in the event of its return* (emphasis mine – AB). [OR 55-56]

We can clearly see that, like Derrida, Foucault is also interested in the philosophical problem of the 'event' (although for Derrida it is undoubtedly much more important – after all he is called the 'philosopher of the event'). Foucault, however, is mostly interested in the 'event' of speech or in the event of an individual statement that resists the order and internal rules of discourse (in which he once again resembles Derrida). Derrida, in turn, is primarily concerned with saving the event from metaphysical constraints. According to Derrida, ontological qualifications cause the 'linguistic death' of events – if only through the use of the indicative mode (in accordance with the above-mentioned opinion of Levinas). Therefore, he believes that the Metaphysics of Presence wishes to obliterate the event – it is after all too unpredictable; it is the 'Other.' For Foucault the event of speech acts as the 'Other' to the unifying mechanisms of discourse. In this sense, both Foucault's and Derrida's notions of the event have definite political overtones. By examining the conflicts between the event of speech and discursive practices or the events of texts and the actions of metaphysics both philosophers speak against the exclusion of the individual. And again, it seems

that Derrida discusses this problem in more depth – for Derrida it is at the level of metaphysical systems that event is first subjected to control. Creating knowledge and its discursive practices is the next step – it is the result of the 'violence of metaphysics'.²⁷⁷

Thus, if Foucault studies systems of thought and knowledge, then Derrida examines the underlying thought processes that give rise to these systems. It could even be said that 'The Metaphysics of Presence' in Derrida's philosophy plays a similar role to 'knowledge' in the writings of Foucault. Such an analogy is indeed appropriate because the modern model of knowledge is rooted in metaphysics – its epistemological foundations date back to, as Foucault puts it, the authoritarian concept of *mathesis universalis* formulated by René Descartes. Derrida once again adds more depth to Foucault's analysis – he indicates that it is metaphysics (i.e. the underlying philosophical system and not just the surface phenomenon) that originally transforms knowledge into a means of oppression. Indeed, Derrida conceives of a 'concentration of being in Logos' – i.e. a logocentric operation aimed at subordinating being to Logos by means of its unification and rationalization, and as a result of which, 'being' becomes 'existence' (a theoretical category) – as inherently violent and oppressive. This is why Derrida also attacks the eternal 'fetishes' of metaphysics, i.e. its fundamental categories, such as Presence, Identity, Origin (*archè*), *telos*, Representation, and Truth. However, Derrida does not criticize them for criticism's sake – he demonstrates how using such categories conditions our thinking. In particular, both Derrida and Foucault criticize 'the will to truth' (and thus 'the will to knowledge'). The metaphysical tradition, as Derrida points out, has always aspired to the non-ambiguity embodied in the idea of the 'ultimate truth' – metaphysical philosophers effaced aporia and implemented the laws of Hegel's dialectics long before Hegel. According to Derrida, metaphysics subordinates everything to its system, even at the price of manipulation and logical contradictions. It is violent and abusive.

Derrida and Foucault also have similar views in regard to the notion of the subject. They both question the role of the metaphysical subject as the author of representations (Heidegger's *Vorstellung*) and as the safeguard of identity, self-presence, and integral consciousness in the Western tradition. Both of them, as I have already mentioned, 'locate' the subject as a concept. Foucault seems to be

277 See also J. McCumber's authoritative book on this subject: *Metaphysics and Oppression. Heidegger's Challenge to Western Philosophy*, Bloomington 1991. It gives an overview of various philosophical concepts (starting from Antiquity), 're-read' from Heidegger's perspective.

more radical than Derrida in his quest to bring to light the 'subjugation' of the subject. However, for example, in 'The Ends of Man'²⁷⁸ Derrida analyzes anthropological discourse as it has been conditioned by metaphysics, and demonstrates that categories such as 'subject' and 'man' function in order to strengthen the order of the 'Logos' and thus control 'being.' On the other hand, such categories are also artificial, lacking 'human' qualities. Metaphysics, therefore, locates the subject at its centre and at the same time forces a system of categorization on it – both raising it on a pedestal and locking it up in a conceptual cage. The title 'The Ends of Man' therefore refers to 'the end of the finitude of man,'²⁷⁹ 'theoretical,' and 'repressed by metaphysics.' Like Foucault, Derrida demonstrates how metaphysics 'subjugates' a human being, who is consequently reduced to a purely theoretical status. She is deprived of a body, senses, desires, emotions, and feelings and thus merely denotes a 'subject.'

Indeed, Foucault is primarily interested in exposing the mechanisms of oppressive discourse which violently 'disciplines' and restrains 'the Other.' The philosopher fights for the rights of the Other in speech and in social life. Derrida, respectively, is interested in introducing philosophy (metaphysics) onto a stage that it can no longer govern. He seeks to expose the hidden mechanisms of, as he puts it, 'calculated repression' – instances of 'concealing,' 'effacing,' or 'obliterating' forms of 'otherness' (including people as such) that do not fit into totalizing systems. Foucault and Derrida protect and fight for the rights of the Other by exposing the violence hidden in the seemingly neutral and 'natural' tenets of Western philosophy. Indeed, both philosophers expose 'a system that Plato [...] wished to reduce to silence' [PO 75].

This long discussion is not meant to convince advocates of the political turn in the United States that Derrida's political reflection is as influential as the writings of Foucault on the subject. History moves along its course, and it is impossible to deny that the hermetic nature of Derrida's project and the 'openness' of Foucault's discourse made the 'obscurity' of Derrida even more prominent. Hopefully, however, I have managed to demonstrate how the views of Derrida and Foucault complement one another and highlight the political presuppositions of Derrida's metaphilosophical project. Deconstruction is 'political,' insofar as it exposes

278 This text was presented by Derrida as a paper at the international conference 'Philosophy and Anthropology' held in New York in 1968, and was published in *Margins of Philosophy* four years later.

279 J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 121.

the metaphysical 'origins'²⁸⁰ of hidden mechanisms of violence and intolerance, denounces the ideology behind philosophical systems, and undermines their oppositional structures. And, last but not least, it is 'political' because it actively opposes dogmatism and institutionalized power. Derrida's readings demonstrate how to carry out a 'micrological' analysis, bringing to light even the smallest traces of violence 'written' in texts – the products of metaphysical systems.

Derrida thus comments on the nature of his political engagement:

when I write, I try to focus on these small differences, changes in the meaning of words, the smallest ambiguities. Paying attention to the elitism of language, homonymy, ambiguity, and rhetorical figures is by no means an unnecessary complication on behalf of an elitist artist who isolates himself in his microscopic studies. The most important things in politics and history pass through language. It is our political responsibility to make everyone realize, whether they are Polish, French, etc., what is happening in language by means of nuances and rhetorical games. [...] Therefore, I consider it my duty not to neglect these nuances and, moreover, to make all my readers and listeners aware of these minor micrological differences] [OS]

Such a view of Derrida's political engagement has become more and more prominent in contemporary criticism. While Derrida was often accused of political indifference in the past, contemporary studies commonly focus on the political consequences of deconstruction, emphasizing the 'political' potential of Derrida's reading practices. Today Derrida is even considered one of the 'patron saints' and initiators of the ethical and political turn in the humanities. Published in 1995, *Deconstruction Is/In America* is a testament to this, a commentary on the ethical and political implications of Derrida's philosophical project. The study's subtitle, *A New Sense of the Political*, demonstrates that American scholars in the humanities recognize Derrida's role in the ethical and political turn.

280 Lyotard was even more radical in the accusations against the Western philosophical tradition of having hidden mechanisms of violence (according to him this historical tradition led Europe to Nazism), as was Rorty (who in a text about the ethics of principles and ethics of sensitivity spoke of: 'Homeric heroes, Nazi soldiers, slave owners – they all had rules. These, however, did not protect them from being cruel to people they did not think of as "us"'). Bauman made a similar claim in 'Two Sketches on Post-Modern Morality', where he emphasized that 'Auschwitz and the Gulag were not a momentary aberration or departure from the modern practice of 'decreeing order', but its logical consequence, because 'the reverse side of arbitrary universalism is the suffocation of everything that eludes unification, and the universal foundation becomes the basis for intolerance and induces a Crusade against those who insist on maintaining their differences. Modern humanization leads to inhumane actions.'

Deconstruction and the New Sense of the Political

The handy reversal of terms which predicts the politics of deconstruction as a deconstruction of politics is as well put as it is badly meant.

Anselm Haverkamp, *Deconstruction is/in America*

The primary aim of the book *Deconstruction is/in America. A New Sense of the Political* was to assess the impact of deconstruction on the humanities (and especially on literary studies) in the US from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s. The question ‘What remains of deconstruction?’ yielded an unambiguous answer: thought in the humanities ‘after deconstruction’ was, above all, ‘politically conscious’ thought, for which the ethical and political message of Derrida’s philosophy had opened up new perspectives, new areas of interest, and new directions in research. It was the deconstruction, the authors of the book were convinced (especially its editor Anselm Haverkamp), that allowed us to understand what the ‘new sense of politics’ was and how we could actively express our commitment to the problems of the world. Derrida’s views thus provided an intellectual apparatus for the entire political turnaround. In Haverkamp’s opinion, however, what was most important was that the politics of Derrida’s project were implemented in practice – ‘performatively’ creating ethical and political ‘effects’ [DIA 7].

The book contained a collection of papers delivered at a conference organized by New York University in the autumn of 1993, at which at least two generations of deconstructionists, commentators, and supporters of this trend spoke. In addition to Jacques Derrida, Joseph Hillis Miller, Gayatri Spivak, Derek Attridge, Jonathan Culler, Rodolphe Gasché, Peggy Kamuf, Samuel Weber, Cynthia Chase, Michel Beaujour and Judith Butler, also in attendance were Peter Eisenman, Perry Meisel, Avital Ronell, Barbara Vinken, Elisabeth Weber, and David Willis. The title of the book referred to Derrida’s famous saying ‘America is deconstruction’, which had enjoyed great popularity in the US. The subtitle, on the other hand, signalled the context in which reflection on the consequences of deconstruction was taking place. There was no longer any excitement about the closed ‘world of texts’, about snobbish predilections for ‘games of meaning’,

about 'reverse' practices of reading, or about maintaining the 'myth of textual autonomy'. Instead, what was stressed was the 'performative' potential of deconstructive practices as a means for actively working for change in the cultural and social sphere.

In his opening speech, which later became the foreword to the book, Anselm Haverkamp, Director of the Institute of Poetry at New York University, stressed not only Derrida's valuable contribution to the development of the American humanities in recent decades, but also the special role that America had played in deconstruction. American literary scholars, he reminded, had made the greatest contribution to the development of the philosophical and critical aspects of deconstruction, and had also initiated the wide-scale 'political adaptation' of it that was at the heart of the humanities' 'love affair' with deconstruction [DIA 2]. Haverkamp also tried to show that reading literary and philosophical texts, especially Derrida's, had always had 'a political effect' [DIA 7]. In his opinion, however, the 'new sense of the political' that he sought to define was not only connected with the political 'activism' inspired by Derrida's thought. His ideas were, above all, an excellent 'lesson on friendship' [DIA 2] – undoubtedly the noblest and only 'non-possessive' encounter with the Other. In this sense, the book *The Politics of Friendship*²⁸¹ most explicitly expressed the 'worldview' of deconstructive philosophy. Derrida taught us, argued Haverkamp, that friendship is the best and most appropriate way to relate to the Other, and it is in here – much more than anywhere else – that we find the ethical and political manifestation of 'difference'. He was also right in seeing a link between Derrida's early works and his later views. Derrida's '*différance*', he noted, ultimately became an unconditional acceptance of 'differences' and refusal to succumb to the pressure of any system.²⁸² The evolution of deconstruction and deconstructionism in the United States proved the possibility of going 'beyond language' – a steady transition from the study of 'internal differences' in texts, through opening up to otherness in the social and cultural sphere, to philosophical reflection on the sovereignty of the Other in 'friendship'. According to Haverkamp, Derrida's 'politics of friendship' – which he considered to be the culmination of his philosophical project – was a particular understanding of 'the political', the core of which was an ethical attitude towards the Other.

281 Published in the US in 1997.

282 G. Bennington also drew attention to this in *Interrupting Derrida*, calling Derrida's idea of *différance* one of his most ethically and politically motivated early concepts (pp. 28-29).

Joseph Hillis Miller fully supported this diagnosis in his PMLA speech, but once again criticized those who accused deconstruction of 'aestheticism' and its followers 'of being concerned only with an enclosed realm of language cut off from the real world, as destroying ethical responsibility by undoing faith in personal identity and agency, as ahistorical, quietistic, as fundamentally elitist and conservative' [DIA 82]. In repelling these attacks, however, he warned against another extremity, i.e. against the conception of deconstruction as merely a form of ideological critique or a tool of political struggle.²⁸³ In his opinion, the practices of deconstruction – especially those of Derrida and de Man – should not be evaluated from a dualistic perspective, which they both strongly opposed. They should rather be seen either as a purely 'formal' analysis of literary language, or as 'ideological criticism' (regardless of whether this is an 'aesthetic ideology' or not,²⁸⁴ or by some other means). Derrida ultimately taught us that thinking in terms of absolutes about any member of the 'other side' is misguided, and therefore it is also wrong to separate these integrally related aspects of 'double' deconstructive reading. Both of these aspects – a 'careful' reading of literary texts and various forms of 'political criticism' written into their modes – were always equally important to him. Deconstruction thus summed up both the analysis of language and 'political criticism' – and this is where the importance of its undertaking should be seen. And although he expressed the opinion that belief in the possibility of changing the world by means of reading and writing about literature was utopian, the political turn undoubtedly provided literary scholars with a strong impulse to find new ways to read literary texts. After years of maintaining a belief in the autonomy of literary theory and its separation from social and cultural practices, which ultimately resulted in the crisis of literary theory and theory, the political turn restored in them a sense of the meaningfulness and practical usefulness of their actions. The specific cult status with which Derrida

283 Hillis Miller refuted allegations made by J. Loesberg in a book published at about the same time, *Aestheticism and Deconstruction: Pater, Derrida, de Man* (Princeton 1991), and engaged in polemics with R. Gasche, J. Nealon and M. Zavarzadeh, who asserted that deconstruction had nothing at all to do with literature, and perceived it as merely a philosophical or 'critical' project (understood as a criticism of certain doctrines or ideologies, from the perspective of which the 'reading' of literary texts is treated only as a means to an end). See e.g. J. Nealon, *Double Reading. Postmodernism After Deconstruction*, Ithaca-London 1993 and M. Zavarzadeh, 'Pun(k)deconstruction and the Postmodern Political Imaginary', *Cultural Critique*, Fall 1992, pp. 5-47.

284 Hillis Miller is referring here to Paul de Man's widely read book, *Aesthetic Ideology*, Minneapolis 1996.

invested literature, repeatedly emphasizing that literature provides much greater opportunities (a more powerful 'economy', as he described it in an interview with Derek Attridge [AL 43]) than other types of utterances, whether historical or philosophical. Hence its more effective power to question patterns, stereotypes or the obvious, and, consequently, the greater its potential to dismantle power structures and reveal its concealed actions – in his opinion, this had changed literary researchers' views on the literary text, and inspired them to ask completely different questions about it. Yet, Hillis Miller feared that *Deconstruction is/in America* was, in a sense, proof that literature and language, if they even appeared to be within the area of interest of the deconstructionists, were only a pretext for considerations of a more general, usually extra-literary nature. As a 'space for practicing the new politics', literary texts were included in some chapters of the book. David Wills' closing statement, entitled very eloquently 'Jaded in America' was not only a summary, but also the 'closure' of the history of the deconstruction in the United States. Returning to the very beginning of the deconstruction – to the year 1966, when Derrida's deconstruction experienced its 'birth in America' in Baltimore – and trying to make a general synthesis of the history of the reception of the philosopher's thoughts on the American continent – Wills also noticed a clear generational difference, connected with changes in the profile of the humanities. As he formulated it, there had been a 'shift of attention or interest of scholars from deconstruction to [...] cultural studies' [DIA 251]. He also stressed what Derrida and some of the commentators of his work so often pointed out – that all these aspects of deconstruction had existed in the project from the very beginning, but that the changing priorities of academics in the humanists (especially literary researchers and literary critics) had brought about a shift in emphasis both in Derrida's own views and in their reception – from the politics of the text to textual politics. The layout of the material contained in the book also confirmed Wills' observations concerning the evolution of Derrida's thought in America. Thus, as the titles of subsequent sections stated: there was a transition from 'the time of analysis' of literary texts to applications in pedagogy (the implementation of deconstruction's 'goals' in university teaching) and, finally to the 'performance of difference' and ethical and political activism (i.e., the 'New Sense of the Political', defined here as a 'performative stage' and a practical consequence of Derrida's concept of *différance*). Thanks to its coherent structure, the book was able to capture both the moment of deconstruction's spectacular 'entry' onto the scene in the humanities in America and the moment of its 'exit' from that scene. It also showed the entire history of the American humanities over the last thirty years as reflected in the mirror of the history of its reception of Derrida's thoughts. According to the authors of the book, the most important thing in

this history was something that Jonathan Culler aptly expressed earlier, namely, that the ethical and political tendencies in humanistic thought emerged thanks to 'a shift from reading ('close reading') that is alert to the details of narrative structure and attends to complexities of meaning, to a socio-political analysis' [LT 51]. However, it was equally clear that the 'phase of political criticism' (as it was called) had led both to the end of deconstruction's success in literary studies and to the diffusion of its practices into other, often very distant disciplines. This was perhaps a testimony to the increasingly common 'interdisciplinarity' and 'culturalism' that are now among the most important currents in American intellectual life.²⁸⁵

While the watchwords 'ethics' and 'politics' or 'the ethical' and 'the political' fell out of fashion in the humanities in the 1990s, they were soon replaced by the very capacious term 'culture' and a new turn which was quickly labelled 'the cultural turn'. Yet, the most important topic and weightiest problem for the ethical and political turn, i.e. 'Others' and their presence in literature, interpretation and the social sphere, would not be relegated to the past, although the cultural contexts of the manifestation and functioning of 'otherness' now gained prominence. Thanks to this, however, Derrida's thought once again took on important meaning, because it was in his philosophy that the issue of the 'otherness of the Other' had always been at the forefront.

285 See e.g. *After Poststructuralism. Interdisciplinarity and Literary Theory*, ed. N. Easterlin and B. Riebling, Evanston 1993.

The Otherness of the Other

I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language.'

Jacques Derrida

I mean that deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity...

Jacques Derrida²⁸⁶

In 1979, when Vincent Descombes decreed in the title his new book *Le même et l'autre* a shift in contemporary French philosophy from 'the Same' to 'the Other',²⁸⁷ he not only drew attention to the numerous antecedents of the recent change, but also wanted to stress that at present – and he noted this fact as this change was in progress – this shift could already be seen as a clear turn, to which the critical practices of postmodern philosophers had contributed most, in particular, in the 'dismantling' of the foundations of thought on Identity undertaken by them. Yet, he could not fail to notice the continuation of this turn; namely, that thanks to many postmodern thinkers, especially Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, thinking about otherness had travelled to the other side of the Atlantic, where it was finding itself on very fertile ground.

The 'turn towards otherness', which dominated the next (following the critical phase) stage of development in postmodern philosophy, was marked above all by a search for answers to questions about the possibility for 'positive' thinking, as Derrida described it in an interview with Richard Kearney. This was a quite natural tendency. If we recall Levinas' message once again, it is easy to observe that in the metaphysical tradition the Other was always conceived of through

286 Both quotes come from an interview with Richard Kearney [DO 123, 118].

287 This refers to the original French title of his book *The Same and the Other: Forty-five Years of French Philosophy (1933–1978)* (*Le Même et l'autre: Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933–1978)*). The book was published in English as *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1980).

negation: in the opposition 'I' – 'Other' or 'Identity' – 'Other',²⁸⁸ and that this opposition and the hierarchy connected with it most often resulted in the marginalization of otherness or its banishment to a place outside philosophical systems, for which Identity was a particularly privileged category, and even at the centre of some systems. This was also pointed out by Derrida, who asked whether

the alterity of the other is *posed*, that is, *only* posed, does it not amount to *the same*, for example in the form of the 'constituted object' or of the 'informed product' invested with meaning, etc.? [PO 95].

And he answered that the 'otherness of the Other' cannot in any way be 'pre-determined', that is, decreed from above, because this always leads to its objectification, and thus, depriving it of its otherness. However, such positive thinking about the Other in 'late' postmodernity proved to be a very difficult task. Negative tendencies coming out of the metaphysical tradition inevitably led to exclusion, while positive thinking carried the risk of assimilation, and thus depriving the Other, as Derrida put it, of its 'inalienable right to otherness'. The former always made her 'alien', while in the latter, she became 'her own', and ceased to be 'the Other'. The space of this aporia – thinking of the Other as either 'alien' or 'one's own' – would mark the main directions of philosophers' searches after critical postmodernity.²⁸⁹ The most important task for philosophy would now be how to think positively about the Other, so as not to deprive her of what is inalienable – her radical otherness. This challenge would define the nature of the various philosophical projects during the last two decades of the twentieth century, in particular, those of Jacques Derrida.

288 Cf. E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity...*

289 I consciously use the term 'after postmodernity' instead of, for example, the frequently encountered 'post-postmodernity'. I believe that the late postmodern (as Zygmunt Bauman sometimes called it) thought on Otherness is a continuation and practical consequence of the critical phase, not a revision or re-evaluation of its assumptions, as in the case of all 'post-' trends, by virtue of the meaning given to the prefix 'post-' by its originator Jean-Francois Lyotard (see, in particular, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Minneapolis 1984. Also, see the discussion on the meaning of the prefix 'post' in: J-F Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982–1985*, translated by D. Barry, et al., Minneapolis 1992). The distinction between 'after' and 'post-' is used today in many other cases, e.g. 'after feminism' or 'after Theory'. See e.g. T. Eagleton's book *After Theory* (London, 2003).

The problem of the Other in contemporary philosophy is a huge, multi-faceted topic, and one that exceeds the scope of this book. For the purposes of our discussion, however, it is worth outlining here a few general tendencies that are especially prominent in French and American thought. Reflections on otherness (as a separate area of philosophical thought) can be said to have begun in the early 1980s (although this thought can be traced back earlier), while the 'end' of this period (in a literal sense), or more accurately, its entry into a crisis phase, one that would require completely new questions to be posed, can be dated to September 11, 2001, i.e. the date of the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York.²⁹⁰ After this event, it is not the problem of the Other, but of the Alien that will demand philosophical reflection, especially in a situation where it may pose a threat to us.²⁹¹ A very quick (by necessity) look at the general trends in late-modern philosophy of the Other, reveals at least three clear trends. The first is the *revisionist-emancipatory* trend, began during the critical phase of postmodernity (and in the case of Levinas, much earlier). The most prominent manifestations of this trend can be found in Levinas' diagnoses concerning negative thinking about the Other within the Western philosophical tradition and the 'metaphysical violence' it inflicted on Others. This trend also includes the (also pioneering) works of Michel Foucault, devoted to psychiatric, penitentiary, and clinical discourse, and from the mid-1970s to sexology as well (1976-84). Lastly here is Derrida's criticism of the creation of an opposition/hierarchy rooted in the metaphysical tradition, which resulted in the exclusion of variously understood forms of 'otherness'. The second trend I would describe as *experimental*. In it we can see attempts to think positively about the Other, combined with attempts to bypass the aporia signalled earlier. One could include here, for example, Levinas (again) pioneering views in his book *Time and the Other*²⁹²

290 Arguments confirming the validity of this date as marking a certain stage in thinking on Otherness can be found in Giovanna Borradori's conversations with Jacques Derrida and Jurgen Habermas in the previously mentioned book *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*.

291 This passage was predicted as early as 1997 by Bernhard Waldenfels' book *Topographie des Fremden* (Eng. *A Topography of the Other*), in which the author draws attention to the urgent need, caused primarily by the changes in the social and political fabric of the countries of Europe and America, to address the issue of alienation and not otherness on the grounds of contemporary philosophy. He further detailed this in another book in 2006: *Phenomenology of the Alien*, trans. A. Kozin and T Stähler, Evanston 2011. The subject of the 'other' was also raised by Levinas in e.g. *Totality and Infinity*.

292 Trans. R. Cohen. Pittsburgh 1987. This book was written on the basis of philosopher's lectures from the 1940s and was not published in France until the 1960s.

and his phenomenology of the 'face' (as 'radically different').²⁹³ Here we can also place Derrida's practical study of the 'otherness of the literary idiom', as well as the problem of the Other in Lacan's thought and Kristeva's concept of the 'object' from the *Powers of Horror*.²⁹⁴ These efforts were marked by a search for ways to go beyond essentialism, and thus to avoid the questions 'what is otherness?' and 'who is the Other?', and in return they introduced various 'experimental' means for confronting otherness, especially visible in the works of Julia Kristeva (who studied the specific experience of 'otherness in me') and Derrida (who studied the experiences of otherness in the 'experimental field' of literature).²⁹⁵ The third trend could be simply called *dialogical*, because it combined concepts born out of the so-called philosophy of dialogue and the radical hermeneutics of Derrida. An important distinguishing feature of this trend was thinking aimed at establishing relations with the Other,²⁹⁶ while avoiding its 'objectification'. One could list here the concepts of Levinas, Buber, Rozenzweig and Tischner, as well as the Derridian idea of '*différance*' from the 1960s (presaging the discourses of late postmodernity) or his reflections in the 1980s on 'friendship', 'the gift' and 'hospitality' as important aspects of his philosophy of the 'encounter'.²⁹⁷ It should be noted that in the 1980s, philosophical thought on otherness had correspondences with many other currents of thought (especially those rooted in the cultural and social sphere) that shared a programmatic interest in this issue – these included, above all, successive waves of feminism and feminist criticism, as well as academic study focused on gender, 'queer', ethnic, racial and

293 Particularly in *Totality and Infinity*. Derrida had earlier focused attention on this very important topic in Levinas' thought in 'Violence and Metaphysics', emphasizing that Levinas' 'nudity of the face is not stylistic figure' [WD 132], but also referred to the experience of a special kind of confrontation with the Other, in which he is, as the philosopher wrote: 'Absolutely present, in his face, the Other – without any metaphor – faces me' [PR 125].

294 J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. L. Roudiez. New York 1982 (first French edition, 1980).

295 The inverse of this idea can be seen in the concepts expressed in Lyotard's book *The Differend*, where he proposed an extremely anarchist vision of the world as the co-existence of radically distinct and contradictory idioms. His idea of a radical 'dissensus' (which he opposes to Habermas's communicative concept of 'consensus' as a principle regulating relations in the 'life-world') arose out of a powerful fear of the temptations of totalization (which he saw in Habermas's thought).

296 With some reservations concerning the notion of 'relation', which I discuss later in the chapter.

297 See the chapter titled 'The Law of the Other'.

post-colonial issues. These disciplines, which all placed questions related to Others (and above all their emancipation) at the heart of their interests, had a significant impact on the climate surrounding the political turn in the United States. The meaning behind these efforts is most profoundly expressed in the words of Levinas, who argued the Other was ‘absolutely other’ and that recognition and acceptance of her difference must be considered a basic requirement in a modern, pluralist society.²⁹⁸

In Derrida’s philosophy, his reflections on ‘otherness’ and the Other had been developing from the very beginning of his project in a ‘three-fold’ manner, and in his search all the tendencies mentioned above can be seen. Because, as Vincent B. Leitch aptly put it:

Mainly, it exhibits over and over how all borders, rules, concepts, structures – how all creations and constructions – suppress primordial difference in favor of dubious identity. To uncover the infinite varieties of such suppressions constitutes the dominant project of Derridian deconstruction.²⁹⁹

Along this same lines, Nigel Mapp keenly observed:

Deconstruction does not serve any system of values [...] but indicates instead the fundamental structure of ethics, a discourse of self-resistance. [DE 788]

Practicing such a ‘discourse of self-resistance’ was intended to serve a purpose that can be described as both ethical and political *par excellence*. In fact, all of Derrida’s reading practices (both in the initial phase of ‘strategic’ deconstruction and later) were motivated by his opposition to the marginalization or exclusion of the Other. Regardless of whether in a particular case the ‘Other’ was the body, the senses, woman, materiality, ‘writing’ or ‘event’, he always tried to prove that it did not find its place in systems based on the principle of identity. By entering texts through the ‘back door’, and seeking their secret, deeply hidden intellectual underpinnings, he simultaneously explored how otherness resisted all attempts at unification. Ryszard Nycz commented insightfully on this fact:

what is ‘on the other side’ cannot be expressed any other way than negatively: that is, either through its very resistance to articulation and understanding, or by means of special analytical strategies [...] whose task is to uncover or widen the gaps in an apparently tightly closed structure and to encounter traces of its susceptibility or ‘sensitivity’ to the arrival of the Other.³⁰⁰

298 *Totality and Infinity*, p. 39.

299 D. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*, New York 1983, p. 261.

300 R. Nycz (ed.), *Dekonstrukcja w badaniach literackich*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 12

The most important motivation for Derrida's practices came from the need to rethink 'what is different' and what, as such, is not subject to habitual metaphysical qualification. A consequence of these reflections was – as Derrida himself described it – was the need to respond positively to the Other and 'open a way' to her. In 'Violence and Metaphysics,' inspired by Levinas' views, he states that we owe a great debt to the Other for being '*what it is: other*' [WD 172]. Examining the 'otherness' of the literary idiom is in his case an initial step toward confronting otherness in the field of literature and drawing conclusions from this for our thinking about Others in culture, tradition, and society. What interests him most in the restrictions applied by Western societies to Others, the 'mechanisms of subordination,' as he formulated it (in a manner very similar to Foucault's 'disciplining practices' applied to the subject). I have already mentioned that these problems were important to him largely because of his own personal experience of being a 'triple Other.' Perhaps to some extent his professional experience also influenced his insights into the philosophical problems of otherness. We can safely say (and even his most fierce intellectual opponents would agree on this) that it would be difficult to find another thinker in the history of philosophy who was more "Other" than the creator of deconstruction.³⁰¹ This fact led to his persistent search for ways to protect the particularities of the language of literature, which he at least considered to be a space of absolute freedom [TD 180], a space in which otherness could be 'experienced' through the uniqueness of the linguistic idiom: the otherness of language, which, as he said on another occasion, is 'always for *the other*, from the other, kept by the other. Coming from the other, remaining with the other, and returning to the other.'³⁰²

Derrida understood his philosophical undertaking as a rethinking of the issue of otherness/the Other on the basis of the western philosophical tradition, and an attempt – by means of a 'critical' revision of this tradition – to practice his own, undoubtedly positive thinking about the Other, on the basis of which there would no longer be room for treating her as the antithesis of the Same (or as its negative complement). Just as importantly, there would be no possibility

301 Efforts by traditional philosophers in Europe to contest Derrida's philosophy by denying him honorary doctorates or attempting to discredit his achievements are already legendary. For this reason, Derrida has often been compared to Socrates, who was also clearly an 'other' in relation to the philosophical tradition.

302 J. Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. P. Mensah, Stanford 1998, p. 40. In this book Derrida also returns to his experiences in Algeria.

for assimilating otherness for the purposes of what is commonly called 'tolerance'.³⁰³ When, in an interview with Giovanna Borradori after the events of September 11, 2001, Derrida criticized the traditional concept of 'tolerance' (as always patronising the Other, and therefore assuming *a priori* his inferior position) and postulated replacing it with the concept of 'hospitality'. He argued in favour of 'unconditional tolerance', in which both the 'I' and the 'Other' always coexist on a completely equal footing. Only this kind of being with the Other, he claimed, built gradually and consistently over time could protect humanity from acts of terror. In his strong opposition to globalization (based on the need to maintain distinctness and individuality), he proclaimed the need for community, understood as 'multiplicity in unity', and, above all, the need to consider the right of others to be Others. Although he wanted to develop a special relationship with the Other, he refused to even use the word 'relationship', which seemed suspicious to him, if only because of the hint of arbitrariness he saw in it. For this reason, he called for the word 'relationship' to be replaced by 'meeting'. In 'Violence and Metaphysics', he wrote (referring to Levinas' essay 'The Trace of the Other'³⁰⁴):

What, then, is this encounter with the absolutely-other? Neither representation, nor limitation, nor conceptual relation to the same. The ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated or made into totalities by a concept of relationship. And first of all because the concept (material of language), which is always *given to the other*, cannot encompass the other, cannot include the other. [...] Truthfully, one does not have to wonder *what* this encounter is. It is *the* encounter, the only way out, the only adventuring outside oneself toward the unforeseeably-other. [...] Therefore, there is no way to conceptualize the encounter: it is made possible by the other, the unforeseeable 'resistant to all categories.' [WD 117–118].

And this is exactly what he would do all his life – in different ways he would engage in meetings with the Other that 'happened' in ethical space in such a way that they could not be dominated by any 'a relationship of knowing'. [WD 169].

303 See *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*.

304 Cf. E. Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', trans. A. Lingis, in *Deconstruction in Context*, ed. M. Taylor, Chicago 1986, pp. 345–359.

The Political Today

The questions and ambitions which I find interesting may seem politically mute. Perhaps, this is because my concern is the political thought, culture and counter-culture, which are almost inaudible.

Jacques Derrida, interview with Christian Descamps³⁰⁵

It is worth asking here in these final pages whether Jacques Derrida's thought can inspire us today in any way. In other words, can we find in his earliest reflections, and especially in his specific form of political criticism, any leads that would be worth pursuing further? I think so, provided we rid ourselves of the wives' tales that have arisen around his philosophy, and look upon it a little more kindly than has been the case up until now. The importance of his thought, both for the American political turn and for its European variants, is perhaps best illustrated by a book published after his death, in which the most important names in contemporary political philosophy (including Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Slavoj Žižek, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) not only remind us of the political and ethical premises of his project, but also consider his views and reading practices – as the title of one of the book's sections put it – as a valuable 'gift for the future'.³⁰⁶ I do not hide the fact that I fully share these beliefs. As a critical thinker, Derrida studied very carefully how all kinds of ideologies were born – including the one he saw in the concepts behind the 'new politics'. However, he did not pass judgement nor propose ready-made solutions, but rather left things in an 'active suspension', intended much more to provoke thought than to offer solutions. One of the things that made Derrida's political thought important was that it was performative³⁰⁷ – it was active, and avoided the obvious and any kind of stereotype. He was definitely more interested in posing questions and highlighting sensitive problems than in formulating statements

305 *Le Monde*, January 31, 1982.

306 *Adieu Derrida*, ed. C. Douzinas. London 2007.

307 This term is commonly found in commentary on Derrida's writing. More on this can be found in Part Two of this book, 'Derrida and Performance'.

about them.³⁰⁸ Moreover, he was not only concerned with ‘making visible’ that which, for various, but always ideological reasons, had been ‘erased from the narrative’, but also explored the conditions for what made both political reflection and effective action possible. The importance in his thinking of the link between politics and ethics was of great significance, and I believe, a prerequisite for today’s understanding of ‘the new politics.’³⁰⁹ Yet, in my opinion, his most important message stemmed from his reading methods, which provided a valuable practical example of ‘subtle’ political criticism, one sensitive to ‘micrological’ nuances in its references to social and cultural reality, and even simply, to the world and its people, a criticism focused on ‘traces’ of our functioning in society ‘inscribed’ into various social practices (artistic, intellectual, research, interpretative, reading, etc.).

In an interview he gave during his stay in Poland, Derrida tried to express the sense of his intention as follows:

many important effects, especially in the field of ethics and politics, have resulted from micrological phenomena in language. I therefore consider it my duty not to neglect these nuances and, moreover, to do everything possible to draw attention of those who read or listen to me to these minor micrological differences. [OS]

Elsewhere, he stressed the importance of the questions that needed to be posed to philosophy, literature and literary criticism. At that time, he spoke of the following:

Our task is perhaps to wonder why it is that so many of this century’s strong works and systems of thought have been the site of philosophical, ideological, political ‘messages’ that are at times conservative (Joyce), at times brutally and diabolically murderous, racist, anti-semitic (Pound, Céline), at times equivocal and unstable (Artaud, Bataille). [...] in the matter of equivocation, heterogeneity or instability, analysis by definition escapes all closure and all exhaustive formalization. [AL 51]

Regardless of how we assess his philosophical project from the present perspective, and how we sum up the consequences of deconstruction for the humanities, philosophy, and literary studies and criticism, this task of searching for the philosophical, ideological, and political ‘messages’ of texts has certainly not

308 I write more about the Socratic spirit of Derrida’s thought in my book *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* (Kraków 2001), especially in the chapters ‘Filozof sokratyczny’ and ‘Myśl otwarcia.’

309 One very important book on this subject, Simon Critchley’s *Political Ethics*, was largely inspired by Derrida’s thought.

lost its relevance. Nor has his sensitivity to all sorts of dogmas, fixations, and schematizations lost any of its power either.

In another conversation with Derrida, Christian Descampes in 1981, i.e. when the political turn in America was still flying high, and in Poland the gloomy times of martial law were approaching, a question was asked: 'As regards the political field, you have never taken up noisy positions there.' Derrida responded:

Ah, the 'political field'! But I could reply that I think of nothing else, however things might appear. Yes, of course, there are silences, and a certain withdrawal, but let's not exaggerate things. Provided that one has an interest in this, it is very easy to know where my choices and my allegiances are, without the least ambiguity. No doubt I don't manifest it enough, that's certain, but where is the measure here and is there one? [...] I have always had trouble recognizing myself in the features of the intellectual (philosopher, writer, professor) playing his political role according to the screenplay that you are familiar with and whose heritage deserves to be questioned. Not that I disdain or critique it in itself; I think that, in certain situations, there is a classical function and responsibility there that must not be avoided, even if it is just to appeal to good sense and to what I consider to be the elementary political duty. But I am more and more aware of a transformation that renders this scene today somewhat tedious, sterile, and at times the crossroads of the worst procedures of intimidation (even when it is for the good cause), having no common measure with the structure of the political, with the new responsibilities required [...]. It is for this reason that what is most specific and most acute in the research, the questions, or the undertakings that interest me (along with a few others) may appear politically silent. Perhaps it is a matter there of a political thinking, of a culture, or a counter-culture that are almost inaudible [...] Perhaps, who knows, for one can only speak here of the chances or the risks to be run, with or without hope, always in dispersion and in the minority. [AN 86-88]

It is true that at the time when this profound transformation in the humanities in America took place, premised, above all, on the need for the writer, critic, theoretician, researcher, reader and interpreter of literature to be 'committed' to solving social and political problems, Derrida and deconstructionists found themselves 'scattered and in the minority', but this allowed them to continue to pursue thinking that moved what was 'inside' of texts to the 'outside'. Thinking which, without ostentation or uproar, without quick judgements or overly easy solutions, and above all, without the 'intimidation' recalled by Derrida, proved out to be 'a completely different practice of the new politics.'

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In the book *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*, discussed in the previous chapter, there was a mention – just a mention – of a clear link between Derrida's philosophy and a phenomenon that was becoming more and more prominent in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In speaking on

the political nature of deconstruction, Rodolphe Gasché [DIA 117] and Terry Meisel [DIA 229] focus attention on the 'performative mode' of deconstructive readings – in their opinion, the most characteristic feature of Derrida's writing style. Gasché also noted the emergence in the United States of yet another turn, one that did not so much take place alongside or in the margins of the ethical and political turn, but which was connected with it integrally and complemented it in a meaningful way. Derrida's views would also play a very important role in this turn, one that was known at the time as the 'performative turn'.

Part 2 Derrida and Performance

As a field, performance studies is sympathetic to the avant-garde, the marginal, the offbeat, the minoritarian, the subversive, the twisted, the queer, people of color, and the formerly colonized. Projects within performance studies often act on or act against settled hierarchies.

Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*

The Performative Turn

Western art experienced a ubiquitous performative turn in the early 1960s, which not only made each art form more performative but also led to the creation of a new genre of art, so-called action and performance art.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*

[...] performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth.

Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else*

Although ‘performance’, the main focus of performance studies, is not a new term – it has been employed since the 1960s in theatre studies and beyond, and the related concept of a ‘performative’ (or ‘performative utterance’) has been in use in the philosophy of language and the humanities since the 1950s³¹⁰ – its prevalence has increased greatly over the last thirty years, and consequently, its semantic field has broadened considerably. The term ‘performance’ has found a place in almost every discipline in the humanities and arts. In recent years, we can even talk about an ‘explosion’ in performance studies research.³¹¹ Alongside the terms ‘performance’ and ‘performative’, we can also often find references to ‘performativity’. The latter, as used by scholar such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, refers to the process of constructing and perpetuating gender roles. For Erika Fischer-Lichte, in turn, performativity refers to a new aesthetics, including not only theatrical and para-theatrical acts but also other performative cultural practices.³¹²

In the United States and Great Britain, and soon after in other English-speaking countries, this interest in performance led to the emergence of a new field of study: performance studies, which, as Richard Schechner observed in

310 I am referring here to the works of J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle.

311 McKenzie’s term. See J. McKenzie, *Perform Or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, London–New York 2001, p. 13; hereinafter PE, followed by the page number.

312 E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*. New York 2008; hereinafter TP, followed by the page number.

2006, grew quickly in terms of both importance and popularity.³¹³ One consequence of the rise of performance studies, with its focus on performance in its various forms, including performatives, performances, performativity and the like, was the emergence of a 'performative turn' in the 1980s in many areas of the humanities, arts, and other fields. As pointed out by McKenzie, this shift even affected many disciplines that had little in common with sublime artistic or spiritual experiences, and were closer to the 'traditional' meaning of the English word 'performance' (as in 'the operation of a machine'), such as new technologies and the organization and efficiency of the workplace. The term 'performance studies' is even applied in an epistemological sense to describe paradigm shifts, processes for legitimizing knowledge, and changing social dynamics. Seeking to better organize the discipline conceptually, Jon McKenzie in his book *Perform or Else* distinguished three fields and three main areas of research on performance and performativity: techno-performance, performative management and cultural performance [PE 14]. All three fields stem from a general transformation in late twentieth-century postmodern thought, which McKenzie ultimately concludes was also 'performative' in nature [PE 12–14]. McKenzie actually uses a much stronger term than 'the performative turn', defining the contemporary study of performance as 'its own paradigm of knowledge', whose origins he sees in the study of the various forms of cultural performance, defined by him as 'the embodied enactment of cultural forces' [PE 8]. The following fragment from *Perform or Else* describes the birth of this interdisciplinary and influential paradigm:

activities that once animated the vaudeville stage – music and dance, comedy and melodrama, daring feats of skill – all these can today be read as cultural performances, as the living, embodied expression of cultural traditions and transformations. Today, the most common uses of this performance concept still come in the contexts of theater, film, and television [...]. However, cultural performance extends far beyond those genres often considered 'mere' entertainment. Over the past five decades, the presentational forms associated with theatrical performance have been transformed into analytical tools, generalized across disciplinary fields, and reinstalled in diverse locations. Anthropologists and folklorists have studied the rituals of both indigenous and diasporic groups as performance, sociologists and communication researchers have analyzed the performance of social interactions and nonverbal communication, while cultural theorists have researched the everyday workings of race, gender, and sexual politics in terms of performance. Here, Richard Schechner's concept of 'restored behavior' – as the living

313 R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd edition, London–New York 2013, p. 5; hereinafter PS, followed by the page number.

reactualization of socially symbolic systems – has been one of the most widely cited concepts of cultural performance. [PE 8]³¹⁴

John Langshaw Austin, one of the undisputed precursors of performance studies and leading proponents of *perform*- prefixes would certainly be surprised by the level of their success – just like Jacques Derrida, who could never comprehend the proliferation of the word ‘deconstruction’, or Jean-François Lyotard, who was baffled by the popularity of the term ‘postmodernism’, especially since Austin himself considered the word ‘performative’ to be ‘ugly’ and was uncertain whether it would have any special significance.³¹⁵ After all, his first lectures on performative utterances delivered in the 1950s were not even especially popular. There is a difference, however, between Austin’s performative speech act and performance as it has long functioned in theatre studies and more recently in contemporary theory.³¹⁶ Still, contemporary performance studies and its focus on the relationship between language and action (or more broadly, between various forms of expression and action)³¹⁷ is heavily indebted to Austin. Regardless of how one evaluates Austin’s views (and this continues to be a controversial issue), his theories undoubtedly bridged the gap between language(s) and experience (and even life as such) opened up by de Saussure, thus offering a new perspective to non-dualistic thinking about language and reality.

The key feature of contemporary performance studies today is its interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary character: performance studies combines artistic and non-artistic social and cultural practices, and theatrical and quasi-theatrical (or paratheatrical) practices within a single research methodology [PS 8]. One could even say that ‘performativity’, and not ‘performance’ itself, as found in many cultural phenomena, is the most universal category with which performance studies deals, and one requiring thorough reflection and careful

314 It is worth noting that McKenzie considered the works of John J. MacAloon to be among the most important studies of the history of this research paradigm, specifically his Introduction to the anthology *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (1984) and his Introduction to Carol Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson’s book *Performance: Texts and Contexts* (1993), whereas he considers M. Carlson’s *Performance: A Critical Introduction* [PE 8] to be the first work entirely devoted to the development of cultural performance.

315 See J. L. Austin, ‘Performative Utterances’, in *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford 1979, p. 233.

316 The meaning of this term has also undergone many modifications, a subject I deal with later in this chapter.

317 Most scholars in performance studies today (e.g. Erika-Fischer-Lichte) make (often frequent) references to Austin’s theories.

consideration. Initially embraced in the area of philosophy of language and theatre studies, performance studies was later employed in aesthetics, anthropology, history, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, ethnography, and many other areas [PS 9].³¹⁸ Due to its interdisciplinary character, performance studies has managed to bring together such various (both methodologically and chronologically) disciplines as theatre studies (Richard Schechner, Marvin Carlson, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Jon McKenzie, Thomas Richards, and John Loxley), anthropology (Victor Turner, Renè Girard, and Clifford Geertz), sociology (Erving Goffman and Guy Debord), and aesthetics (besides Erika Fischer-Lichte, also Gianni Vattimo, Richard Schusterman, and Odo Marquard). Moreover, 'performativity' has also left its mark on philosophy and literary criticism (especially thanks to Jacques Derrida and the Yale school of deconstruction, as well as their critics Rodolphe Gasché and Derek Attridge). English-speaking postmodernist scholars (including Linda Hutcheon, Ihab Hassan, and Hal Foster), the term 'performativity' have applied the notion to postmodernist literature (of the 1960s and later), its avant-garde precursors (including James Joyce and Dada),³¹⁹ other postmodernist cultural practices, and even to postmodernist culture as such.

In the case of philosophy, the influence of 'performativity' can be seen in changing critical views on the nature of philosophical thought, on philosophy as a discipline, and on knowledge as a means of philosophical verification (especially in the works by Lyotard), as well as in new forms of philosophical discourse (especially in Derrida's practices). The concept of performativity has also been applied to philosophy in the works of other postmodern thinkers, especially in those of Gilles Deleuze and his theory of *difference*.³²⁰ In fact, some traces of 'performative' thinking can even be seen in earlier works by such thinkers as Nietzsche, Freud, and Kierkegaard. When it comes to literary studies, some attempts are made to reformulate traditional models of literary theory (including

318 They 'left' the field of theatre studies, forming a separate field, Performance studies, whose area of interest concerns all possible (not only theatrical) manifestations of performativity.

319 See e.g. two very interesting books: R. Poirier, *The Performing Self*, New York 1971, and J. Kutnik, *The Novel as Performance: The Fiction of Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman*, Carbondale 1986. Erika Fischer-Lichte and Marvin Carlson, among others, have written about the links between postmodern aesthetics and performative practices. I discuss this in more depth later in the book.

320 See esp. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P.R. Patton, New York 1994, and *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester and C. Stivale, New York 1990.

in particular literary hermeneutics) and literary discourse in the spirit of 'performativity'. Such attempts have been influenced by the works of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, and others.³²¹ The general direction of these changes, both in philosophy and literary criticism, can be aptly described in the words of McKenzie: 'the presentational forms associated with theatrical performance have been transformed into analytical tools.' And the best example of the practical implementation of McKenzie's words is the interpretational practices of Jacques Derrida. It is also worth adding that these relations between philosophy, literary criticism, and performance studies have been and remain mutually beneficial. For just as performance studies has rejuvenated many humanistic disciplines which had been previously isolated in their autonomy and traditional divisions, postmodern philosophers have likewise influenced the conceptualization, vocabulary, and methodology of performance studies.

It should also be noted that the phenomenon of the performative turn has numerous parallels with other twentieth-century artistic practices and corresponding developments in the humanities. In fact, in all disciplines where one can observe the influence of the performative turn, the gap between knowledge (criticism) and art and, accordingly, between critical discourse and artistic language, has narrowed. In this sense, as rightly pointed out by Erika Fischer-Lichte, the performative turn in the arts has had a significant impact on the performative turn in the humanities. What is more, according to Fischer-Lichte, the performative turn in the arts, including theatre, literature, the visual arts, music, and even architecture, has blurred the boundaries between separate artistic disciplines, and consequently

not only made each art form more performative but also led to the creation of a new genre of art, so-called action and performance art. The boundaries between these diverse art forms became increasingly fluid – more and more artists tended to create events instead of works of art [...]. [TP 18]

All of these developments, in turn, profoundly influenced perceptions on the status of the work of art. The general framework within which art had been traditionally defined was reshaped, especially in terms of the relations between subject and object, materiality and referentiality, work and event, distance and immediacy. Moreover, 'the traditional distinction between the aesthetics of

321 See e.g. a fundamental and very early work on the subject: E. Bruss, *Beautiful Theories. The Spectacle of Discourse in Contemporary Criticism*. Baltimore-London 1972; hereinafter BT, followed by the page number.

production, work, and reception as three heuristic categories,' was also questioned or even shown to be outdated altogether [TP 18]. According to Fischer-Lichte, the strongest reforming impulses in the field of aesthetic theory, i.e. the need to reformulate it into an 'aesthetics of performativity,' originally arose from within artistic practices. As Fischer-Lichte argues, numerous 'artistic events' in twentieth-century art created direct contact with the audience and even encouraged its active participation, thus questioning the traditional status of a work of art (as detached, holistic, static and created as a result of an earlier creative process). As a result, it became necessary to formulate a completely new aesthetics that would assimilate these dynamic aspects of new and changing artistic practices. It should also be added that similar transformations could be noticed in poststructuralist literary studies and criticism, where traditional distinctions between language (literature) and metalanguage (theory of literature and literary hermeneutics), and between the object (literary text) and the subject of criticism, were being questioned.

As I have pointed out earlier, the performative turn did not only affect art and aesthetics but also the humanities in general. For example, as Ewa Domańska has aptly noted:

In recent years, one can observe a special interest in performance and performativity in the contemporary Anglo-American humanities – a phenomenon known as the 'performative turn'. The word 'performance' has become as popular in the humanities as the word 'text'. It could be said that the word 'performance' has become an umbrella term and that all actions can actually be described as performances. Everything was sued to describe as a 'text' and nowadays it is defined in terms of performance. [ZP 48]

Domańska claims that the performative turn (especially in the humanities in the United States) led to significant transformations in humanistic discourse, although, contrary to Fischer-Lichte, she does not seem to recognize the importance of developments in the arts in this process.³²² Domańska is much more interested in the openness of performance studies to new and emerging phenomena, emphasizing 'adaptation of the humanities (and especially humanistic methodology and theory) to the challenges of contemporary culture' [ZP 52]. Domańska has also tried to specify the most important properties of the performative turn. In her opinion, among its most observable tendencies are a focus on the category of change and the influence of posthumanism on contemporary performance studies research, i.e., its interest in non-human beings, which are endowed with 'agency' and treated on a par with people [ZP 53]. Such thinking

322 She only notes that many researchers of performance are also active artists [ZP 51–52].

can also be noticed especially in the works of Bruno Latour³²³ and Andrew Pickering. By ‘non-human beings’ (a term used in posthumanistic performance art), Domańska means various artifacts (objects and inanimate matter) and ecofacts (natural beings) which actively affect reality in the same way as human subjects [ZP 57]. The scholar also comments on the significant changes taking place in epistemology and the accompanying transformations in models of knowledge brought about by the development of performance studies. Cognitive processes have taken on a more ‘empathetic’ character: knowing subjects agents formulate their own thoughts and research strategies in various communities, where they participate in these strategies together with others, leading the methods of acquiring knowledge to become, as Dwight Conquerwood puts it, ‘open to play.’ The position of the researcher in relation to the object of research has also changed: distance has given way to authentic engagement, while interventionism and cooperation have taken centre stage in methodology [ZP 60]. Indeed, Domańska’s findings, similarly to McKenzie’s diagnoses, make one realize just how influential the performative turn has become: it has led to a complete reformulation of the ontological and epistemological foundations underpinning the traditional scientific paradigm.

Richard Schechner,³²⁴ the undisputed spiritual father of performance studies in the United States, the founder and professor of performance studies at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, the editor of the quarterly *TDR/The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies*, the editor-in-chief of *Worlds of Performance* (published by Routledge), and the director and founder of The Performance Group (whose productions included *Commune*, *Dionysus in ‘69* and many others), would certainly agree with these views. It was Schechner who in 1980 transformed the Graduate Drama Department at New York University into the Department of Performance Studies [PS 20], providing an impulse for similar transformations in many other American academic institutions. Schechner also contributed to the popularization of performance studies as a

323 See e.g. B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005; B. Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences Into Democracy*, Cambridge 2004; and B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. C. Porter, Cambridge 1993.

324 It is worth noting that Schechner comes from a Jewish-German family connected with Poland (his father was a Jew from Lesser Poland). Jerzy Grotowski, Ryszard Cieślak (whom he met for the first time in the United States in 1967) and Tadeusz Kantor had a great influence on his thinking about performance. Schechner writes about this in the Foreword to the Polish edition of *Performance Studies*.

new interdisciplinary research discipline in universities both in the United States and elsewhere, including Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, and Australia. According to Schechner, two main trends can be seen in the development of performance studies in the United States. The first trend, often associated with New York University, grew out of the study of theatre practices and experimental performance, and the links between performance and social, feminist, queer, post-colonial,³²⁵ and poststructuralist studies. The second trend, with its roots at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, focuses to a greater extent on the study of relationships between performance and communication theory, rhetoric, speech act theory, and ethnography. With time, however, Schechner adds, performance studies found its way into other American universities [PS 5], subsequently spreading to other English-speaking countries and Europe. Already in 1989, Schechner noted that (as McKenzie also points out)

since the mid-'70s there has been an immense body of performance studies work. It is not possible to name even a fraction of the scholars – some well known, some just emerging – currently working the field. [PE 39]³²⁶

The spectacular rise of performance studies (especially in the United States) is also discussed by Schechner. He describes in detail numerous programs, research goals and courses listed on the websites of various universities and research centres which have systematically embraced performance studies or some aspects of it. Schechner also lists theatre, literature, cultural, anthropological, sociological, and historical studies departments that have transformed themselves into centres of performance studies. From this brief, yet informative, description of performance studies as an academic discipline, we can see just how broad the field has become.

Richard Schechner and other scholars have also confirmed its deeply-rooted interdisciplinarity. It can even be said that performance studies is not a separate discipline *per se*, but rather a discourse that incorporates various humanistic disciplines (and not only), and at the same time questions them, transforming traditional concepts, research areas, and terminology. Contemporary performance studies are thus both interdisciplinary (Schechner pays special attention to the 'inter-' prefix) and transdisciplinary. In fact, it could also be called

325 See [PS 12].

326 McKenzie and several other scholars of performance studies have recently voiced their opposition to the hegemony of Schechner and the 'New York' line of performative research. See e.g. *Contesting Performance. Global Sites of Research*, ed. J. McKenzie, et al., New York 2010.

meta-disciplinary insofar as it reformulates the conceptual framework of numerous disciplines, including philosophy and literary studies. Jon McKenzie even claims that performative studies are radically transforming the traditional concept of 'discipline' itself, a position implied by the (sub)title of his book *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. Indeed, according to McKenzie, performance as a concept not only revolutionizes how we think about many social, artistic, and cultural phenomena, but also transcends or even completely obliterates traditional boundaries between various disciplines. It can thus be said that McKenzie agrees with Schechner's diagnosis in the first pages of *Perform or Else*, where he states that 'the one overriding and underlying assumption of performance studies is that the field is open' [PS 1]. However, the fact that so many 'perform-' compounds have become so popular in the humanities in the United States and worldwide does not mean that the study of the humanities in America began developing in a new and unknown direction in the wake of the ethical and political turn. Rather, thanks to the rise of performance studies, the demands for the involvement, action and active participation of humanists in social and cultural practices have been provided with a sound theoretical foundation and a new conceptual framework. Indeed, as Marvin Carlson points out:

This growing interest in the cultural dynamics embedded in performance and theatrical representation itself was primarily stimulated by a materialist concern for exposing the operations of power and oppression in society.³²⁷

Drawing on Derrida, Peggy Phelan, in turn, in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* explains that

Unmarked examines the implicit assumptions about the connections between representational visibility and political power which have been a dominant force in cultural theory in the last ten years. Among the *challenges* this poses is how to retain the power of the unmarked by surveying it within a theoretical frame.³²⁸

McKenzie's book poses a challenge that he describes as 'perform – or else: be socially normalized' [PE 9] in order to emphasize the dynamic potential of performance(s) to subvert and contest traditional social, institutional, and political structures. It is easy here to notice the affinities with the thoughts of Derrida, to whom McKenzie refers repeatedly in his book.

327 M. Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed., New York 2004, p. 184. Hereinafter P, followed by the page number.

328 P. Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London-New York. 1993, p. 1. Cited in [PE 32].

Of course, it would be difficult to say which came first: the performative turn or the ethical and political turn. Such a discussion would echo the chicken or the egg dilemma and essentially lead nowhere. Indeed, especially in the United States, the first clear signs of both of these turns appeared almost simultaneously. And while performance studies as a discipline most certainly addresses much more than just ethical and political issues, these problem areas are among its core research domains (and *vice versa*). The directions in research defined by both turns thus complement and creatively transform one another. Thanks to the interdisciplinary fusion of these two perspectives (as Schechner and Haverkamp also point out), both at the onset of the ethical and political turn, and in later years, when ethical and political reflection in the United States had become a trend within cultural studies, it was possible to clarify the role of “agency”, a crucial matter for both of these trends, and to reformulate the equally key issue of “engagement”, which grew grown out of the demand for a ‘performative’ transformation of social and cultural reality [DIA 27] by means of literature and literary studies. A similar process also took place in many other currents of humanities discourse and in other fields. The concept of ‘performance’ opened up new perspectives for many disciplines, while their most important terms and basic concepts were endowed, to use a ‘performative’ term, with a new energy and dynamics, and were sometimes even completely transformed.

The relationship between the ethical and political currents in the humanities in America (and other English-speaking countries) and performance studies research became increasingly visible, including the way they were inspiring and transforming one another. In the terminology originally taken from Austin’s and Searle’s theory of performatives, which over the next decade incorporated many new ideas coming out of the study of performance in theatre studies,³²⁹ strong emphasis began to be placed on all kinds of activities, events, and experiences, while speech (and other forms of expression) came to be viewed primarily as a certain activity in the social and cultural sphere;³³⁰ meanwhile, performance studies, defined in the curriculum of one of American universities as a ‘new addition’ to other research fields and processes [PW 10], was influencing ethical and political thought by not only providing it with a new conceptual framework,

329 Richard Schechner organizes this sphere of issues in a very useful manner, generally reserving the notion of ‘performativity’ for the linguistic source of the phenomenon, an ‘performance’ for the paratheatrical and theatrical. See [PS] (esp. Chapter 2 ‘What is performance?’ and Chapter 5 ‘Performativity’).

330 See esp. Austin’s book *How to Do Things with Words* and Searle’s *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy In The Real World*, New York 1999.

but also by enriching its vocabulary. Similarly, the term ‘performance’ – which originally referred specifically to paratheatrical practices³³¹ and only later expanded to include a wide variety of activities in the sphere of culture – was used to introduce aspects of performativity, aleatoricity, processuality, experience, and agency to the study of ethical and political issues. As almost all contemporary performance studies scholars emphasize, the opposite was also true. Interest in discursive and textual ethical and political practices also influenced performance studies, providing it with not only a methodology, but also a vocabulary to describe linguistic ways of acting in the social and political sphere. Dwight Conquerwood drew attention to these close links between performative practices research and the ‘new politics’ as early as in 1991. He listed a number of key questions that should be posed in this regard:

what is the relationship between performance and power? How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How does performance accommodate and contest domination?³³²

Drawing on Marvin Carlson’s view on the importance of ethics and politics to the development of performance studies, Jon McKenzie, in turn, stated that:

indeed, within Performance Studies, performance has taken on a particular political significance; with increasing consistency, performance has become defined as a ‘liminal’ process,³³³ a reflexive transgression of social structures. Marginal, on the edge, in the interstices of institutions and at their limits, liminal performances³³⁴ are capable of temporarily staging and subverting their normative functions. Through the study of such genres as demonstrations, political theater, drag, public memorials, performance art, and everyday gestures of social resistance, performance scholars have sought to document and theorize the political practices enacted in performances around the globe. [PE 8–9]

331 I use this term because many performance theorists carefully separate it from traditional ‘theatre’.

332 D. Conquergood, ‘Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,’ *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, ed. D.S. Madison and J. Hamera, Thousand Oaks 2005, p. 361.

333 The term ‘liminal’ in the field of performance studies refers to various issues related issues, not only those concerning the transgression of social structures, as McKenzie suggests, but also other phenomena, such as the specific type of ‘experience’ occurring in ‘performance’, as in the case of Fischer-Lichte’s concept.

334 Later in the present book, I write more about ‘liminality’ as one of the most important features of cultural performance.

Naturally, McKenzie was talking about so-called ‘real-world’ performance practices, which only later became the subject of performance studies. However, referring to the research projects of the first university performance studies departments in the United States, McKenzie also added that:

at the same time, scholars in the Departments of Performance Studies at New York University and Northwestern have used liminal performance as a generative model for theorizing their own institutional practices of research and teaching. [PE 9]

According to McKenzie, ‘to perform culturally’ also meant ‘to foreground and resist dominant norms of social control’ [PE 9]. At the same time, however, the scholar argued that performance reviewed and redefined the Foucauldian concept of ‘power/knowledge’, and, most importantly, abolished its limited and limiting binary nature. McKenzie observes that

modern legitimation operates by opposing knowledge and power, with the latter conceived primarily in negative terms. The asserted objectivity, rationality, and universality of knowledge – not only of its formal truths, but also of its methods of research and teaching, as well as its institutes and universities – purportedly allow it to demystify and master subjective, irrational, and particular forces of power. Performative, postmodern legitimation, however, challenges this opposition and realigns the relation of power and knowledge. [PE 15]

While McKenzie sees in the performative paradigm of thinking a ‘realignment’ of the relations between knowledge and power, he views the exercising of power through knowledge quite differently. Put simply, performative structures of power lack the dynamics of oppression ascribed to such structures by Foucault’s theory of power. Knowledge here is identified above all with ‘information’, while power is defined in terms of ‘productive potential’:

but this realignment of knowledge and power, while troubling to some social critics, also allows us to entertain another reading, one that exposes the specific ways in which knowledge always entails questions of power. Lyotard puts the equation this way: ‘knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?’³³⁵

Drawing on Lyotard’s notion of performativity, McKenzie points out that according to the French scholar, performance is seen as a ‘normative force’. This perspective proved very important for a school of thought that, since the very beginning, has been focused on the links between the performative, the ethical, and the political: gender studies. One of the most important representatives of

335 J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis 1979, pp. 8–9.

such a view on performance is Judith Butler.³³⁶ In her examination of the relationship between the discursive practices and social constructs of gender and gender identity, Butler formulated her own concept of performativity, based both on Austin's theory of speech acts and on Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's concepts. Butler also drew on Foucault and his view of the oppressive nature of performative 'power'. Indeed, as Butler observes:

performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements which, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power. [...] The power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts as discourse.³³⁷

However, it should also be pointed out that Butler defines performativity in a twofold manner. Performativity is both a normative force, which can be seen, for instance, in the practice of 'performative body shaping', that is, in adapting the body to gender standards and a heteronormative model of sexual identity, and a subversive force, present in various transsexual and transgender acts, in which the subversive potential of transvestite performance is the greatest.³³⁸ It is also worth adding that McKenzie cites Herbert Marcuse's celebrated book *Eros and Civilization* (1955) as an early example of treating performance as a 'normative force'. Combining Marx's theory of productive forces with Freud's theory of drives, Marcuse formulated a new reality principle, the 'performance principle', which represented the very essence of alienation. In this case, performative power meant imposing social roles on others. For Marcuse, it was important to realize that, as McKenzie puts it,

individuals not only tolerate performative alienation; through a process of repressive desublimation they can even take pleasure in it. Further, the effects of the performance principle extend throughout society. [PE 16]

336 See J. Butler's numerous books on this subject, in particular the chapter 'Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions' in the previously referenced *Gender Trouble* and her book *Bodies that Matter*, London 1993. See also E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance* (with A. Parker), London–New York 1995, as well as *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham 2003.

337 See esp. J. Butler, 'Critically Queer', *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1993, no. 1, p. 17.

338 J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, London–New York 1993, pp. 84–85. McKenzie also mentions this [PE 15]. Due to the vast number of issues connecting Derrida's deconstruction and performance, I will not deal with Butler's theories here. For more information, please refer to her works, especially *Gender Trouble*.

McKenzie's insightful comments thus prove how deeply interconnected the ethical, the political, and the performative are. Such an approach can also be seen in the works of many American scholars, who are interested in both cultural performance and its impact on social and cultural reality. One American performance studies department describes the discipline in the following manner:

Performance Studies [...] employs performance as an optic through which to examine a variety of representational practices, thereby widening understanding of performance as both a vital artistic practice and as a means to understand historical, social and cultural processes. Performance Studies provides an innovative, integrating, interdisciplinary and intercultural perspective on the continuum of human action, from theatre and dance to public ceremonies, virtual performance and the performance of everyday life, [PS 8]

Undoubtedly, the performative notion of 'agency', and thus the concept of an entity that operates and transforms reality, also corresponds to the demand for humanistic knowledge to be used actively. And as such it also touches upon the changing role of universities. Indeed, as Jacques Derrida puts it:

I am referring to the right to deconstruction as an unconditional right to ask critical questions not only about the history of the concept of man, but about the history even of the notion of critique, about the form and the authority of the question, about the interrogative form of thought. For this implies the right to do it affirmatively and *performatively*, that is, by *producing events*³³⁹ (for example, by writing) and by giving rise to singular oeuvres (which up to now has not been the purview of either the classical or the modern Humanities). With the event of thought constituted by such oeuvres, it would be a matter of making something happen to this concept of truth or of humanity, without necessarily betraying it, that is, to the concept that forms the charter and the profession of faith of all universities.³⁴⁰

For Derrida, as has already been noted, the most significant performative aspect of deconstruction practices involved intervening in social and cultural reality. This was particularly important to Derrida when it came to the most sensitive ethical and political issues, which he did not intend to 'present' or 'describe'. Instead through his (writing) practices, Derrida wanted to produce performative 'events', just as he explained in the quote provided above. Jonathan Culler was right, therefore, in noticing that Derrida was also connecting

339 In both cases, my emphasis – AB.

340 J. Derrida, 'University Without Conditions', *Without Alibi*, trans. P. Kamuf, Stanford 2002, p. 204.

the performative to the general problem of acts that originate or inaugurate, acts that create something new, in the political as well as literary sphere. [...] Both the political and the literary act depend on a complex, paradoxical combination of the performative and constative, where in order to succeed, the act must convince by referring to states of affairs but where success consists of bringing into being the condition to which it refers.³⁴¹

Indeed, for Derrida, writing involved the production of events performatively through language.

Although, as I have already mentioned, performance studies are in general heavily indebted to theatre studies, I will not focus much on the latter. Especially since, as I have already mentioned, research on the specificity of theatrical and paratheatrical performance dates back to the 1960s.³⁴² What is innovative in this context is rather the broadening of the scope of the term 'performance' (so that it applies not only to theatrical forms of cultural activities), and the treatment of performance as a counterweight to 'classic' stage productions (i.e. those based strictly on a dramatic text), or redefining the traditional understanding of 'theatre'.³⁴³ However, while theatrical and cultural practices are seemingly a natural environment for performance and performativity, even with Austin's major contribution to the theory of performative interaction through language, the performativity of a text (be it literary, critical or philosophical) is not at all easy to define. Even Austin himself limited the scope of the performative, applying this term only to very specific speech acts that function in equally specific circumstances (e.g. marriage or baptism, etc.). Contemporary discourse and text analysis testify to the fact that, as McKenzie observes, 'the presentational forms associated with theatrical performance have been transformed into analytical tools,' this process remains somewhat difficult to grasp. In a nutshell, I will not focus on the 'performativity' of culture or the conflict between performance and drama or performance and theatre, but on the endemic context of performativity. This leads to unexpected sources in relation to reading practices, especially those of Jacques Derrida. Yet these sources include not only Derrida's keen insights into changes in literary and theatre practices during the

341 J. Culler, 'Performative language', *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 1997, p. 9.

342 There is a great deal of literature on this subject.

343 I write later in the book about the distinction between 'performance' and 'theatre', which is an important one for performance studies. For this reason, I sometimes use the term 'paratheatrical phenomenon' as an equivalent to performance – such a term appears in the literature on the subject.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also the theory of speech acts developed by Austin and Searle. I am interested, above all, in answering the question of how to endow texts, especially literary and critical texts, with 'agency'. Such a mode of thinking, which draws heavily on the works of Jacques Derrida and the American deconstructionists, is gradually becoming more widely recognized. However, in order to precisely assess the contribution of Derrida's philosophy to performance studies (as well as the influence of performance studies on Derrida's philosophy), a more general perspective should be presented first – this involves tracing the relationship between performative thinking, post-modernity/post-structuralism, and postmodernism.

Performativity and the ‘Post-s’

The contemporary terms ‘performance’ and ‘postmodernism’ are products of the same cultural environment.

Marvin Carlson, *Performance*

The relations between postmodern and poststructuralist theory and the artistic practices associated with postmodernism have proved to be as contentious as the relations between postmodernism, poststructuralism, and the ethical and political turn. After all, both require us to answer the same two questions: did the early ‘post-’ movements contribute to the performative turn in the humanities (and respectively: did postmodernism influence performativity in art and aesthetics)? Or, to the contrary, did performance studies appear as a negative reaction to postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other post-s?

While the first question (concerning the relations between postmodernity, poststructuralism, postmodernist art and aesthetics, and performativity) has been very often addressed in contemporary American and Western performance studies (in particular, in ‘classic’ works by such scholars as Schechner, Carlson, McKenzie, Fischer-Lichte, and others), the second question – and its implied denial of such a relationship – has been pursued by a number of Polish academics. A good example this tendency in Poland is Ewa Domańska’s article “‘Zwrot performatywny’ w humanistyce” [“The Performative Turn” in the Humanities’], cited in the previous section. Let me use it once again as a starting point for discussion. As I have already noted, Domańska accurately identifies the most important features of the performative turn, but follows this with the questionable thesis that the performative turn pushed aside what she globally (and imprecisely) categorizes as ‘postmodernism’, seeing it as anachronistic, outdated, and detached. It is hard for me to agree with Domańska’s claim that ‘the metaphor of the world as a text’ lost its ‘power to explain’ the problems of the contemporary world [ZP 52] and that the performative turn abandoned ‘text’ for the sake of ‘performance.’ It is also hard for me to accept Domańska’s views because numerous contemporary scholars of performance studies, including myself, see a very strong (cause-and-effect) relationship between postmodernity/poststructuralism, postmodernism (defined as a trend

in art and aesthetics), and performance studies. Moreover, many contemporary performance studies scholars find the category of 'text' (as discussed by Derrida, Barthes, and Kristeva) to be highly inspirational, especially when it comes to the process of moving away from the traditional concept of the 'work' towards the broadly defined idea of 'performance.' Thus, contrary to Domańska, I would say that there is continuity and relationality between postmodernity, post-structuralism, postmodernism, and the performative turn, and I will attempt to explain this in more detail. Generally, one could say that although performance studies (broadly defined) goes beyond postmodern and poststructuralist critiques of the humanities, philosophy, literary theory, hermeneutics, etc., and beyond postmodernist concepts of art (and aesthetics), many issues that defined these critiques have significantly impacted performance studies and the terminology it uses. The strongest opinions on the links between 'critical theory,'³⁴⁴ synonymous with postmodernity, poststructuralism, and performance studies, are expressed by McKenzie in *Perform or Else*. In the chapter entitled 'The Theory Explosion', for example, McKenzie observes that performance originally emerged from paratheatrical practices and found its way into 'critical theory' in the humanities in the late 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, McKenzie also believes that the relations between critical theory and performance studies have been mutually beneficial: French and American 'critical theory' introduced new concepts to performance studies and prompted it to reassess its philosophical foundations. In turn, performativity-inspired metatheoretical reflection led to the reevaluation of the autonomous model of modern theory (quintessentially defined by structuralism).

This issue was addressed in a 1992 anthology titled *Critical Theory and Performance*, edited by Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach,³⁴⁵ and often referenced by McKenzie. The essays in the book clearly show the influence of critical thought on the evolving concept of cultural performance. As Reinelt and Roach explain, the main aim of the book was to broaden the methodology of

344 The frequently used term 'critical theory' (used in reference to the early phases of both postmodernity and poststructuralism) means in simplest terms a theory that has questioned the traditional model of 'strong' theory. It is not, therefore, the 'critical theory' of the Frankfurt School, although some similarities in thinking can undoubtedly be found between the two. For example, according to McKenzie, performance theory was influenced simultaneously by French and American 'critical theory', and by the Frankfurt School and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham [PE 40].

345 Ann Arbor 1992.

performance studies, define the key categories of performative discourse, and provide the discipline with a deeper philosophical context. And although, as McKenzie points out, 'such discourse had obviously been employed by earlier performance theorists,' at some point it was important to add to it an 'element of philosophical critique.' Indeed, thanks to critical theory, performance studies could transition 'from *theater* to *theory*.' 'Over the course of the past two and a half decades, the impact of critical theory has helped transform the 'what' and the 'how' of performative efficacy while also contributing to its movement of generalization' [PE 40–41].

McKenzie further observes that

theater, which had served performance scholars as the most productive formal model for analyzing cultural performance, has gradually ceded this role to theory itself. If theater helped performance scholars 'see' performance as embodied practices, critical theory challenged this vision and, indeed, the very field of its theoretical visibility, its form as presence [...] the poststructuralist critique of presence contributed to a whole new series of conceptual shifts within the study of cultural performance. [PE 41]

Reinelt and Roach also emphasize the importance of poststructuralist theory of a 'text' for performance studies, pointing out that:

the new theory has provided a methodology and an impetus to specify the meaning of an old cliché: a text is different on the stage than it is on the page. Theory has done so principally by radically questioning the idea of what a text is.³⁴⁶ [...] Perhaps most important, performance can be articulated in terms of politics: representation, ideology, hegemony, resistance. In a way, theory gives theatre back again to the body politic.³⁴⁷

Indeed, McKenzie in his claims that performance will replace the traditional notion of a discipline in the twenty-first century draws on 'the performance theories of Butler, Lyotard, and Marcuse, as well as readings of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari' [PE 18]. In his vision of removing conventional boundaries between disciplines, the scholar also refers to the works of Jean-François Lyotard [PE 14–15, 18 ff] and Jacques Derrida [PE 21, 40 ff.]. McKenzie argues that Lyotard's views, expressed in *The Postmodern Condition* and elsewhere, on the transformation of paradigms of knowledge, and especially on the collapse of the 'grand narratives' that had earlier validated knowledge,

346 This refers to its undermining the traditional idea of the text, in which it was actually synonymous with a 'work' as a depository of meaning, and not as a concept derived from poststructuralism.

347 Ibid., p. 26, cited from [PE 39].

proved to be little short of revolutionary. McKenzie also emphasizes the significance of Lyotard's diagnosis that we should now move to 'small' narratives (such as performative games that give rise to mutable and situational rules for the legitimization of postmodern knowledge) and essentially treat knowledge pragmatically (not defined by the categories of 'truth' or 'value'). As McKenzie further explains, all of these concepts paved the way for not only the performative turn but also for 'the becoming-performative of knowledge itself' [PE 14]. The suggestion that something like this might 'happen' to knowledge, McKenzie concludes, was first introduced in *The Postmodern Condition*. Indeed, Lyotard here distinguishes between two methods of legitimation: traditional (modern), which employs 'grand narratives,' and postmodern, which aims to 'optimiz[e] the system's performance-efficiency' [PE 14]. Postmodern validation, in opposition to traditional legitimation, is an 'internal' and integral aspect of creating knowledge and not an 'external' determinant. According to McKenzie, Lyotard's views initiated a transition from traditional knowledge to performative knowledge. The French philosopher himself used the term 'performative' to describe this new model of knowledge. McKenzie concludes with the observation that 'in a certain sense, performativity is the postmodern condition: it demands that all knowledge be evaluated in terms of operational efficiency.' [PE 14] Drawing on Lyotard, McKenzie then expands the scope of performativity even further, claiming that it 'extends beyond knowledge; it has come to govern the entire realm of social bonds.' Such a broadly defined concept of 'performativity' ultimately becomes a means for categorizing the general conditions that define the types of performance distinguished by McKenzie: technoperformance, performative management and cultural performance [PE 14].

In his history of performance studies, Richard Schechner also provides a list of names of thinkers who, in his opinion, have had the greatest influence on the discipline. The scholar argues that

Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Guy Debord, and Félix Guattari proposed what were then radical new ways to understand history, social life, and language. Many of these ideas retain their currency even today. [PS 16]

In the chapter titled 'Performativity', Schechner quotes a number of postmodern thinkers who proved inspirational for performance studies. Derrida, for instance, 'contributed' the concepts of 'writing' and '*différance*' [PS 143–146], which provided a philosophical foundation for discussion of the processuality of performance, its productive (and not reproductive) potential, and its general

openness.³⁴⁸ Schechner also draws attention to a more general tendency in the development of the poststructuralist trend, namely that at the very genesis of poststructuralism, there was a demand for concrete 'action' that drew on the notion of performance rather than on Austin's theory of performative speech acts. Such a trend can be observed in the early 1970s. Schechner goes on to explain that

the causes of this situation are not difficult to locate. Once the 'disturbances' of the 1960s were snuffed out, many defeated radicals returned to, or took refuge in, academia. There they won in theory what they could not in the streets. [PS 148]

The radicality of the views of almost all poststructuralists (especially Derrida and Foucault) can be traced back to the subversive atmosphere of the late 1960s.³⁴⁹ Their 'revolutionary' activity in the fields of philosophy, the history of ideas, or literary theory became, in a sense, the equivalent of real-world activities: the political was transferred 'onto paper.'³⁵⁰ This radical approach is clearly visible in the contestant, revisionist, and interventionist nature of deconstruction as well as in Foucault's notion of unmasking the oppressive 'order of discourse.' Schechner, however, claims (especially in the chapter 'Problems with Poststructuralism' [PS 148–151]) that such 'performances on paper' never moved beyond paper, marking instead a return to Austin's theory of speech acts. Schechner expresses his disappointment with this development because, in his view, poststructuralist practices lost their performative dynamism and energy. Yet, in truth, poststructuralists' efforts to bring critical and political activity into the realm of 'theory' was meant to serve as a means for impacting the social and cultural spheres. Their intention was not to tear down the walls of the academy in order to take to the 'streets,' as hinted by Schechner, but rather to transform the humanities and overcome their isolation from the 'real' world. The 'deconstruction' of the systemic foundations of the humanities and the metaphysical paradigms of philosophy, literary theory, and hermeneutics were to serve exactly this purpose. The scholar here accurately identifies a phenomenon that I will try to explain in detail in the following pages, i.e. the fact that many poststructuralist practices were in fact 'performances on paper.' This can be seen, for example,

348 I write in more depth on this subject in the chapter titled 'Textual Performance'.

349 I write in more depth on this subject in my book *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* in the section titled 'Czas wielkich kryzysów'.

350 Although neither Derrida nor Foucault have themselves resigned, of course, from political activity.

in the writings of Derrida, who practiced what might be referred to as 'textual performance.'

Schechner also rightly points out that the contestation of structuralism, and in particular, the undermining of the 'aseptic' model of structuralist 'human sciences' characterized as 'problematic' by Derrida in 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', was from the very beginning political in nature. Poststructuralists claimed, as Schechner rightly emphasizes, that 'structuralism buttressed the status quo socially, politically, and philosophically' [PS 142], while a disappointment with the status quo was a key component of poststructuralist theory and had its origins in politics.³⁵¹ And using Austin's well-known categories (which as we shall see is not without reason), we could even say that the spiritual aura of poststructuralism was 'performative' in contrast to 'constative' structuralism. Indeed, Marvin Carlson argues at the very beginning of his book that

postmodernism and poststructuralism are the bases for academic theories of performativity. Postmodernism and poststructuralism can only be understood if they are examined in relation to each other. Postmodernism is a practice in the visual arts, architecture, and performance art. Poststructuralism, a.k.a. 'deconstruction,' is an academic response to postmodernism. Taken together, they constitute practices and theories of performativity. [...] The first wave of scholars and artists³⁵² – those who devised poststructuralism and practiced postmodernism – were vehemently anti-authoritarian. They elaborated Austin's ideas of performativity in ways that were philosophically, politically, and aesthetically anti-authoritarian. Today's poststructuralists and postmodernists continue this work of subverting the established order of things. [...] Poststructuralists opposed all notions of universals, originals, or firsts. To poststructuralists, every act, every utterance, every idea, is a performative. [PS 141–142]

The influence of poststructuralist ideas and postmodernist artistic practices on performance and performativity is also emphasized by Henry Sayre in *The Object of Performance*. According to Sayre (as quoted by Carlson):

performance, under the influence of poststructuralism, has moved from an 'immanentist aesthetics of presence,' which seeks to transcend history and escape temporality, to an 'aesthetic of absence,' which accepts contingency and the impingement of the quotidian upon art. [P 148–149]³⁵³

351 This was particularly emphasized by Richard Rorty in the aforementioned text 'Deconstruction'.

352 That is, the period from about the mid-1960s to the early 1980s.

353 See H. M. Sayre, 'The Object of Performance: Aesthetics In the Seventies,' *The Georgia Review* 1983, vol. 37, p. 174.

Like McKenzie, Carlson also acknowledges the role postmodernism and post-structuralism (in both their French and American variants) played in providing the methodological and philosophical foundations for performativity. Referring to Lyotard and Derrida, but also to Stanley Fish, Julia Kristeva, and Shoshana Felman, Carlson points out that

This opposition between absence and presence and between structuralist stability and poststructural flux [...] became particularly important for those attempting to develop a theoretical grounding for the rapidly developing new field of performance.³⁵⁴

Like Schechner and Fischer-Lichte, Carlson also recognizes the influence of postmodernism (i.e. postmodernist artistic practices and aesthetics) on performance.³⁵⁵ He states, for instance, that

The contemporary terms 'performance' and 'postmodernism' are products of the same cultural environment, and both have been widely and variously employed to characterize a broad spectrum of activities, especially in arts. [P 137]³⁵⁶

Carlson then continues to enumerate examples of performances which were described as 'postmodern' by their creators, although he himself is more interested in artistic activities that are more serious 'than (...) occasional amused appropriation of a currently fashionable critical term' [P 137]. He also carefully analyzes the structural links between performance strategies and postmodernist art and aesthetics, emphasizing the connections between performance and postmodernist theory (e.g. in the writings of Linda Hutcheon, Ihab Hassan, Hal Foster, Charles Jenks, and others). Similarly to Fischer-Lichte, Carlson also recognizes the role art has played in the transformation of historical, theoretical, and critical discourse.

Indeed, in Carlson's view, postmodernism and poststructuralism to a large degree shaped performativity. For example, Carlson points out that one of the key concepts in contemporary performativity originally appeared in one of Lyotard's lesser known works, (*Des Dispositifs Pulsionnels* published in 1973):

354 M. Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed., New York 2004, p. 51. This fragment is not found in the first edition, generally cited throughout the book.

355 He devoted an entire separate part of his book to this topic.

356 One of the most outstanding theorists of postmodernism, Ihab Hassan, also drew attention to the strong links between performance and postmodern aesthetics, esp. in his essay on 'The Question of Postmodernism', in *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, ed. H. R. Garvin, *Bucknell Review* 1980, vol. 25, no. 2, to which Carlson also refers [P 137–138].

'a theatre . . . should be built . . . not upon the 'representative substitutions' of signs, but upon the 'libidinal displacements' of flows of psychic energy.'³⁵⁷ Consequently, Lyotard's concept of the fall of 'grand narratives' and the subsequent transition to 'small' narrative games that legitimize postmodern knowledge is, in Carlson's view, one of the most important triggers of the performative turn. According to Carlson, Jean-François Lyotard's highly influential book *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) was purportedly concerned with contemporary science and the problem of knowledge, but as Frederic Jameson observed in his Foreword to the English edition, Lyotard's speculations also had profound implications 'in the directions of aesthetics and economics.' In esthetics, Lyotard's focus upon the event and upon 'performativity' as a working principle of knowledge both profoundly affected postmodern thought about performance.[...] Having lost the support of the metanarratives [...] modern science has split into a host of specialties, each following its own procedures, or language-game, incapable of harmonization with the rest through any appeal to an over-all truth or authority.[...] Says Lyotard: 'no single instance of narrative can exert a claim to dominate narratives by standing beyond it.' This orientation, like that of Bakhtin's performative 'utterance' or de Certeau's 'tactics,' shifts attention from general intellectual or cultural structures to individual events, and from the determination of a general truth or general operating strategy to an interest in 'performativity' – activity that allows the operation of improvisatory experimentation based on the perceived needs and felt desires of the unique situation.³⁵⁸

The last fragment of Carlson's commentary, concerning the shift of attention towards 'individual events' and away from everything that is general and determined by arbitrary rules, the move towards 'performativity' and action, and 'the operation of improvisatory experimentation' conditioned by a specific situation, draws on not only Lyotard but also Derrida. In keeping with Derrida's views, deconstruction is seen as a reading of philosophical and literary texts defined in terms of an 'activity' conditioned by a specific situation – the 'environment' of a text within which it 'works.' Indeed, deconstructions were, by their very nature, performative – they claimed that reading produces critical 'effects' on its own.³⁵⁹ Both Derrida and his commentators point to the 'causative' aspect of a deconstructive reading. For example, in *Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference?* Michael Fischer notes that the most characteristic determinant of

357 M. Carlson, *Performance...*, 2nd ed., p. 57.

358 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

359 I described this in detail in my book *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*, especially in the section titled 'Recepta na dekonstrukcję.' For this reason, I recall here only the most important aspects of the performative dimension of Derrida's 'strategic' deconstruction, and place more emphasis on his later writing practices, which from the perspective of the present book seem much more relevant.

Derrida's philosophy is not postulating (e.g. creating discourse or theory of difference) but 'making' a difference (i.e. creating effects that transcend the process of reading).³⁶⁰ The ambiguity of the phrase 'to make a difference' used by Fischer in the title of his text is both an allusion to the manner in which deconstruction 'works' and to a distinct difference between Derrida's theory and traditional philosophical concepts. Deconstructions, Fischer emphasizes, do not only *describe* but also *make* something. Thus, deconstructions take the form of open-ended processes whose outcomes are often unpredictable. Such a view would certainly be accepted by Derrida himself, who often referred to deconstruction as an 'action' or 'operation,' emphasizing its 'economic'³⁶¹ and 'performative' and not conceptual character. Indeed, Derrida once summarized deconstruction with the following statement: 'it 'is' only what it does.'³⁶²

In 'A Letter to a Japanese Friend,' the only text devoted to deconstruction as such, Derrida juxtaposes 'clear and univocal signification' with its 'use value.' In trying to explain what deconstruction does, the French scholar does not define the term nor does he investigate its etymology. Instead of answering the question 'what is it?,' Derrida demonstrates 'how deconstruction works.' He does not attempt to define the general or universal sense of deconstruction, but instead emphasizes that it is an 'event' – unique, situational, and contextual. The practice of deconstruction, Derrida argues, may only be defined in terms of its pragmatic effectiveness. Therefore, in keeping with Derrida's views, numerous scholars have

360 M. Fischer, 'Does Deconstruction Make any Difference?' *The Textual Sublime. Deconstruction and its Differences*, ed. H. J. Silverman and G. A. Aylesworth, Albany 1990, p. 23.

361 Cf. the following terms used by Derrida in reference to strategic deconstruction: 'general economy' [PO 41], 'focal points of economic condensation' [PO 40], 'my own 'economy' (in a conversation with Attridge, [AL 62]). The terms 'economics' and 'economic' play a very important role in Derrida's discourse, replacing ontological qualifications. In a single interview with Attridge, the term 'economics' appears at least a dozen times, mainly in relation to the performative character of Derrida's philosophy (the term 'performativity' appears equally often in this interview). The notion of 'economics' in relation to reading is also meant to draw attention to the practical nature of certain terms and concepts used by Derrida, and even to their performative effectiveness (e.g. the effectiveness of 'literature' as a kind of 'critical category' in relation to 'philosophy'; see AN 344–347), and thus its causative power, its ability to induce concrete 'practical effects'. See also on this subject: *Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms and Other Small Seismism*, w *The States of 'Theory'*. *History, Art and Critical Discourses*. ed. D. Carrol. New York 1989, p. 85.

362 J. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. S. Weber and J. Mehlman, Evanston 1988, p. 141.

postulated that we should no longer ask 'what is deconstruction?' but rather, 'what does it do?', 'what does it make?', or 'what does it perform?'³⁶³ Since 1972, however, that is, since the publication of *Dissemination* (and specifically the text 'The Double Session'), Derrida ceased to practice deconstruction in a form that he described as 'strategic,' and whose 'exemplary' version was presented in *Of Grammatology*. Derrida moved instead to 'reading-writing' (*lecture-écriture*)³⁶⁴ literary and philosophical texts, which proved to be extremely performative. Ann Jefferson describes this style of Derrida's writing as 'the rhetoric of exposition' in which language functions 'on a stage'. What Derrida wanted to convey through his practices, Jefferson points out, was not described but demonstrated.³⁶⁵ And thanks to this, to put it in Barthes's terms, Derrida's philosophical writing was much more like a 'theatrical performance than a doctrine.'³⁶⁶ David Wood, in fact, claims that '[Derrida] is engaged in a theatrical re-animation of the textual space.'³⁶⁷ And consequently, Wood argues, a distinguishing feature of Derrida's philosophy is its 'performative reflexivity' [PL 132]. Respectively, Samuel Weber in his monumental study *Theatricality as Medium* devoted to 'theatre' as a philosophical category lists Derrida among the most 'theatrical thinkers.'³⁶⁸

363 D. J. Anderson, 'Deconstruction: Critical Strategy/Strategic Criticism', in *Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. G. D. Atkins and L. Morrow, Amherst 1989.

364 I write more about this important connection in Derrida's project in the chapter titled 'Lekturografia. Derridowska filozofia czytania' in my book *Anty-Teoria literatury*, where I also proposed the term 'lecturography' [Pol. lekturografia] in order to avoid the awkward word cluster 'reading-writing'.

365 A. Jefferson, 'Structuralism and Poststructuralism', in *Modern Literary Theory. A Comparative Introduction*, ed. A. Jefferson and D. Robbey, London 1982, p. 111.

366 Barthes' term; see 'Authors and Writers', in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. S. Sontag, New York 1983, pp. 185–193.

367 See D. Wood, 'Reading Derrida: An Introduction', in *Derrida. A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Wood, Cambridge 1992, p. 3.

368 S. Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, New York 2004, p. 2; hereinafter TM, followed by the page number. For instance, Weber dedicated his book, published in 2004 after Derrida's death, in the philosopher's memory. It should also be noted that Weber says his reflections on the theatricalisation of thinking stem from the combination of his academic experience and his practical work as a playwright of theatrical and opera productions in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. This combination – as Weber emphasizes in the Preface – was of crucial importance for the development of his concepts. This reflects something that can also be observed in Derrida: the intervention of artistic practices in speculative thought.

Insightful comments by Jefferson, Wood, and Weber require in-depth reflection and extension. However, one should first ask in what sense is Derrida considered 'the most theatrical thinker'? And what exactly is the essence of the 'theatrical re-animation of the textual space' practiced by Derrida? And finally, how does all this apply to Derrida's 'performative reflexivity'? Indeed, considering that in contemporary performativity there is a sharp distinction between 'theatre' and 'performance,' we must start with the question: what understanding of 'theatricality' may be applied to the philosophy of Jacques Derrida? Samuel Weber's *Theatricality as Medium* will come in handy in answering all these questions, especially in determining the connection between a specific vision of theatricality and the idea of performativity in Derrida's philosophy.

Two ‘Theatres’

[There exists a] *tension between the effort to reduce the theatrical medium to a means of meaningful representation by enclosing its space within an ostensibly self-contained narrative, and the resistance of this medium to such reduction.*

Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*

In *Theatricality as Medium*, Weber analyzed the notions of ‘theatre’ and ‘theatricality’ in a philosophical context from Antiquity to the modern day. His main aim was to compare two different attitudes present in Western thought, which can be described as the ‘metaphysical’ and ‘critical’ traditions in thinking about ‘theatre.’ The metaphysical tradition, as Weber explained using Derridean terms, was related to the persistent ‘efforts’ of the Metaphysics of Presence ‘to appropriate theater for its purposes’ [TM 2], and in consequence, ‘to reduce the *theatrical medium* to a *means* of meaningful representation.’ These, somewhat ambivalent, ‘efforts’ date back to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, as Weber explains:

Theater is a medium that, from Plato to Aristotle to the present, has been regarded with suspicion, fear, and contempt – but also with fascination and desire – by a tradition seeking at all cost to keep the ground from slipping out from under its feet.³⁶⁹ [TM 30]

The ‘critical’ tradition differs completely from the ‘metaphysical’ tradition described above. According to Weber, it attempts to liberate ‘theatre’ and ‘theatricality’ from the influences of the Metaphysics of Presence. Its representatives include both twentieth-century practitioners of theatre (such as Artaud, Genet, and Brecht) and philosophers (from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Adorno, Benjamin, Deleuze, and Derrida) who employed a (deconstructed) ‘theatricality’, liberated from metaphysics, in their philosophical projects.

Weber begins his book by tracing the etymology of the words ‘theory’ and ‘theatre’: The term *theatre* has the same etymology as the term *theory*, from the Greek word *Thea*, designating ‘a place from which to observe or to see.’ [TM 2–3]

369 This is a clear reference to the Metaphysics of Presence.

This combination of 'theory' and 'theatre' initiated a process that subsequently led to the appropriation of 'theatricality' by metaphysics – the 'First Theory' of being. Martin Heidegger writes on this topic in 'Science and Reflection':

The word 'theory' stems from the Greek verb *theōrein*. The noun belonging to it is *theoria*. Peculiar to these words is a lofty and mysterious meaning. The verb *theōrein* grew out of the coalescing of two root words, *thea* and *horaō* (cf. theater) is the outward look, the aspect, in which something shows itself, the outward appearance in which it offers itself. Plato names this aspect in which what presences shows what it is, *eidōs*. To have seen this aspect, *eidēnai*, is to know [*wissen*]. The second root word in *theōrein*, *horaō*, means: to look at something attentively, to look it over, to view it closely. Thus it follows that *theōrein* is [...] to look attentively on the outward appearance wherein what presences becomes visible and, through such sight – seeing – to linger with it. [...] [T]hen *theōria* is the reverent paying heed to the unconcealment of what presences. Theory in the old, and that means the early but by no means the obsolete, sense is *the beholding that watches over truth*.³⁷⁰

We can see in Heidegger's comments that 'theory' requires a connection to 'theatre', and that this connection is established through 'seeing' or 'looking', defined not so much in terms of 'sight' (a sensory perception) but as grasping the 'essence' (*eidōs*) of something. This near instantaneous jump from sensual vision to extra-sensual metaphysical philosophy was, of course, rooted in Plato, according to whom extrasensory seeing was supposed to lead to one's 'maturation' and the acquisition of 'knowledge', which Heidegger then defines as 'the beholding [of theory] that watches over truth.' As he had many time before, Plato presented a set of concepts that are useful for his philosophical system, beginning with sensory vision, followed by extrasensory vision, then knowledge, and finally, truth. Although 'sensory vision' and materiality were the first elements in Plato's system, they were eventually removed from this system, which now favoured what was rational, ideal, and intangible. Weber rightly points out that the etymology of the word 'theory' evokes 'theatricality' (as a synonym for 'that which is shown', that is 'visible') only to immediately efface it, as the 'visible' becomes the 'conceptual' and is thus 'purified' of all sensuality. Similarly, the meaning of the word '*oreō*' (despite the fact that it originally meant 'to see something with one's own eyes') changed as well. It no longer referred to sensual 'vision' but to 'capturing the essence' of something, the 'viewing' of which was non- and extra-sensory (and thus, e.g. 'to see something clearly' meant simply 'to realize something' or 'to see the truth'). 'Theatricality' (or the 'spectacularity of the

370 M. Heidegger, 'Science and Reflection', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W Lovitt, New York 1977, pp. 163-165.

spectacle') was thus stripped of its material and sensory layer. This procedure would be repeated some years later by Edmund Husserl, a faithful student of Plato, for whom the 'empirical-sensual' sphere was merely a 'place of transition', the medium through which *eidos* or 'the essence' of phenomena was revealed.³⁷¹ Thus, the outward appearance wherein presence becomes visible is not ultimately an 'appearance', a product of visual perception, but the 'viewing of essence'. The transition from the sensible to the ideal is clearly 'visible' in the philosophy of Plato, who appears to be fascinated with 'visibility', while, in fact, he deprives it of its proper function. Such a shift in meaning was grounded in Plato's dualistic system (later adopted by the Metaphysics of Presence), i.e. a sharp opposition between, to quote Derrida, 'the sensible' and 'the intelligible.' The metaphysical systems founded on this opposition, seen as foundational, favoured, as Derrida puts it in *Of Grammatology*, 'intelligibility, [...] the ideality which is not fortuitously affiliated with the objectivity of *theōrein* or understanding' [DF 5]. This basic opposition (and hierarchy) downplayed the sensible (and visual perception) because it threatened the conceptual 'purity' of the metaphysical system. And thus while the ancient concept of 'theory' evoked the idea of 'theatre', it also deprived 'theatricality' of any traces of the sensible and the material. The 'show' went on but only in the sphere of the ideal because its leading 'actor' was immaterial 'being'. Why then was there a connection between the philosophical concept of 'theory' and 'theatre' (clearly visible in the etymology of both words)? Weber's answer is as follows: to 'protect the truth' but maintain a safe distance in doing so:

The privileging of sight over the other senses, especially hearing, which is implied in the currency of words such as *theory* and *theater* [...] often results from the desire to secure a position from which things can be viewed and *controlled*, from a distance that ostensibly permits one to view the object in its entirety while remaining at a safe remove from it. The desire for exteriority and control has always felt both threatened by and attracted to a certain conception of theater. [TM 3]

Through its connection to the ancient Greek sense of the word 'theory', 'theatre' became subordinate to the interests of metaphysics. On one hand, such a move established the connection between 'vision' and 'theory' that was so important for the latter. On the other, the threat of sensual perception, always subordinate to the purely spiritual, was eliminated. At the same time, the metaphysical concept of 'theatre' was marked by ambivalence: one could see in it, as Weber

371 See E. Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy, Book 1*, trans. D.O. Dahlstron, Indianapolis 2014.

notes, an 'infatuation' with visual perception (which 'theatricality' implies) and a fear of 'polluting' the metaphysical system with the sensible. More problematic, Weber adds, was that 'theatre' came to be associated not only with 'visibility' but also with 'false appearances' and 'distorting the truth'. By appropriating 'theatre' on behalf of 'theory', classical Greek metaphysics was thus forced to cleanse 'theatricality' from 'theatre' by transforming sensual vision into spiritual 'vision' and establishing an ontological line of division – the boundary between truth/reality and falsehood/appearance (of course with more value assigned to truth and reality). The best example of such a semantic and ontological shift is Plato's famous allegory of the cave, which, as Weber suggests, can be read as a 'staging of a scenario with strong, if negative, theatrical connotations' [TM 3]. Plato's allegory of the cave also conveys the ambivalence about 'theatre' found in Greek philosophy. By assigning the cave clear 'theatrical' connotations, Plato ultimately condemned theatre.³⁷²

As we know, the main goal of Plato's parable was to show the limitations of ordinary human existence in a situation in which man has no access to philosophy, which could bring him Enlightenment. Thus, the 'cave', in the form in which it appears in Plato's text, may be considered a 'particular kind of theatre', although the philosopher (except for one small detail) did not use this term. However, the situation in the cave was arranged like a theatrical performance, though with some significant differences. For one, the 'viewers' were 'chained' to their seats so that they could watch the 'spectacle' only from one perspective, which they took for granted because they did not know that a different one was possible. The entire situation resembled a puppet show or, better yet, a 'shadow play'. There was a hole at the top of the cave with, as Plato explained, 'a path along which you must picture a low wall'. Along the wall there were 'people carrying all sorts of implements which project above it, and statues of people, and animals made of stone and wood [...]'.³⁷³ At this point in the story, the theatrical connotations become evident. Plato (through the words of Socrates) thus described the properties of the 'wall': '[it is] like the screen which hides people when they are giving a puppet show, and above which they make the puppets appear.' The lighting was also very theatrical: 'they [the people in the cave] have light from a distant fire, which is burning behind them and above them.'³⁷⁴

372 In Weber's proposal on how to read Plato, we can hear clear echoes of Derrida's deconstructive readings of the Greek philosopher's writings, such as that in his book *Dissemination*.

373 Plato, *The Republic*, trans. T. Griffith, Cambridge 2000, p. 220.

374 Ibid.

Indeed, just like in a real theatre, the 'viewers' could not identify the source of the light, and just like in a Chinese 'shadow play', the 'viewers' were not able to see the 'people carrying implements' but only their shadows and the shadows of the objects being carried. The message of the Platonic parable was clear: the people trapped in the cave could only see the false appearances of things, and these appearances were mistaken for reality. Plato's alternative to this shadow play was a difficult and arduous but ultimately liberating 'ascent' towards the sun where one could see things as they really were.³⁷⁵ In 'the world above, the world of ideas and of truth', as Weber explains, there were

No shadows or obscurities, no echoes, projections, or simulacra: only light as it is and things as they are, in and of themselves: such is the dream of liberation, which would leave behind the cavernous nightmare of theater [TM 8]

Plato would construct a similar system in reference to *mimesis*. On one hand, he placed imitation within a metaphysical context; on the other, he criticized it for creating a copy of a copy, twice removed from the original. Consequently, Plato banished poets from his ideal state. The Greek philosopher referred to a quintessentially theatrical context only to denounce it for the sake of true reality. Weber explains that Plato's 'condemnation of theater'

Sets the scene, as it were, for all successive attempts to determine the precise place – ontologically, epistemologically, ethically, politically – of theater and all of its 'special' effects, including spectators and actors, stages and their 'props', lightning, sound, and perhaps *effectiveness* in general. Insofar as one proceeds from a presumption of self-identity and self-presence, all departures from their putative self-enclosure – and theater entails just such a departure – are to be vigilantly controlled, if not condemned. Theater marks the spot where the spot reveals itself to be an ineradicable macula, a stigma or stain that cannot be cleansed or otherwise rendered transparent, diaphanous. [TM 6–7]

The condemnation of theatre may therefore be linked to a metaphysical desire for presence and identity. The Platonic model of theatre was based on a sharp opposition between reality and appearance: the 'viewers' remained forever distant from the 'truth' and 'reality'. Such a dualistic mode of thinking was also visible in the spectacle itself: real things carried by people behind the wall stood in opposition to their shadows. According to Plato, in order to discover the truth, one needed to escape from the world of false appearances. Weber, in turn, adds that though Plato was predominantly interested in maintaining the duality of truth and false appearances and promoting the notions of presence, truth, and

375 See Derrida's remarks about the 'violence of light' in the metaphysical tradition. [WD 104-114].

reality, he was so blinded by his belief in the metaphysical system that he actually infected it with a 'virus'. This 'virus' deconstructed the system, dismantling the opposition/hierarchy of presence and absence and reality and appearance. The 'virus' turned out to be 'theatre'.

The notions of 'theatre' and 'theatricality' themselves do not imply an opposition between reality and appearance or between truth and falsehood, but suggest the presence of something that lies in between them. To put this in Derridean terms, they exhibit the ability to dismantle such simple divisions. The thing is not so much present as 'shown' and 'played out' onstage: it is both itself and its representation. Or, to put it differently, it is merely a representation of a thing that itself remains 'behind our back', and the reality it references. A theatrical performance contains in itself its own 'truth' while at the same time being 'false'. The theatrical sign is not a sign but an index: it does not replace something that is separate from it (and remain outside of it as its referent) but points to the signified, which results, as Derrida puts it, 'in a deferral'.³⁷⁶ In an indexical relation, the connection between the signifier and signified is 'natural' (and not conventional) and this paradoxical 'artificial naturalness' or 'present absence' defines the very nature of 'theatre'. Therefore, as Weber argues, Plato seemed to intuitively sense the threat that 'theatre' posed to his system, just as years later Husserl would recognize the threat of 'writing' – the written sign in which (unlike in speech) it is impossible to draw a line between material symbol and spiritual meaning.³⁷⁷ Thus, theatre is a 'contamination' in the dualistic system established by Plato because, as Weber points out, in a theatrical performance seemingly pure metaphysical oppositions are not pure at all – it is impossible to separate the material from the spiritual.

Plato was not the only critic of theatre. A similar critical approach may be found in Guy Debord's famous study *The Society of the Spectacle*. As Weber explains, Debord condemned the 'spectacle' as a metaphor of a capitalist society

376 I wrote more about the concept of the sign, so very important to Derrida's thinking, in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*.

377 This problem, noticed by Derrida while reading Husserl's manuscripts, was the first and most important inspiration for his deconstruction project. As the philosopher put it, 'writing' became for him a 'lure', which then loosened the oppositional conceptual construction of metaphysics. It is no coincidence that it is with Plato that the long history of condemning 'writing' in philosophical discourse begins. I write more about this in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*. For more on this subject, see J. Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. L. Lawlor, Evanston 2011.

that indulged in false appearances, paying no attention to real life. In criticizing the spectacle, however, Debord also emphasized the deconstructive potential of 'theatricality':

[the spectacle] [...] is self-generated, and it makes up its own rules. Or: the spectacle [...] is at once united and divided. [...] unity is grounded in a split'. Debord also added that: 'The world the spectacle holds up to view is at once *here* and *elsewhere*'.³⁷⁸ 'This 'at once,' Weber explains, 'constitutes the challenge of theatricality to every system of thought based on the priority of identity and self-presence' [TM 13].

The challenge that 'theatre' poses for metaphysics may be one of the main reasons for Derrida's fascination with 'theatricality'. And even though Weber does not quote Derrida extensively in his study, he is clearly inspired by the French philosopher's fascination with various 'borderline' phenomena, which, thanks to their 'in-between-ness', can deconstruct the architectural structure of the Metaphysics of Presence and expose the arbitrariness of its oppositions. Derrida questions in particular the oppositions between reason and senses, ideality and materiality, reality and appearances, which may all be challenged by 'theatre'. Indeed, instead of the metaphysical *arche* (basis), Derrida opts for 'difference' (*différance*), which defies the oppositions of the Same and Other or the sensible and the intelligible [PO 29] [OG 60–61].³⁷⁹ 'Such oppositions have not the least pertinence to *différance*' [DF 12]. As Derrida notes, unlike the sound and unquestionable basis of Plato, *différance* does not belong to the sensible:

But neither can it belong to intelligibility, to the ideality which is not fortuitously affiliated with the objectivity of *theorein* or understanding. Here, therefore, we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible. [DF 5]

According to Weber, the Derridean concept of *différance*³⁸⁰ could also express the deconstructive (subversive) potential of 'theatricality' – the ability to question established oppositions, which Plato so greatly feared. Like the idea of 'deferred presence' formulated by Derrida, 'theatre' also defers that what was actually presented on the stage. This is precisely why Weber calls Derrida 'a

378 G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, New York 1994, pp. 25, 54 and 37.

379 See also Derrida's interview with R. Montley, p. 99.

380 I discuss the notion of 'difference' in Derrida's philosophy in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* in the chapter titled 'Różnia, różnica, różnicowość...'

theatrical thinker' – Derrida's concept of *différance* evokes the general principle of 'theatricality'.³⁸¹

The metaphysical 'appropriation' of theatre, however, was not only present in the philosophy of Plato. As Weber points out, a similar idea may also be seen in the philosophy of Aristotle. While Plato strived to maintain the opposition/hierarchy of reason and the senses, reality and appearances, truth and falsehood, Aristotle wanted to protect 'unity' – another 'fetish' of Western metaphysics. Weber identifies such an attempt in the Aristotelian concept of tragedy described in the *Poetics*:

Tragedy, he [Aristotle] asserts, involves above all the representation upon the stage of an *action* that is complete, unified, and therefore meaningful. Such meaningful representation of action Aristotle designates, in Greek, the *muthos*, or plot. This is the heart and soul, the goal of tragedy and a fortiori of theater, since tragedy is, for Aristotle, its highest form. [...] Aristotle emphasizes that the didactic value of tragedy is superior to that of the epic by virtue of its compactness and concentration. Tragedy, he insists, should be able to be 'taken in a single view,' [...] in contrast to the epic, which is more extended, more dispersed, and therefore less unified. [TM 256]

Weber argues that the Aristotelian '*synoptic* conception of tragedy' equates 'tragedy' with 'theatre', thus leading to the 'devaluation of everything having to do with mere *opsis*, that is, with the visual, spectacular nature of theater as a scenic medium, rather than with tragedy as its essential manifestation' [TM 256]. For Aristotle, it was *opsis* that posed a threat to the 'unity' of the tragic plot – it disrupted the continuity and coherence of the plot by distracting the viewer. Thus, by subjecting 'theatre' to the Metaphysics of Presence and attempting to satisfy the metaphysical desire for 'unity' and 'coherence', Aristotle destroyed the 'theatrical' in theatre – its 'spectacularity'. Indeed, Aristotle subordinated the 'scenic-medial dimension of theater' to the 'narrative-representational function'. This proved somewhat problematic but Aristotle seemed not to notice it. Weber claims that at the heart of the matter were 'problems in distinguishing theatrical mimesis from that of other media, for instance epic poetry' [TM 257]. That is why, Weber adds, 'Aristotle tries to, as it were, to get the question 'out of the way' early on, so that he can go on to the points that interest him most, concerning above all the structure of the tragic plot' [TM 257]. By identifying 'theatre' with 'tragedy', Aristotle wanted to emphasize the coherence and logical

381 As I have already mentioned, Schechner believed that 'difference' as understood by Derrida was among the concepts that had the greatest influence in inspiring reflection on the nature of performance.

continuity of meanings, subordinating them to a coherent narrative sequence (the tragic plot). Such a scheme, however, came at a price. In Aristotle's view, 'theatricality' became a perfectly transparent medium that should disappear so that meaning could be revealed in its entirety.³⁸² Like Plato (though in a different way), Aristotle also brought 'theatre' to the stage in his system in order to deprive it of 'theatricality' ('spectacularity' and thus also 'materiality'). Because, as Weber explains, if meaning is focused 'within itself'

within the narrative sequence that makes it 'whole,' then the movements of the body on [...] the stage can at best be means toward attaining that end or, as Aristotle insists, to presenting the whole story, the *muthos*, and through it the meaningful action upon which all tragedy is based, its *praxis*. [TM 24]

According to Weber, all these intricate, but from the point of view of the Metaphysics of Presence, understandable conceptual processes which Western philosophy imposed on 'theatre' have one goal: 'Ever since Plato and Aristotle, philosophy has sought to reduce the importance of the scenic, medial dimension by comprehending it primarily as *tragedy*.' [TM 200]. What is more, Plato and Aristotle

in whose work the question of theater as medium is posed, but only to be rapidly disposed of in a way that was to determine much of the history – the thought and practice – of theater in the West [TM 2]

Weber's last diagnosis proves the most significant. Because of his sound grounding in the philosophy of Derrida, Weber also notices that Plato's and Aristotle's understanding of 'theatricality' determined both the 'classical' model of theatre in Western culture and traditional theatrical discourse. Such an understanding is evident in Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, where he accuses theatre of two cardinal sins: turning 'reality on its head' and allowing 'images and representations [to] usurp the role of "reality" and threaten "life"' [TM 11]. In his vision of theatre, Debord drew on metaphysics and, like Plato, assigns attributes to theatre on the basis of which he later condemns it. This 'metaphysical' concept of 'theatre', as Weber rightly points out, also reduced the role of the viewer to 'alienated passivity' [TM 11]. According to Weber, such a mode of thinking about theatre essentially conditioned its classical model, which prevailed in

382 Derrida noticed a similar gesture in the determined metaphysical concept of literature, namely, in the tendency to keep 'writing' out of view and to deny the 'written' status of literature, so that language would become merely a transparent medium for the transfer of meaning.

Western culture up to the beginning of the twentieth century. It subjected performance to the 'transfer' of meaning, and consequently to the requirement for clarity, coherency, and unequivocalty in its message (making 'spectacularity' transparent so that the content could be visible). Ultimately, and here Weber's train of thought comes full circle, 'theatre' was meant to be subordinate to the Metaphysics of Presence, and thus, in a truly metaphysical fashion, seen as 'a theater that is understood to be essentially a vehicle for the presentation of a coherent, meaningful story' [TM 23]. In conclusion, as Weber argues, 'Western audiences have been encouraged to expect the display of such meaning and to demand it from theater and from art in general' [TM 24].

If one were to gather all of Weber's findings, it would become evident that both the 'metaphysical' and the 'classical' model of theatre are based on the dichotomy of a stage/non-stage reality. The imitation of non-stage reality on the theatrical stage is determined by the adequacy (or 'truthfulness') of the performance, and the primary goal of a performance is to create a 'copy' of a non-stage reality. This is a means to an end, aiming at the most effective transmission of the tragic (or dramatic) plot. Consequently, the dramatic plot is treated as a 'product' of the performance, excluding the active participation of the theatrical audience and reducing its participation to passive perception. 'Theater is thus, from the very beginnings of what, for convenience, we continue to call 'Western' thought, considered to be a place not just of dissimulation and delusion but, worse, self-dissimulation and self-delusion. It is a place of fixity and unfreedom, but also of fascination and desire' [TM 8], Weber concludes. Thus, it could be said that by drawing on Derrida, Weber exposes the subordination of 'theatre' to metaphysics in the Western philosophical tradition and its conceptual excesses. Weber's 're-reading' of philosophical texts devoted to 'theatricality' and reflections on the metaphysical tradition of literature and literary discourse certainly owes a lot to Derrida, who tried to demonstrate that the traditional understanding of literature and interpretation was rooted in metaphysics: whereas the Metaphysics of Presence was founded on the 'presence of being', the 'metaphysical' theory of literature was founded on the 'presence of meaning'. This tradition reduced a literary work to its message: the form became a 'transparent' medium. In Weber's opinion, such an understanding was likewise applied to theatre. The 'metaphysical' model of theatre treated 'theatricality' merely as a medium for conveying a dramatic plot, disregarding its form. However, Weber also identifies in Western culture a completely different, 'critical' means of thinking about theatre, which strongly opposed the 'metaphysical appropriation' of theatricality, and questioned the dichotomy of the content and form established in Antiquity. Like Derrida, who identified the source of the 'metaphysical' concept of literature

in Plato's philosophy and its end it in literature itself (above all, in the writings of Mallarmé), Weber also traced the beginnings of the 'metaphysical' tradition of theatre back to Plato (and Aristotle) and the end of it to twentieth-century theatre practices (especially by such artists as Brecht, Artaud, and Genet).³⁸³ Philosophy also played an important role in efforts to free theatricality from the influence of metaphysics, especially the twentieth-century 'deconstructionists' of the Metaphysics of Presence such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Roland Barthes [TM xiii-xiv]³⁸⁴ and their predecessors: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Benjamin, and Adorno. All of these thinkers discovered in the very idea of 'theatricality' something that defined the limitations imposed on it by philosophy. This 'something' was connected to the subversive potential of 'theatre' and its ability to transcend metaphysical oppositions. 'Theater, in short, is that which challenges,' Weber writes in a truly Derridean fashion, 'the 'self' of self-presence and self-identity by reduplicating it in a seductive movement that never seems to come full circle' [TM 8]. The 'critical' movement directed against Plato's and Aristotle's 'metaphysical matrix', which subordinated theatricality to the interests of the Metaphysics of Presence, began in Weber's opinion with 'theatrical writers from Brecht to Artaud to Genet', who realized 'the need to change, not just the habits of stagecraft, but those of spectatorship as well' [TM 24]. However, the crisis of metaphysical domination over 'theatre' came earlier, namely with the publication of Soren Kierkegaard's *Repetition* in 1843.³⁸⁵ As Weber explains, the revision of the 'metaphysical' trend

emerges perhaps most significantly in the early part of the nineteenth century, in what might be called the 'aftermath' of the Hegelian philosophical system and the culmination of thought it entails – in a writer-thinker such as Kierkegaard, for example – and it continues to mark the work of many of the most radical writer-thinkers of that century, such as Marx and Nietzsche, to name just the most obvious and influential. In the wake of the exhaustion of a conceptual tradition based on a certain notion of identity, reflexivity, and subjectivity, *theater* and *theatricality* emerge as names for an alternative that begins to articulate itself in the writings of these thinkers, although it certainly has far more complex a progeny than this limited list would seem to suggest. [TM 2]

To Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, we owe not only a break with the nostalgic ('reminiscent') model of Greek philosophy which persisted until Hegel, but also the

383 It is no coincidence that these were the ones to whose achievements Derrida most frequently referred.

384 To whom Brecht's theatrical experience was particularly close.

385 S. Kierkegaard, 'Introduction' to *Repetition*, in *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M.G. Piety, Oxford 2009.

introduction of a new model based on a (reformulated) principle of 'repetition'. Constantin Constantius, the hero of Kierkegaard's *Repetition*, unsuccessfully tries to 'repeat an experience',³⁸⁶ realizes his mistake, and experiences a revelation that leads him to formulate a new vision of philosophy and a new concept of 'repetition'. Constantius discovers that one cannot repeat the same experience twice (contrary to what he believed) – repetition is always 'repetition with a difference'.³⁸⁷ Repetition is not a one-to-one copy of the past. It creates, or simply is, an afterimage. Such an understanding of repetition brings together (at least when it comes to this aspect) the writings of Deleuze and Derrida, providing inspiration for a new notion of theatricality. In Kierkegaard's book, 'repetition' is no longer a means of restoring 'presence' or conveying 'the Same', as it was in Greek philosophy, but becomes instead a medium for 'difference' (or, as Derrida would say, '*différance*'). Such a re-evaluation of the traditional idea of 'repetition', Weber argues, eventually leads to a new concept of repetition that 'will reveal itself as being irreducibly theatrical' [TM 211] and not only affect philosophy as such (for example in Deleuze's concept of 'difference and repetition'), but also find its equivalent in stage practices, specifically in Kierkegaard's notion of *posse* (farce or burlesque) [TM 200–210].

However, what exactly is the relationship between Kierkegaard's 'repetition' and the philosophical notion of 'theatre'? The best answer to this question is given by Deleuze, who distinguishes between the concept of (theatrical) 'representation' in its traditional ('metaphysical') version and the concept of 'representation' based on Kierkegaard's 'repetition'. Deleuze argues that the idea of freeing 'theatricality' from metaphysics may be found in anti-Hegelian views. Hegel's philosophy, rooted in the 'reflective representation, in universality',³⁸⁸ results in 'a false theatre [...] a false movement' [DR 11]. However, to Deleuze theatre is

real movement [...] this movement [...] is not opposition, not mediation, but repetition. [...] The theatre of repetition is opposed to the theatre of representation, just as movement is opposed to the concept and to representation which refers it back to the concept. [DR 11–12]

According to Deleuze, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche opposed 'the Hegelian way' of thinking about theatre, and sought to undermine the classical (Platonic-Aristotelian) idea of 'representation' (and 'theatre') focused solely on conveying

386 I return to this line of thought in the chapter titled 'The Repetition of Experience'.

387 For more on this subject, see: G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.

388 This is a reference to 'representation' as a category in reflexive philosophy, i.e., the 'representation' of things in the mind of the cognitive subject.

ideas. This was mutually beneficial: philosophy became 'theatricalized' – it was no longer rooted in the mimetic concept of representation but in a 'differential and differentiating repetition' – and theatre was freed from the mimetic model as well. And this change was brought about by Kierkegaard.

Weber's intention becomes clear at this point. By reconstructing the 'critical' trend in theatre discourse, he attempts to define the concept of 'theatricality' which emerged from both theatre practices and philosophical writings. 'Theatre' is no longer meant to represent the text of a play on the stage, paying strict attention to semantic coherence and the clarity of the message. 'Theatre' in which performance (Aristotelian *opsis*) was subordinate to content gives way to theatre which in the process of performance dynamically produces (*in statu nascendi*) theatrical indexes. Such a way of thinking about theatre undermines the traditional divisions between stage/audience and performance/performed established by Plato in his allegory of the cave. 'Theatre' may no longer be defined by binary oppositions because it creates a world that is 'at once *here* and *elsewhere*'. And, to quote Weber, '[t]his 'at once' constitutes the challenge of theatricality to every system of thought based on the priority of identity and self-presence' [TM 13]. Weber also discusses many interesting examples of 'metaphysical' concepts which both reduce 'theatricality' to 'a means of meaningful representation' (as in the Hegelian system) and oppose such a reduction. For example, Brecht, in Weber's opinion, criticizes the classical model of theatre using 'non-Western theatrical practices' [1–2].³⁸⁹ Genet, in turn, experiments with 'decentering and displacing' the stage, while Artaud employs a 'virtual theatre reality'. The writings of Adorno, who radicalized Kierkegaard's vision of the 'ghostly spectacle of the unremitting repetition of the unrepeatable' [TM 249], also proved important, as did the writings of Benjamin on the irreducibility of form in the structure of the German *Trauerspiel*. And finally, there is Freud and the 'scene' of the dream, which, as Weber argues, functions in a very 'theatrical' manner. According to Weber, however, when it comes to questioning the 'metaphysical' tradition of theatre, Derrida is the most important thinker. Although Derrida's philosophy was rooted in the Kierkegaard-Nietzschean 'critical' model, the French philosopher both deconstructed the metaphysical model of 'theatre'

389 For example, Brecht's essay 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting', fragments of which Weber quotes. Already in the Foreword to his book, Weber draws attention to the important and even decisive role that, in his opinion, 'non-Western theatre practices' have played in the history of Western theatre. R. Schechner has also pointed out Brecht's influence (and in particular the 'alienation effect') on Derrida's practices [PS 145].

and introduced critical 'theatrical' reading practices. Thus, for Weber, Derrida is truly 'the most theatrical thinker'.

At this point, let me refer to the distinction between 'theatre' and 'performance' that features prominently in the works of contemporary performance scholars. According to Carlson, this distinction was introduced by Josette Féral in her article 'Performance and Theatricality: the Subject Demystified', published in 1982 in *Modern Drama*. In it Féral argues that

Theatre [...] was based upon the semiotic, built of representation, of signs of an absent grounding reality, while performance deconstructed the semiotic codes of theatre, creating a dynamic of 'flows of desire' operating in a living present [P 57]

In Carlson's opinion, separating 'performance' from 'theatre' was fundamental to early performance studies, influencing the notion of performativity itself. Performance studies was recognized as a discipline that both draws on theatre studies but also transcends its limitations.³⁹⁰ A division between the two based on theoretical influences was established: semiotics and structuralism were primarily associated with theatre studies, and poststructuralism with performance studies. As Carlson explains,

An important concern among performance theorists in the early days of that field's development was to show how performance differed from theatre, and, for many, the association of theatre with discursivity, structure, absence and semiotics and of performance with libidinal flow, presence, and poststructuralism. [P 57]

He also adds that:

[...] post-structuralist theorists in general, whatever their individual differences, found the traditional absent ground of meaning philosophically unacceptable, insisting that all positions were relative, shifting, and negotiable. [...] this approach, in the writings of theorists like Lyotard, Féral and others, provided a position for the development of a post-structuralist view of the unstable and flowing art of performance that opposed it to the traditional and more theoretically stable 'semiotic' or 'structuralist' art of theatre. [P 75]

In her reflections on the differences between 'theatre' and 'performance', Féral successfully employs Derrida's deconstructive logic, drawing also on Lacan, Kristeva, and Lyotard. She is concerned not so much with

matters such as presence and duration [...] than with representation, the Lacanian imaginary, and the construction of the subject. She begins not with the minimalist

³⁹⁰ Fischer-Lichte also points this out in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*.

goal of reducing arts to their 'essences' (a goal incompatible with in any case with post-modern relativism and dissolving of boundaries) but with the poststructuralist strategy of problematizing structuralist assumptions and seeking the seams and margins where structures are negotiated. Theatricality she sees as devoted to representation, narrativity, closure, and the construction of subjects in physical and psychological space, the realm of codified structures and of what Kristeva calls the symbolic. Féral directly opposes performance to activity of this kind; it undoes or *deconstructs* (emphasis mine, AB) the competencies, codes, and structures of the theatrical. Although it begins with the materials of theatre – codes, bodies seen as subjects, actions and objects involved in meaning and in representation – it breaks down these meanings and representational relationships to allow a free flow of experience and desire. Narrativity is denied, except for ironic quoting with a certain remove, so as to reveal a narrative's inner workings or its margins. There is 'nothing to grasp, project, introject, except for flows [...]'. Everything appears and disappears like a galaxy of 'transitional objects' representing only the failures of representation.' Performance 'attempts not to tell (like theatre), but rather to provoke synaesthetic relationships between subjects' [P 150–151].³⁹¹

Such an understanding of 'theatre', from which according to both Féral and Carlson 'performance' differs, is consistent with the traditional (classical) and, as Weber would say, metaphysical model. In turn, in determining the properties of 'performance' that distinguish it from the traditional model of 'theatre', both Féral and Carlson list features which were attributed to 'theatricality' by artists and philosophers associated with the 'critical' model. This is evident when one discusses Féral's findings together with the writings of Herbert Blau, also cited by Carlson:

theorists and performers acquainted with his (or with related) poststructuralist thought could no longer comfortably embrace the goal of pure presence so attractive to modernism. Very much in the spirit of Derrida, Herbert Blau in 'Universals of Performance' (1983) specifically rejects the attempt of the modernists to create an experience of unmediated presence by removing 'theatre' from 'performance.' In fact, asserts Blau, theatre, which involves both mediation and repetition, 'haunts *all* performance,' forcing the recognition that there is something in the nature of *both* theatre and performance that 'implies no first time, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction.' [P 149–150]³⁹²

The above appears to stand in opposition to the writings of Féral; however, if we refer to Weber's findings, it becomes clear that Féral distinguishes between 'performance' and the classical model of 'theatre' based on binary oppositions.

391 J. Féral, 'Performance and Theatricality: the Subject Demystified', *Modern Drama* 1982, no. 25, p. 179.

392 H. Blau, 'Universals of Performance: or, Amortizing Play', *Sub-Stance* 1983, no. 37–38, pp. 143 and 148.

In turn, when Blau writes that theatre 'haunts *all* performance', he is referring to the 'critical' model of 'theatricality' described by Weber, which 'involves both mediation and repetition' (of course in the Kierkegaardian sense) and 'implies no first time, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction.' The influence of Derrida and other postmodern philosophers is clearly visible in this last quote. Indeed, it even can be said that the classical notion of 'theatre' constitutes the direct opposite of 'performance' (in its contemporary understanding).³⁹³ The latter, however, may be traced back to the 'critical' revisionist model of theatre described by Weber.³⁹⁴ So, if, as Jefferson, Wood, and Weber point out, Derrida's writing is 'theatrical', then this 'theatricality' is deconstructed and performative. Undoubtedly, the 'theatralization' of Derrida's writing stems from a 'critical' reevaluation of the metaphysical model of 'theatre', and *vice versa* – Derrida has also inspired thinking about 'representation' in terms of 'performance'. In this sense, Derrida's practices resemble the views of Erika Fischer-Lichte, for whom 'representation' lies at the heart of all contemporary kinds of performance. However, as I will try to prove, this 'representation' is connected with the 'critical' model of 'theatre' and not with the classical 'metaphysical' system that values *mimesis*.³⁹⁵ Once again, Jacques Derrida's performative writing practices will guide me in that pursuit.

In *Theatricality as Medium*, Samuel Weber also comments on Derrida's revision of the Platonic concept of *mimesis* and its significance in criticizing the 'metaphysical' concept of theatre. In deconstructing representation in *La Double*

393 E.g. as proposed by Fischer-Lichte, whose concept seems to me to be the most interesting and to which I will return later in the book.

394 Of course, not all contemporary performance studies researchers accept such a restrictive distinction between 'theatre' and 'performance' as Fèral does. Some even think that 'theatre' as such has always been 'performative' and should therefore be regarded as one a form of 'cultural performance' in the broad sense of the term. It seems to me, however, that if we tie Fèral's opinion with Weber's diagnosis, the recognition that performance – in the way it is treated today – displays many more affinities with the 'deconstructive' version of 'theatricality' than with the 'metaphysical' one. This can also be seen in Derrida's practices. I return to this later in the book.

395 I am referring here to Fischer-Lichte's aforementioned text 'Cultural Performances', where she writes: 'What [...] is held to be an opposition which is grasped by pairs of dichotomic concepts such as: autonomous subject vs. subject determined by others; art vs. social reality/politics; *presence* vs. *representation* (emphasis mine, AB), in performances is experienced not in the mode of either-or, but in that of an as-well.' She presents a similar position in the section titled 'Performance' in [TP 29-37]. I return to her concept later in the book.

Seáncé, Derrida also deconstructs the (theatrical) performance. Interestingly enough, in the process of freeing representation and performance from metaphysical influences during this 'double session', Derrida refers to a very well-known theatrical figure: the mime.

Mime versus Mimesis

The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action [...] [it is created] under the false appearance of the present. That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion.

Stephane Mallarmé, *Divagations*

It is prescribed (...) to the Mime that he not let anything be prescribed to him but his own writing, that he not reproduce by imitation any action (...) or any speech.

Jacques Derrida, *The Double Session*

The order of events was as follows: in 1881, the mime and writer Paul Margueritte performed a pantomime entitled *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* (Pierrot, Murderer of his Wife) for a group of friends. Five years later, Margueritte published a small book recounting the performance: with gestures and facial expressions, drunk Pierrot ‘describes’ killing his wife Columbine, whom he suspects of having an affair with Harlequin. The murder itself is reenacted as well. Walking up and down the stage, Pierrot hears the creaking of the wooden floor, reminding him of tickles. He bursts out laughing which, in turn, reminds him of his unfaithful wife. Next, Pierrot explains why the laughter made him think of Columbine. He takes her portrait in his hand and ‘impersonates’ alternately himself and the wife, showing that Columbine died from tickling – she literally burst from laughter. During this scene, however, Pierrot also ‘dies’ from laughter.

In 1886 Stephane Mallarmé wrote *Mimique*, in which he recounted Margueritte’s performance, or his text, or both at the same time – Mallarmé did not indicate exactly which.

In 1972, Jacques Derrida published *Dissemination*. The book included the essay ‘The Double Session’ (*La Double Séance*), in which Derrida describes Margueritte’s pantomime, Mallarmé’s *Mimique*, and Plato’s *Philebus*.

As I explained in my 2001 book *Dekonstrukcja i Interpretacja* [*Deconstruction and Interpretation*], among the reasons for Derrida’s interest in Mallarmé’s and Margueritte’s works was undoubtedly the numerous indeterminacies, impasses, and obscure references (on many different levels) found in these texts. The most important reason, however, was that by commenting on both Mallarmé and

Margueritte, Derrida could undermine ‘mimetologism’³⁹⁶ and thus challenge the opposition between the (primary) literary text and (secondary) commentary established by traditional theories of interpretation. This opposition was the basis of all theories which, in the spirit of Plato’s theory of *mimesis*, regarded the literary text as a representation (reproduction) of non-literary reality and, respectively, treated commentary on it as a representation of the literary text (that is ‘external’ to the commentary).³⁹⁷

Derrida was quite open about his motives. Texts like Mallarmé’s *Mimique*, he argued, ‘operate, in their very movement, the demonstration and practical deconstruction of the representation of what was done with literature’ [PO 69]. The traditional (Platonic) concept of *mimesis* (representation) was based on the dichotomy of the ‘original’ (the thing represented) and a secondary imperfect copy (the representation). The relationship between the ‘original’ and its ‘copy’ was limited here by the notion of the ‘adequacy of representation’. Consequently, Derrida argued, if representation so defined was made ‘the essence of literature’, the category of adequacy/truthfulness would become the hallmark of literary *mimesis*. The correspondence between the work (the representation) and reality (the thing represented) imposed on literature an obligation to ‘represent’ external reality (to ‘make it present’). According to Derrida, such a model of thinking about literature had prevailed from Antiquity until the 19th century, that is, until Mallarmé. His writing challenged the idyllic correspondence between the work and the external reality represented (in it) by refusing to recreate in the work of literature a representation of the outside world (also called the ‘represented world’). Indeed, Mallarmé’s texts were not ‘representations’ but ‘self-representations’ (they represented themselves).

396 Derrida’s term, the meaning of which he explained as: ‘a certain interpretation of mimesis [...] a mimesis reduced to imitation’ [Acts of Literature 57]. For Derrida, ‘mimetologism’ meant an ontological (and ideological) re-interpretation of *mimesis* derived from Platoism, subordinated to the requirements of the Metaphysics of Presence. In his opinion, a consequence of this model was the subordination of imitation of the subject (representation), which had repercussions for the ‘metaphysical’ tradition of thinking about literature and interpretation, because it led to the framing of literature and literary commentary within the categories of ‘expression, imitation, illustration’ [PO 87]. I write about Derrida’s concept of mimetologism and deconstruction of representation extensively in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*, in the chapter titled ‘Pewna interpretacja mimesis’. I will therefore limit myself to recalling only what is relevant to the current discussion.

397 This mimetic reproduction of a literary text in a commentary has been called ‘second-order mimesis’ or ‘critical mimesis’. ‘Critical mimesis’ does not refer to the relationship between the imitated thing and its representation (as in the case of the generally understood principle of *mimesis*), but between the ‘imitated’ (literary) text and its ‘representation’ in the commentary. The term ‘second-order mimesis’ is also sometimes used.

In this sense, Mallarmé's work proved to be truly 'revolutionary' for both modern literature and theatrical criticism. Literature itself, Derrida said, could now deconstruct Plato's model of *mimesis* because Mallarmé's texts were only a 'free play of signifiers' with no external references.³⁹⁸ Mallarmé's work also deconstructed the Metaphysics of Presence by undermining metaphysical oppositions between reality and appearance, exterior and interior, presence and absence, and truth and falsehood. Most importantly, literature did this much more effectively than philosophy. In *Dissemination*, which included a reading of *Mimique*,³⁹⁹ other texts by Mallarmé, and a commentary on two novels by Sollers, Derrida tried to demonstrate the failure of the mimetological way of thinking, which in his opinion left a very strong mark on traditional theories of art, literature, and literary criticism. Above all, Derrida questioned the traditional ontological foundations of *mimesis*: the opposition between the 'original' and the represented copy. Calling into question Plato's idealism, Derrida demonstrated that *Mimique* refutes both the opposition (and hierarchy) of the thing represented and the representation. The essay on Sollers' novels⁴⁰⁰ likewise discredited the possibility of discovering the truth of the literary text. As Derrida, argued, the 'palimpsest' structure of *Nombres* [*Numbers*] provided one with a glimpse of different layers of the text, none of which pointed to a definitive conclusion – something that could be identified as the designatum or a single (or even multiple) stable meaning(s). The text only referred to other texts. The dogma of 'representing reality' lost its *raison d'être*.

Derrida, however, was not only interested in the problems of literary *mimesis*, but also, and perhaps most of all, in 'critical mimesis'. More specifically, he was interested in the consequences of imposing a mimetic ideology on literary commentary, that is, a text which in the traditional sense was meant to be a representation of another text. Indeed, the philosopher described 'The Double Session' as 'a deconstructive "critique" of the notion of "criticism"' [PO 46]. In this text, Derrida attempted to identify the pitfalls of 'critical mimesis' founded on the binary oppositions of a ('primary') literary text and ('secondary') commentary, which subjected the commentary to Plato's principle of the 'adequacy of representation'.⁴⁰¹ A good example of 'mimetologism' was thematic criticism. Analyzing the works of its main representative, Jean-Pierre Richard, Derrida set out to discredit the belief that the critic may faithfully reproduce the work in his commentary by creating a 'copy' of it. However, Derrida's critical 'performance' (indeed, the word 'performance' seems to be the most appropriate in this context) did

398 Norris draws particular attention to this in his book *Derrida*, juxtaposing two models of representation: Plato and Mallarmé.

399 For more on this subject, see G. Bennington, 'Derrida's Mallarmé', *Interrupting Derrida*, London 2000.

400 About his early novels *Drame* (*Event*, 1965) and *Nombres* (1968).

401 In this case, the presentation of the commented text.

not simply involve enumerating the faults of thematic criticism. Instead, Derrida opted for 'staging' – he 'enacted' the internal linguistic mechanisms of Mallarmé's *Mimique*, demonstrating its ambivalent internal textual logic. Derrida's reading refuted the assumptions of not only Richard's commentary, but also those of traditional literary criticism. Derrida demonstrated that it would be impossible to reduce the 'scene of writing' ('textuality') to some hidden 'mental content'. Respectively, the text of *Mimique* did not succumb to unification strategies (e.g. summarizing its subject matter) and could only be defined by a continuous and unrestrained 'play' of meanings [LD 288] that defied any organizing principle. Derrida thus simultaneously criticized the ideological (metaphysical) foundations of mimetologism, the belief that one can create a 'copy' of reality in the literary text, and the mimetological foundations of literary criticism, i.e. the belief that one could create a 'copy' of a literary text in commentary. As such, the philosopher undermined the metaphysical foundations of mimetological art and literary criticism.

Derrida's deconstruction of representation (literary and critical mimesis) paved the way for the deconstruction of the (theatrical) performance, particularly through the notion of the pantomime. As Derrida noted, irresolvable questions concerning references in Mallarmé's text to Marguerite's text and/or performance were doubled along an entire chain of successive significations. Clues about potential 'actual references' to something outside the pantomime were called into question, for example, by the tickling scene that Pierrot 'invented' on the spur of the moment. It was impossible to tell what was true and what was false. For example, did the murder of Columbine by tickling actually occur or did it only take place in Pierrot's imagination? Was Pierrot's final death, like the entire pantomime, make-believe or was it the result of his con-fabulation? Did Pierrot really die laughing or did he just pretend to do so? Was it because he imagined the possible death of Columbine or because he recalled her actual murder? And if Pierrot died on the stage, did it happen accidentally or intentionally (was it a suicide)? Did Columbine really cheat on Pierrot or was it simply Pierrot's projection, his reaction to the question: 'what would happen if?' Or maybe the play was only a way to stage a 'tautological' version of the phrase: 'if I learned that Columbine died of laughter, I would die laughing myself ...' This last scenario, as credible as any other, ultimately removed all possible references to reality. Both the pantomime described by Marguerite and its 'representation' in Mallarmé's *Mimique* remind one of a Borgesian 'garden of forking paths'. Everything, as Derrida notes, takes place in a state of suspension (or the 'spacing' [*l'espace*] [LD 260]) between the intent and its execution, between reality and fiction, between facts and imagination, between truth and

appearance – it exists only ‘between’ [*entre*], and the suspension is ‘played out’ in Derrida’s reading. Derrida thus implies that the reader, the recipient of this ‘double session’, is also in a state of suspension – because of the ambiguous status of the text (‘being neither one nor the other and both at once, undecidable, *remains* as a text, irreducible to either’ [DIS 259]) he could not decide what was true and what was false. The reader could only remain in a state of suspension, in a ‘state of permanent indecision’. The relationship between the representation and what was (supposed to be) represented in it was also ambiguous because at no point was it possible to determine if the mime’s gestures made an actual reference to anything outside the play. In this process of ‘layered’ representation, therefore, no real equivalent (object) was present – the only thing ‘present’ was play, defined as fictitious (and ambiguous) events that did not refer to anything outside of the pantomime. The episodes somehow ‘grew’ from the preceding scenes, ‘creating’ themselves *in statu nascendi* during the performance. The absence (or ambiguous status) of the referent not only negated the meanings of both the pantomime and the texts describing it, but also constituted a basic condition for their existence. It could be said that deconstructions here were ‘layered’ atop of one another: Margueritte’s text deconstructed representation as such (in its metaphysical ‘mimetological’ understanding), while Mallarmé’s text deconstructed literary representation (also in its metaphysical ‘mimetological’ understanding). Derrida’s text, respectively, deconstructed the representation of the ‘primary’ text in the ‘secondary’ text, and thereby questioned the ‘metaphysical’ tradition of literary theory and criticism. Finally, using the subversive potential of the pantomime, Derrida also deconstructed the traditional theatre performance founded on the same ‘mimetological’ dichotomies as ‘traditional’ literature. Thus, while both Margueritte’s and Mallarmé’s texts proved to be ‘practical stagings’ of a problematic reference to the reality beyond the pantomime/literary text, Derrida’s text was a ‘practical staging’ of a problematic reference to the (‘primary’) text and of a failure to represent this in the commentary. The pantomime, which produced a ‘stage reality’, became in turn a ‘practical staging’ of a problematic reference of the (theatrical) performance to the outside reality.

In ‘The Double Session’, Derrida simultaneously discredits three models: the mimetic model of literature, the mimetic model of literary criticism, and the mimetic model of theatre. All three were based on the ‘ontological’ dichotomy between the ‘object’ and its ‘representation’, and the assumption that the object is to be reproduced/represented. The consequences proved important: just as literature was freed from the limitations of *mimesis* and truth, becoming instead a performative free play of meanings (which Derrida saw as a truly creative act), theatrical performance, freed from the restrictions imposed by the Platonic

paradigm, could be transformed into a process of performative actions that produced their own infinite meanings. Just as modern literature (thanks mainly to Mallarmé), Derrida argued, defied representation (in its traditional meaning), theatre defied (classical) representation (especially thanks to Artaud and Genet, Derrida's two favourite theatre artists). In 'performing' the problematic nature of the metaphysical models of literature and theatre, Derrida thus demonstrated (rather than describe) what Weber was talking about in his re-reading of the philosophical tradition of 'theatrical' discourse. At the same time, Derrida proved that the process of subordinating 'theatricality' to the requirements of metaphysics constrained it in a manner akin to 'literariness'. The metaphysical paradigm reduced the (theatrical) performance to a secondary 'copy' (of the dramatic plot, as stated by Aristotle) and reduced literature to the meaning it conveyed. Thus, both the unique 'writing' of the theatre ('theatrical writing', as Derrida called it in his texts on Artaud) and the writing of literature were reduced to a medium that was supposed to convey a message. As a result, both theatre and literature were forced to reproduce and not produce meanings. Weber thus comments on Derrida's findings:

a reading of Mallarmé elaborates an alternative to the more traditional – Platonic – subordination of mimesis to truth construed in terms of self-presence. This alternative is described as a peculiar type of 'closure of Metaphysics,' peculiar because it does not simply 'close' but also, in a repetitive remarking, opens a different sort of space and place, a sort of 'dislocation.' This dislocated space 'takes place' simultaneously as the written text of Mallarmé and as the theatricality of the performance it describes, comments upon, interprets, and quotes [...] [TM 13]

According to Weber, Derrida thus demonstrated that 'it is both possible and compelling to read Mallarmé's text as deconstructing the duality of appearance and reality' [TM 14]. Indeed, *Mimique* is

a simulacrum of Platonism or Hegelianism, which is separated from what it simulates only by a barely perceptible veil, about which one can just as well say that it already runs – unnoticed – between Platonism and itself, between Hegelianism and itself. Between Mallarmé's text and itself. [LD 207]

Thanks to the 'closing and dislocation' of tradition and the opening of 'a different sort of space,' Derrida was able to propose (and uphold) a different concept of 'theatrical performance' – 'without succumbing to the nostalgia for a self-present 'life' or 'reality' that would both antedate and ground theatrical mimesis as its 'authentic' origin and foundation' [TM 13]. According to Weber, Derrida's readings from 'The Double Session' also had significant consequences for the understanding of 'theatricality' as a specific kind of 'writing'. And from

this perspective, ‘theatricality’ proved to be a kind of indication and not signification. As Weber explains,

Theatricality resists the reduction to a meaningful narrative by virtue of its ability to signify. This ability associates it with what is called ‘language.’ As the most ubiquitous of signifying media – a pleonasm insofar as *all* media are such through signifying – language demonstrates the priority of the signifying function over that of representation. In so doing, far from reducing the materiality and corporeality of theater, it marks their irreducibility. This is what Walter Benjamin interprets as baroque ‘allegory,’ and it is why he links it to theater in the form of the German ‘mourning play.’ In its allegorical dimension, the process of signifying always leaves something *out* and something *over*: an excess that is also a deficit, or, as Derrida has formulated it, a ‘remainder’ – *un reste*. It is the irreducibility of this remainder that, ultimately, renders language *theatrical*, and theatricality *significant*. [TM x]⁴⁰²

However, Derrida’s deconstructive practices produced ‘critical effects’ that proved useful not only in the process of revising mimetic models of theatre, literature, and literary criticism but also in Derrida’s own (literary and philosophical) writing practice. For this reason, *Dissemination* (and in particular ‘The Double Session’) marked a significant shift in Derrida’s writing. With the publication of *Dissemination*, Derrida’s writing strategies became more and more performative, as noted by Gregory Ulmer in *The Object of Post-Criticism*.⁴⁰³ According to Ulmer, in ‘The Double Session,’ Derrida not only deconstructed mimetologism, identifying ‘Mallarmé’s alternative to Platonic mimesis’ [OP 91], but also set a convenient starting point for his subsequent readings. After his engagement with Margueritte and Mallarmé, Ulmer said, Derrida could no longer practice something that would in any way resemble a mimetic reproduction of a text in the spirit of ‘mimetologism’ [OP 87]. Thus, he transformed his writing practice so that it took the form of performative play with the rules of the literary text. Derrida’s writing was a ‘simulation’ of the text’s ability to suspend references to the real world. Indeed, Derek Attridge wrote about Derrida’s ‘play of reflections’ that ‘referentiality is enacted’;⁴⁰⁴ it is an imitation the action of the mime, who produces only the appearance of reality (‘a reference without a referent’ [DIS 206]). Using

402 Derrida was much more interested in the processes of signifying and not in meaning, because of the openness and ability of the former to ‘suspend its potential’, as opposed to the teleological character of the latter.

403 G. Ulmer, ‘The Object of Post-Criticism,’ *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. H. Foster, Port Townsend 1983, pp. 83–110. Hereinafter OP, followed by the page number.

404 *Acts of Literature*, p. 136.

the experiences of Margueritte and Mallarmé, Derrida transferred this principle to text. As Markowski pointed out, ‘the gestures of the mime’

are only traces, because they refer to other gestures. They are not present (they never ‘are’) just as the Mime is never present (because he is not the sovereign subject of these gestures). Mimicry prevents the full presence of the imitating subject and the imitated object (which ‘are not there’), the appearance of reality, reference without a referent, fiction, or *différance*: that is the lesson provided by the Mallarmé’s Mime. [EI 241]

Therefore, Derrida’s writing became a ‘playing’ of certain ‘actions’, taking on a ‘performative’ character [AL 216]. This comparison of reading to a ‘performance’ on the ‘stage of the text’, so important for Derrida (and for Barthes), carried further important connotations – it metaphorically expressed the paradox of the act of reading, with which Derrida seemed to be particularly concerned. To use Derridean terms, one could say that the ‘logic of representation’ itself is fundamentally paradoxical, and that this can be translated into a specific *modus vivendi* of the text in the process of reading. Representation (as Derrida understood it) is ‘always Other’ (even when it speaks of ‘the Same’); it never produces the ‘full presence’ of the presented ‘object’ but only performs its presence. The space of representation can thus be defined, to use Derridean terms again, as the space of the ‘suspended reference’. And from Derrida’s point of view, the poetics of ‘non-representative representation’ was the only legitimate, or rather justified, means of ‘representing’ what is happening in the literary text. His most important motivation for adopting such a reading practice, however, was the philosopher’s belief that writing about literary texts should be guided by the principle of the ‘appropriateness’ (or ‘homologous correspondence’) of a literary and critical way of writing. Or to put it differently, according to Derrida, writing about literature could only ‘repeat’ (as Kierkegaard put it) the writing of literature, and thus ‘enact’ the mechanisms of literary language.⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, just as ‘every literary text plays and negotiates the suspension of referential naivety, of *thetic* referentiality [...], each text does so differently, singularly’ [AL 47], Derrida observes in his interview with David Attridge, that ‘writing-reading’ (*lecture-écriture*) too should follow analogical rules in relation to its ‘object’ (another text). This consists in ‘the suspension of referential naivety, of *thetic* referentiality’ [AL 47]). The object of reading (another text) was not to be (mimetically) reproduced but ‘produced’ (‘played’) in the process of textual ‘representation’. Samuel Weber described Derrida’s unique style of writing simply as ‘theatrical writing’, which

405 Such an assumption was also made by other poststructuralists (e.g. Barthes). I return this topic later in the book.

resembled the theatrical movement of Mallarmé's writing. This was grounded both in the linguistic experiences of modern literature⁴⁰⁶ and in (a deconstructed model of) 'theatricality'.

Derrida had drawn specific conclusions from his deconstruction of mimetologism, and since 1972 wrote performatively, 'producing' meanings on the 'stage' of the text. Carefully avoiding all mimetological 'extrapolation', he moved closer towards 'textual staging'. This distinct change in Derrida's writing was also commented on by Weber, who traced it back to 'The Double Session':

Derrida moves from a purely 'theoretical' discourse, describing an object independent of it, to a "theatrical" mode of (re)writing that stages (dislocates) what it also recites: the theatrical movement of Mallarmé's writing. [...] In the almost four decades since this essay [*La double séance*] was published, Derrida's writing has not ceased to demonstrate and explore, with increasing explicitness and variety, its own theatrical quality as a 'staging' or *mise en scène*, rather than as an essentially constative reading of something held to exist independently of it. [TM 14]

In trying to describe the characteristic properties of Derrida's 'performative writing', Gregory Ulmer used such expressions as 'textual mime', 'mimed' version, and verbal and textual 'mimicry'. Samuel Weber, in turn, employed a different metaphor, namely that of the 'ballerina' [TM 15–16]. The metaphor of the 'ballerina' (also in reference to Mallarmé) is reminiscent not only of pantomime, but is also yet another image shared with Derrida [DIS 238–239], one used to clearly distinguish his reading practice from traditional 'readings', and by which he questions yet another principle of writing traditional commentary – the need to reproduce the semantic coherence of the text or, to put it in Derridean terms, 'the unity of meaning'. Contrary to the principles of the phenomenology of literature, Derrida in his 'textual performances' did not 'harmonize' the meanings of literary texts or follow their course step-by-step in a linear fashion. Instead, he would focus on one or a few selected fragments (sometimes even one word) and then 'revolve' around it, rendering a reading that was fragmentary and with intermittent breaks. As Derrida explained to Attridge,

With Joyce, I was able to pretend to isolate two words (*He war* or *yes, yes*); with Celan, one foreign word (*Shibboleth*); with Blanchot, one word and two homonyms (*pas*). But I will never claim to have 'read' or proposed a general reading of these works. [AL 62]⁴⁰⁷

406 In addition to Mallarmé, Derrida also lists Joyce, Celan, Bataille, Blanchot, Artaud and Genet as his most important teachers of this means of writing. [TD 191]

407 I write more extensively about the meaning of the 'fragment' in Derrida's philosophy of reading in the chapter titled 'Lekturography' in [AT 301–302].

In Weber's opinion, thanks to this practice, Derrida's writing took on a strongly theatrical character – the philosopher would do 'a ballerina's pirouette' around a selected fragment. In his readings, Derrida

follows a trajectory like that of the ballerina in another text of Mallarmé. Her pirouette, as Derrida shows, revolves incessantly around a center that is displaced with each turn, never coming full circle, never adding up to a whole nor even to a simple step forward. If the ballerina's pirouette is eminently theatrical, that is because its complex movement winds up going nowhere [...] [TM 16]

Derrida himself compared the pirouette of Mallarmé's ballerina to the moment in reading when he encounters a 'hieroglyph'⁴⁰⁸ – an obscure fragment that resists explanation. One can only revolve around it, following the pirouette's trajectory, which, however, is never the same because the hieroglyph

cannot be played internally in its entirety [...] most especially because of a certain lateral movement: in turning incessantly on its point, the hieroglyph, the sign, the cipher moves away from its 'here and now,' as if it were endlessly falling, forever here en route between here and there, from one here to the other, inscribing in the *stigmé* of its 'here' the *other* point toward which it continually drifts. [DIS 241]

Similarly, reading, defined as 'revolving' around the hieroglyph, was not merely a repetition of the same movement. Just as Mallarmé's 'ballerina' not only revolved around her own axis but also changed her trajectory with each turn, moving laterally across the stage,⁴⁰⁹ reading also involves 'revolving around a center that is displaced with each turn, never coming full circle' [TM 15] — 'repetition with difference,' always both 'the Same' and 'Other' in a complex movement that winds up going nowhere.⁴¹⁰ A 'ballerina's pirouette,' Derrida would say, operated

408 Derrida also used the term 'hieroglyphy' in describing the specificity of Artaud's 'writing' in texts devoted to his theatrical practices, as well as in his essay 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in WD. See, for example, Artaud's statement that 'the spirit of the most ancient hieroglyphs will preside at the creation of this pure theatrical language' and Derrida's attendant commentary [WD 240–242]. See also [WD 260–261, 270–278]. I write more extensively about 'circumscribing a fragment' as a specific property of Derrida's readings in 'Lekturography. Derridowska filozofia czytania' [AT 301–302].

409 Joseph Hillis Miller also based his reading of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* on this 'figure' in his book *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge 1982 (in particular, the section on the 'lateral dance of interpretation', pp. 58–59).

410 This was Derrida's next idea for dealing with the 'teleologicality' of interpretation – its pursuit of a clear (and pre-determined) goal: to discover the 'ultimate *signifié*'. It was thus also a kind of 'critical' formula, because this 'regulatory ideal,' as Derrida referred to it, of hermeneutics once gain revealed its dependence on the metaphysical tradition.

in the same way as the performance of a mime – it overcame ‘the simple opposition between activity and passivity, between production and the product’ [DIS 224] established by theories of art/literature and the metaphysical model of the theatre.

Deconstructing ‘representation’ and ‘performance’ in ‘The Double Session’, Derrida thus established a completely different relationship between the literary text and its commentary, namely one that is suspended ‘between imitation and reference’.⁴¹¹ At the same time, Derrida made a special gesture, a gesture which in reference to the title of his most famous text about Antonin Artaud can be described as ‘the closure of representation’.

The idea of ‘repetition with displacement’ will also be important for his concept of repetition, to which I return in the chapter titled ‘The Repetition of Experience’.

411 Z. Mitosek’s formulation, found in the title of his article ‘Między udawaniem a referencją’ [Between Pretending and Reference], *Przestrzenie teorii* 2002, no. 1, pp. 25–46.

The Second Closure of Representation⁴¹²

*Thus, the closure of classical representation, but also
[...] a closed space of original representation, the
archimanifestation of force or of life.*

Jacques Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty and
the Closure of Representation'

*Such, on the stage of cruelty, [Artaud insists], would be a
'spectacle acting not as reflection, but as force'*

Jacques Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty and
the Closure of Representation'

The fact that Derrida placed epigraphs from both Mallarmè and Artaud at the beginning of his most famous text devoted to the latter, *The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation* [WD 292–316], is certainly very telling. In doing so Derrida emphasized not only the affinity between Mallarmè's and Artaud's philosophies of art, theatre, and literature, but also designated them both as spiritual masters who influenced the style of his own writing practices. According to Derrida, the autopresentative, autotelic and antimimetic theatrical writing of Artaud was extremely similar to Mallarmè's vision of literary language. Derrida observed that just as Mallarmè practiced literary 'writing', Artaud was a pioneer of 'theatrical writing'. What is more, according to Derrida, both Mallarmè and Artaud opposed mimetologism and resisted the domination of the 'message' over the form of literary language, questioning the hegemony of the traditional theatre performance. Derrida described the writing of Mallarmè as essentially a dynamic 'production of meanings' (and not a passive reproduction of some non-literary reality), while in his own theatrical writing Artaud wanted to 'reconstitute the stage' [WD 298]. At the very beginning of Derrida's text on Artaud, the philosopher states that

412 Derrida's two most important texts on Artaud's theatre practices are 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' and 'La Parole Soufflée', both contained in *Writing and Difference* [WD]. In 1974, he also devoted a separate book, *Glas* (Lincoln, 1986), to Genet (along with Hegel). Due to the vast range of issues related to the relationship between Derrida's philosophy and Genet's theatre, I will leave such a broader comparison for another occasion.

Western theater has been separated from the force of its essence, removed from its *affirmative* essence, its *vis affirmativa*. And this dispossession occurred from the origin on, is the very movement of origin, of birth as death. [...] The theater has always been made to do that for which it was not made [WD 293–294]

The above finds its confirmation in Artaud's writing, in which he who fiercely criticized the traditional notion of theatre: '*Et le théâtre est ce patin dégingandé, qui musique de troncs par barbes métalliques de barbelés nous maintient en état de guerre contre l'homme qui nous corsetait*' [WD 294].⁴¹³ Derrida thus commented further:

Indeed, the eve of the origin of this declining, decadent, and negative Western theater must be reawakened and reconstituted in order to revive the implacable necessity of affirmation on its Eastern horizon. This is the implacable necessity of an as yet inexistent stage [...] The void, the place that is empty and waiting for this theater which has not yet 'begun to exist,' thus measures only the strange distance which separates us from implacable necessity, from the *present* (or rather the contemporary, *active*) work of affirmation. Within the space of the unique opening of this distance, the stage of cruelty rears its enigma for us. And it is into this opening that we wish to enter here [WD 294]

This somewhat baffling statement is then explained in the context of how important Artaud's model of theatre was for understanding the nature of representation and revising the traditional model of it. According to Derrida, Artaud's views heralded 'the limit of representation' and 'the humanist limit – of the metaphysics of classical theater' [WD 294–295]. Most importantly, Artaud's 'theater of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation' [WD 294]. Artaud was a revolutionary because he was 'done with the *imitative* concept of art, with the Aristotelean aesthetics in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own' [WD 295]. In that sense, Derrida concluded, *The Theater and Its Double* should be considered 'more a system of critiques,' '*shaking the entirety of Occidental history than a treatise on theatrical practice*' [WD 296]. The main reason for Derrida's fascination with Artaud becomes clear in this last sentence. Derrida recognized in Artaud, like he did in Nietzsche, a deconstructionist who asked 'Is not the most naïve form of representation *mimesis*?' [WD 295]. Whereas Mallarmè freed (literary) representation from mimetologism, Artaud did the same for theatrical representation. Derrida fully sympathized with Artaud's understanding of the nature of theatre, declaring:

413 In the text 'Le théâtre et l'anatomie,' published in *La Rue* (1946); cited in [WD 293].

Theatrical art should be the primordial and privileged site of this destruction of imitation: more than any other art, it has been marked by the labor of total representation in which the affirmation of life lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation. [WD 295]

Yet how does one arrive at Artaud's model of the theatre, and thus theatre that is not a (mimetological) representation but a production of meanings on stage? According to Derrida, such a concept of theatre must first of all be freed from theology and teleology – i.e. freed from the supreme consciousness of the 'supervisor of meaning'⁴¹⁴ and from a pre-determined purpose (*telos*). Instead, as Artaud claimed, it should become an unpredictable and dynamic process in which the production of meaning 'takes place' on stage and is not determined by external 'objects of reference.' Such a notion of representation was described by Artaud as a 'theatrical practice' which 'in its action and structure, inhabits or rather *produces* a nontheological space.' Drawing on Artaud, who fiercely criticized the 'theological and teleological' model of 'classical' theatre, Derrida employed these same concepts, but for his own purposes:

The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary *logos* which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance. The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter *represent* him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas. He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who represent characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the 'creator.' Interpretive slaves who faithfully execute the providential designs of the 'master.' Who moreover – and this is the ironic rule of the representative structure which organizes all these relationships – creates nothing, has only the illusion of having created, because he only transcribes and makes available for reading a text whose nature is itself necessarily representative; and this representative text maintains with what is called the 'real' (the existing real, the 'reality' about which Artaud said, in the 'Avertissement' to *Le moine*, that it is an 'excrement of the mind') an imitative and reproductive relationship. [WD 296]

The 'teleological' concept of representation imitating the external reality, reconstructing and reproducing the author's intentions, closely corresponds to the vision of the theatre audience described by Weber in his analysis of the Platonic parable of the cave. Such an understanding of the role of the theatre

414 I describe this problem in more detail in the chapter titled 'Kres "mitu nadzorczy"' in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*.

audience was definitely alien to both Artaud and Derrida. First of all, because it was:

a passive, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of 'enjoyers' – as Nietzsche and Artaud both say – attending a production that lacks true volume or depth, a production that is level, offered to their voyeuristic scrutiny. [...] This general structure in which each agency is linked to all the others by representation, in which the irrepresentability of the living present is dissimulated or dissolved, suppressed or deported within the infinite chain of representations – this structure has never been modified. [...] And it is the [...] speech, transmitted discourse – eventually transmitted by the prompter whose hole is the hidden but indispensable center of representative structure – which ensures the movement of representation. Whatever their importance, all the pictorial, musical and even gesticular forms introduced into Western theater can only, in the best of cases, illustrate, accompany, serve, or decorate a text, a verbal fabric, a logos which *is said* in the beginning. [WD 297]

According to Derrida, such a metaphysical 'theatre stage' is an 'illustrative' stage because it 'does nothing but illustrate a discourse is no longer entirely a stage' [WD 297]. One needed, as Derrida noted, to further 'reconstitute the stage, finally to put on stage [...],' and this 'is thus one and the same gesture' described by Artaud as 'the triumph of pure *mise en scène*' [WD 298].

The intentions of both Artaud and Derrida are thus clear: they tried to challenge the dualistic metaphysical vision of theatrical representation. Artaud wanted to end the separation between the content and the form, questioning the hierarchy in which representation was a means to one end—conveying meaning. According to Derrida, Artaud in his own way demonstrated that in the Western tradition, theatrical performance was subjected to a metaphysical 'ideology' whose centre was the 'author'—the 'guardian' of his own words, endowed with privileges granted to him by Plato in *Phaedrus*.⁴¹⁵ Artaud thus could be seen as the most important deconstructionist of the classical model of theatre and the traditional idea of representation. Indeed, as pointed out by Derrida, the history of theatre in Western culture involved a 'forgetting of the stage' (its 'materiality' and its creative possibilities). Using Nietzsche's words, Derrida also said⁴¹⁶ that the history of traditional hermeneutics involved 'forgetting the text' (also in regard to its materiality and *signifiance*). The consequences of such an understanding of the theatre were very different from the ramifications brought about

415 I write about this in detail in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* in my discussion of Derrida's reading of *Phaedrus*.

416 In the book *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. I discuss this book in more detail in the chapter titled 'A Warning in *Spurs*'.

by a traditional understanding of literature. However, as Artaud claimed (in a letter to Francis Crémieux from 1931):

The theater, an independent and autonomous art, must, in order to *revive or simply to live*, realize what differentiates it from [...] speech, literature, and all other fixed and written means. [WD 298]

According to Derrida, Artaud in a radical 'critical' gesture wanted to free the theatrical stage 'from [...] the author-god', thus restoring 'its creative and founding freedom' [WD 299]. With his vision of representation, or 'nonrepresentation',⁴¹⁷ he provided something different from the traditional theatre, in which 'the stage' does not 'operate as an addition' but as 'the sensory illustration of a text already written, thought, or lived outside the stage', 'a text [...] which the stage would then only repeat'. Here the focus was not on 'the repetition of a *present*', but on the stage, which

will no longer *re-present* a present that would exist elsewhere and prior to it, a present whose plenitude would be older than it, absent from it, and rightfully capable of doing without it [WD 299]

Representation was no longer defined as 'the surface of a spectacle displayed for spectators' but became representation in the original sense of the word, 'an experience which produces its own space' [WD 299]. Such a representation, 'cruel', as Artaud would say, was also supposed to actively involve the audience, who were no longer passive consumers of the dramatic plot. This concept was very close to Derrida's idea of theatre: 'cruel representation', as he emphasized, 'must permeate me' [WD 299]. For Artaud, a very important distinguishing feature of 'nonrepresentation' was 'spacing', defined as 'the production of a space that no speech could condense or comprehend',⁴¹⁸ leading to a 'spectacle acting not as reflection, but as force' [WD 300]. It can be said that for Derrida this was the essence of 'theatricality'. He further quotes Artaud, who observed that:

417 Derrida points out here that in spite of the dangers, he will use the word 'representation' for the lack of a better word, but with reservations which he refers to in detail, because he considers the term 'representation' itself to be grounded in metaphysics. Thus, in using the term 'representation', he will understand it in Artaud's way, as deconstructing 'representation' in the traditional 'mimetic' sense. At times he tries to mark this difference by adding the prefix 'non' ('nonrepresentation') or uses the term 'original representation' [WD 299].

418 It is worth recalling that 'spacing' [*espacement*], was also an important attribute of Derridean 'différance'.

We intend to base the theater upon spectacle before everything else, and we shall introduce into the spectacle a new notion of space utilized on all possible levels and in all degrees of perspective in depth and height, and within this notion a specific idea of time will be added to that of movement [...]. Thus, theater space will be utilized not only in its dimensions and volume but, so to speak, in its undersides (*dans ses dessous*). [WD 299–300]

At this point, Derrida formulates what would become his writing credo, expressed in the form of an impassioned call for

the closure of classical representation, but also the reconstitution of a closed space of original representation, the archimanifestation of force or of life. [...] a space produced from within itself and no longer organized from the vantage of an other absent site, an illocality, an alibi or invisible utopia. The end of representation, but also original representation; the end of interpretation, but also an original interpretation,⁴¹⁹ that no master-speech, no project of mastery will have permeated and leveled in advance. A visible representation, certainly, directed against the speech which eludes sight – and Artaud insists upon the *productive images* (emphasis mine, AB), without which there would be no theater (*theaomai*) – but whose visibility does not consist of a spectacle mounted by the discourse of the master. Representation, then, as the autopresentation of pure visibility and even pure sensibility. [...] theater or life must cease to ‘represent’ an other language, must cease to let themselves be derived from an other art, from literature, for example, be it poetic literature. For in poetry, as in literature, verbal representation purloins scenic representation. Poetry can escape Western ‘illness’ only by becoming theater. [WD 300]

Let me comment here on Artaud’s and Derrida’s understanding of ‘speech’ in both theatre and literature. The fact that Artaud criticized ‘speech’ (and at the same time the text as the basis for representation) did not mean that he sought to eliminate it completely. According to Derrida, Artaud’s reform of the theatre undoubtedly marked the closure of the ‘stage subjugated to the power of speech’ and ‘speech will cease to govern the stage’ but ‘speech’ in this context is understood as a tool of communication or a carrier of meaning, ‘diaphanous’ in relation to the transmitted content [WD 301–302]. In his formulation of ‘logocentrism’, Derrida likewise spoke against such an understanding of ‘speech’, both on the grounds of the metaphysical tradition, in which the word (speech)

419 Derrida wrote this in 1967, when he still uses the term ‘interpretation’ in texts such as ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, published in that year in WD. He will later use the term ‘active interpretation’ to distinguish his views on interpretation from the traditional approach. Later he would consistently replace the term ‘interpretation’ (for being too burdened with ‘onto-hermeneutical’ connotations) with the term ‘reading’.

was the perfect tool for Logos, and whose ‘disappearance’ allowed things to be revealed in their entirety.⁴²⁰ This was also true of the ‘metaphysical’ model of literature and interpretation, in which the word (speech) functioned as a vehicle (carrier), and thus as a means to an end. Derrida became a faithful ally of Artaud in his quest to end the domination of ‘speech’ on stage. Artaud did not intend, however, to eliminate ‘speech’ from the theatre but to end its hegemony and expose it as a non-transparent medium. In his opinion, the hegemony of speech overshadowed the sensible properties of staging. In addition to this understanding of ‘speech’, Derrida also borrowed upon Artaud’s concept of theatrical writing, which closely resembled his own ideas on ‘writing.’ Derrida even implied that Artaud might replace ‘speech’ with ‘theatrical writing’, quoting the playwright’s words from *The Theater and Its Double*:

I am adding another language to the spoken language, and I am trying to restore to the language of speech its old magic, its essential spellbinding power, for its mysterious possibilities have been forgotten. [...] in the spectacles I produce there will be a preponderant physical share which could not be captured and written down in the customary language of words, and [...] even the spoken and written portions will be spoken and written in a new sense. [WD 303]

Derrida shared these views, adding that

Everything, thus, will be *prescribed* in a writing and a text whose fabric will no longer resemble the model of classical representation. [...] How will speech and writing function then? They will once more become *gestures*; and the *logical* and discursive intentions which speech ordinarily uses in order to ensure its rational transparency, and in order to purloin its body in the direction of meaning, will be reduced or subordinated. And since this theft of the body by itself is indeed that which leaves the body to be strangely concealed by the very thing that constitutes it as diaphanousness, then the deconstitution of diaphanousness lays bare the flesh of the word, lays bare the word’s sonority, intonation, intensity – the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet entirely frozen, that is, the aspect of oppressed gesture which remains in all speech, the unique and irreplaceable movement which the generalities of concept and repetition have never finished rejecting. [WD 302]

For Derrida, ‘writing’, and in particular ‘literary writing’, was antimimetic. In contrast to ‘speech’ (to which literature was subordinated), in ‘writing’ the material and the ideal were impossible to separate (as Husserl observed earlier). Thus, if literature was defined as ‘writing’ (in accordance with its status in practice),

420 In the Greek tradition, the word ‘logos’ meant both ‘speech’ and ‘reason’, while literature and all traditional concepts concerning its interpretation and description were also grounded in analogous thinking.

the duality of form and content could no longer be maintained. This led Derrida to postulate that literature should be recognized as 'writing' – with all the consequences this implied. He found a similar concept in the writings of Artaud, who in his opinion also opposed the recognition of theatrical language as 'speech', whose form merely serves to convey content. Drawing on Freud and his concept of the dream,⁴²¹ Derrida later called this new 'theatrical writing', closely associated with Artaud's notion of representation, 'hieroglyphic writing'⁴²² – something mysterious and difficult to decipher. The special properties that Artaud attributed to 'writing' in his *First Manifesto* also proved important for Derrida. The philosopher emphasized the 'visual and plastic materialization of speech', 'making use of speech in a concrete and spatial sense' and treating it as 'a solid object, one which overturns and disturbs things.' As Derrida concluded, in this 'writing' 'phonetic elements are coordinated to visual, pictorial, and plastic elements' [WD 303]. In Artaud's quest to replace 'speech' with 'theatrical writing', Derrida also recognized traces of Mallarmè's 'revolution of poetic language'.⁴²³ In the French poet's writing, Derrida claimed, the 'speech' of literature also turned into 'writing.' The

421 'On the stage of the dream, as described by Freud, speech has the same status. This analogy requires patient meditation. [...] Present in dreams, speech can only behave as an element among others, sometimes like a 'thing' which the primary process manipulates according to its own economy.' [WD 303–304]. See Z. Freud, 'A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams', in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, London 1957, pp. 222–235. Note that in Artaud's 'First Manifesto', he speaks of 'giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams.' For more on this subject see also 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in WD, in particular the section in which Derrida comments on the following statement by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: 'If we consider first verbal expression, as it is circumscribed in the dream, we observe that its sonority, the materiality of the expression, does not disappear before the signified, or at least cannot be traversed and transgressed as it is in conscious speech. It acts as such, with the efficacy Artaud assigned it on the stage of cruelty.' [WD 264]. During Derrida's reading of *Course in General Linguistics* in *Of Grammatology*, he deconstructs the metaphysical system of de Saussure's language, which strictly separated the phonic substance of the sign from its meaning (the *signifiant* from the *signifié*), and expresses his strong opposing to this opposition.

422 We should note that Derrida also compared the ballerina's pirouette of Mallarmè to a hieroglyph 'turning incessantly on its point' in 'The Double Session', in *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, Chicago 1981.

423 I make reference here to J. Kristeva's well-known book *Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York 1984.

‘nuclear traits of all writing’, as Derrida wrote in ‘Signature, Event, Context’⁴²⁴ brought together Mallarmé’s views on the language of literature with Artaud’s views on the language of theatre – Mallarmé’s antimimetic idea of the literary text corresponded with Artaud’s concept of ‘non-representational representation.’ We should explore the affinities between these two writers in greater detail.

In Derrida’s philosophy, ‘writing’ [*écriture*] originally played a deconstructive function – it was ‘used’ to challenge the hegemony of speech and hermeneutics in the Western metaphysical tradition. Later, however, this concept was identified with specific writing practices (‘literary writing’) in which, according to Derrida, the idea of ‘writing’ found its most perfect embodiment. In the opinion of Derrida (and many other representatives of the early phase of French poststructuralism, including Foucault, Kristeva, Barthes, Sollers, etc.), Mallarmé’s works⁴²⁵ radically changed literary language, transforming it into a ‘pure writing act’ (as Foucault would put it). Its most important feature was the self-presentational (and not mimetic or mediational) treatment of the word. Thanks to the inspirations of Mallarmé and many other modern writers, the term *écriture* eventually became

424 J. Derrida, section titled ‘Writing and Telecommunication’ in ‘Signature Event Context,’ *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 1982, pp. 307–330. Hereinafter WT, followed by the page number.

425 I write extensively about the meaning of the term ‘*écriture*’ in French thought at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* (in the chapter titled ‘Pismo, pisanie, pisarstwo’), and about Derrida’s deconstructive use of this category in the chapter ‘Odkrywczy symptom pisma.’ The term ‘*écriture*’ does not refer only to Mallarmé’s poetry, although his work was, in a sense, the ‘paradigm’ of modern writing for French thinkers. This concept was used primarily to denote a particular type of literary practice which – to use Derrida’s phrase – was approaching ‘the end of literature’ [AL 110] and the limits of representation. For Foucault, a very important example of such writing (apart from Mallarmé’s poetry) was Rousset’s prose, to which he devoted the book *Raymond Rousset* (Paris 1963). Cf. also Foucault’s view that ‘language may sometimes arise for its own sake in an act of writing that designates nothing other than itself’ (*The Order of Things*, p. 331). Derrida considered Mallarmé, Joyce, Celan, Ponge, Blanchot to be among the writers whose practices the ‘*écriture*’ style emerged. On the category of ‘*écriture*’ and its function in post-constructuralist discourse, see also: B. Johnson, ‘Writing’, in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, Chicago 1987. The concept of *écriture* obviously owes much to the modernist idea of ‘pure poetry’ [*poesie pure*]. (or more on ‘de-objectification’ as a condition of ‘purity’ of poetry, see also: H. Friedrich, *Structure of Modern Poetry: From the Mid-nineteenth to the Mid-twentieth Century*, Evanston 1974). It is also worth noting that this concept is very close to Artaud’s notion of ‘pure theatre.’

synonymous with 'writing practices' and 'writing'⁴²⁶ (only the kind of writing that deserved to be called 'literary') and with the creative process in its 'pure form.' The term '*écriture*' therefore stood for the autonomy, autotelicity, and self-presentation of the act of writing, defined as an action that is 'creative' and not imitative. It becomes clear here how Artaud's understanding of performance as a 'pure language of theatre'⁴²⁷ corresponded to Mallarmé's idea of a 'pure language of literature' and Derrida's concept of *écriture*. Weber, in turn, pointed out that Artaud wanted to restore the indicative function of the word. As we can recall, Derrida attempted to do the same, drawing attention to the antimimetic potential of indications (for example, in his reading of Plato).⁴²⁸ Weber commented thus on Artaud's attempts:

Despite his attack on verbal discourse, Artaud never dreams of excluding language as such from theater, but rather of restoring its capacity to signify, in short, its *virtuality*. To do this, the tyranny of *meaning* must be supplanted by a language of *signification*: a language, above all, of gesture, intonation, attitude, and movement, but without recognizable or identifiable 'goal'. The absence of such a goal would allow the movement of language, its signifying force, to come into its own without being subordinated to a purpose. The incidence of such a language of signification would be inseparable from its location in time and space. At the same time, that location can never be stabilized once and for all. The performance of a gesture on the stage thus remains tied to a *singular* situation. [TM 286]

Derrida's deconstruction of presentation and representation brought together (and was inspired by) both literature and theatre. However, it should be emphasized that this concerned a special type of literature whose language (thanks to its deconstructive properties) initiated a process of questioning presentation and a special kind of theatre whose 'language' created the possibility of deconstructing the traditional idea of representation. *Écriture*/'writing' (literary and theatrical) should be self-referential and self-contained. Artaud, quoted by Derrida in 'La Parole Soufflée',⁴²⁹ put it most concisely,

When I write there is nothing other than what I write. Whatever else I felt I have not been able to say, and whatever else has escaped me are ideas or a stolen verb which I will destroy, to replace them with something else. [WD 212].

426 For more on this subject, see J. Derrida [PO 70–71].

427 Derrida writes about Artaud's 'pure theatrical language' in [WD 241]

428 See J. Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, Chicago 1981.

429 This text primarily describes 'Artaud's madness', but it also includes important references to the stage language of the founder of the 'Theatre of Cruelty'.

Derrida found in these words an important postulate for his future writing. What is most important, he explained was

to acknowledge the passing of a discourse which, without *doubling itself* (emphasis mine – AB), without even distributing itself [...], but with a single and simple characteristic speaks of madness *and* the work, driving, primarily, at their enigmatic conjunction. [WD 212–213]

Artaud's views were also closely related the critique of the metaphysical subject given by Derrida, who undermined the position of the subject sanctioned by the Metaphysics of Presence, in which the speaking subject (in theatre and in literature) was always defined as a voice from outside the text. However, in Artaud's practices, as Derrida noted,

[The speaking subject] discovers his irreducible secondarity, his origin that is always already eluded; for the origin is always already eluded on the basis of an *organized field of speech* (emphasis mine – AB) in which the speaking subject vainly seeks a place that is always missing [WD 223–224]

Ultimately, therefore, the creative subject in Artaud's theatre⁴³⁰ existed only on the stage, in language, and in a 'field of speech,' which *produced* as much as it was *produced*. It was thus able to leave its 'mark' thanks to its unique *écriture* [WD 220–225]. Such a subject was the 'double' of the theatre, as the title of Artaud's most famous text, *The Theater and its Double*, proclaimed.

But how to evade 'the stolen speech' described by Derrida? And how to evade, as Artaud put it, 'a body stolen by effraction'? Derrida's answer (and Artaud's, as implied by Derrida) was as follows:

by summarily reducing the organ. The first gesture of the destruction of classical theater – and the metaphysics it puts on stage – is the reduction of the organ. The classical Western stage defines a theater of the organ, a theater of words, thus a theater of interpretation, enregistration, and translation, a theater of deviation from the groundwork of a preestablished text, a table written by a God-Author who is the sole wielder of the primal word. A theater in which a master disposes of the stolen speech which only his slaves – his directors and actors – may make use of. [...] If, then, the author is the man who arranges the language of speech and the director is his slave, there is merely a question of words. There is here a confusion over terms, stemming from the fact that, for us, and according to the sense generally attributed to the word *director*, this man is merely an artisan, an adapter, a kind of translator eternally devoted to making

430 The French poststructuralists spoke in a similar way about Mallarmé's subject – as a subject that exists only on the 'stage' of its own text. I discuss this issue extensively in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja* in the chapter titled 'Kres "mitu nadzorcy"'.

a dramatic work pass from one language into another; this confusion will be possible, and the director will be forced to play second fiddle to the author, only so long as there is a tacit agreement that the language of words is superior to others and that the theater admits none other than this one language. [WD 233]

Another reason for Derrida's fascination with Artaud's theatrical practices was the possibility of questioning the traditional dichotomy (and autonomy) of the (creative) subject and the object (work), as well as the production process and its result. Being a creator was contrasted with being an 'adapter', while the creator ceased to be defined merely as a 'translator' who reproduces the message of the author on stage. Artaud, based on his own specific conception of the role of the 'director', was both the playwright and the creator of his performances. However, he did not simply (re)produce someone else's text but created his own theatre with his own '(hand)writing'. Derrida would then apply this postulate of Artaud's to his writing, which, in a sense, would also become his own 'original representation' – a representation in which, like in the works of Artaud and Mallarmé, 'the sign has not yet been separated from force' [WD 238].

However, one important objection must be made in regard to Derrida's interest in Artaud's vision of theatre. This is the fact that, as Samuel Weber has pointed out, 'Artaud's words seem both uncannily appropriate and utterly outmoded. Utterly outmoded in the political and cultural importance he attaches to theater' [TM 277]. While Artaud's idea of 'the theatre of cruelty'⁴³¹ was (for obvious reasons) quite controversial, Derrida did not seem to pay much attention to these reflections in his analysis of *The Theater and Its Double*. He focused his interest solely on matters concerning the nature of presentation and representation. As Weber observed, Artaud was 'eliminating or abandoning representation in favor of pure performance (as is evident from his own stagings and proposals for the Théâtre Alfred Jarry). He [did] insist, however, that the 'represented' no longer dominate the practice of theater'. In this way, he opposed Aristotle, who claimed that 'we learn through mimetic behavior and actions', like 'viewing images', which, he said, can be 'recognized' only if the viewer has some prior knowledge about the thing represented, as 'learning through seeing is an actualization' of what one already knows. [TM 280–281].

In Aristotle's theory, this purpose is served by the coherent and clear structure of the plot, which must 'represent the action as a unified and comprehensible

431 Weber interprets Artaud's idea very aptly, making reference to, among other things, the ancient idea of catharsis, but I will not pursue this topic here because it is too far removed from the main thrust of my analysis.

whole, with beginning, middle, and end' so that 'it must be possible for the beginning and the end to be seen together in one view.' This type of plot, constructed with the use of specific narrative strategies, was questioned by Artaud. He did not reject narrativity as such but opposed subordinating 'action to character.' Derrida correctly interpreted Artaud's intentions, claiming that 'Artaud condemns a theater that 'recounts psychology,' that tells stories whose unity derives from the character of the individual figures involved', 'places [it] at the center of the universe' [TM 281].

Artaud's questioning of 'the dominance of an anthropologically anchored and teleologically oriented type of storytelling' [TM 283] also inspired Derrida's notion of the dynamic and 'situated' subject that is always 'in motion,' creating itself through various (also literary and theatrical) practices. Derrida was likewise inspired by what Weber referred to as Artaud's notion of a 'place' or a 'stage' – a theatrical space of 'singular duplicity' (echoing Nietzsche's *Düplizität* from *The Birth of Tragedy*). For Artaud, Weber noted, 'the double and its shadows replace and supplant the 'heroes' of dramatic theater. They are virtual heroes of a stage that is split and doubled, whose space Artaud, near the end of his lecture, describes as an 'essential separation' [TM 294]. These 'doubles' may also be found on other levels of Artaud's 'nonrepresentational theatre,' which resembles Derrida's notion of 'double writing.' In the writings of Artaud, Derrida found confirmation for his later views on performativity, which at that stage he described as 'productivity.' According to Artaud, representation was to be 'productive,' not so much thanks to language, but thanks to 'the autopresentation of pure visibility and even pure sensibility.' For Derrida, this proved that Artaud had explored the most 'primitive' understanding of the theatre, untouched by metaphysics (like Heidegger, who explored 'primitive manifestations of being'): 'Artaud insists upon the productive images without which there would be no theater (*theaomai*)' [WD 300]. The idea of theatre 'before' metaphysics, and thus theatre free of its 'appropriations,' was undoubtedly very close to Derrida. In his quest to undermine metaphysics and hermeneutics, he employed the notion of 'theatricality,' giving his writing the qualities of a 'performance,' in line with the understanding of this word he found in Artaud's writings.

It is interesting to note that an early critique of the traditional (mimetic) model of representation can also be found in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Derrida commented on Rousseau's reluctance towards 'classical theatre' in one of the final chapters of *Of Grammatology*, titled 'The Theorem and the Theater' [OG 302–313]. Praising theatre which 'speaks in a lively voice,' Rousseau claimed (especially in *The Social Contract* and *Letter to M. D'Alembert on Spectacles*) that the theatre had been 'plagued' with corruption. As Derrida added, it had been corrupted

by the profound evil of representation. It is that corruption itself. For the stage is not threatened by anything but itself. Theatrical representation, in the sense of exposition, of production, of that which is placed out there (that which the German *Darstellung* translates) is contaminated by supplementary re-presentation. The latter is inscribed in the structure of representation, in the space of the stage. Let us not be mistaken, what Rousseau criticizes in the last analysis is not the content of the spectacle, the sense *represented* by it, although that *too* he criticizes: it is re-presentation itself. [OG 304]

Therefore, according to Derrida, instead of representation (the ‘classical spectacle’), Rousseau opted for ‘public festivals lacking all exhibition and spectacle, festivals without “anything to see” in which the spectators themselves would become actors’ [WD 309]. Rousseau also warned against ‘imitative’ representation in which the viewer is but a passive consumer. ‘But what is a stage,’ Derrida respectively asked, ‘which presents nothing to the sight?’ His answer, in keeping with the reflections of Rousseau, was as follows:

It is the place where the spectator, presenting himself as spectacle, will no longer be either seer [*voyant*] or voyeur, will efface within himself the difference between the actor and the spectator, the represented and the representer, the object seen and the seeing subject. With that difference, an entire series of oppositions will deconstitute themselves one by one. Presence will be full, not as an object which is *present* to be seen, to give itself to intuition as an empirical unit or as an *eidōs* holding itself *in front of* or *up against*; it will be full as the intimacy of a self-presence, as the consciousness or the sentiment of self-proximity, of self-sameness [*propriété*]. [OG 306]

Rousseau thus elevated the ‘public festival’ and discredited the ‘traditional’ theatre, because the ‘public festival’ made

the desire of making *representation* disappear, with all the meanings that converge in that word: delay and delegation, repetition of a present in its sign or its concept, the proposition or opposition of a show, an object to be seen. [OG 306]

He therefore praised participation, directness, and engagement. The ‘object’ of representation should be created on stage with the help of the spectators, bringing them together in the shared experience. Derrida then connected Rousseau’s views on the festival with Artaud’s notion of the theatre in which ‘the spectator is in the center and the spectacle surrounds him.’ Thus, as the philosopher added,

the distance of vision is no longer pure, cannot be abstracted from the totality of the sensory milieu; the infused spectator can no longer *constitute* his spectacle and provide himself with its object. There is no longer spectator or spectacle, but *festival*. [WD 308]

At this point, hopefully, it is now clear that performance is indebted to the ‘festival’ and its participatory character.

Derrida's 'performative' writing style was undoubtedly influenced both by the writing practices of Mallarmè and the theatrical practices of Artaud. Austin's theory of speech acts also proved important for Derrida. However, in order to become 'useful', this theory had to first be deconstructed. Derrida would take the performative as his point of departure – only to soon transcend it.

Scrutinizing Austin

[...] *confining ourselves, for simplicity, to spoken utterance.*

A performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage.

John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*

The terms ‘constative’ and ‘performative’ appear frequently in the texts of Jacques Derrida. They describe not only the specific properties of literary language, but also, and perhaps above all, Derrida’s unique style of writing. This does not mean, however, that Derrida accepted the theories of Austin (and his student, Searle) uncritically. On the contrary, his critique of Austin and Searle⁴³² has gained prominence and was widely discussed in the late-twentieth-century humanities. For the sake of my argument, however, let me briefly summarize the most important points of Derrida’s polemic.⁴³³

432 See in particular, J. Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, in *Limited Inc.*, trans S. Weber. Evanston 1988. This text was first published in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 1982.

433 Due to a lack of space, I can only briefly discuss Derrida’s dispute with Austin, especially given that Searle argued with Derrida on behalf of Austin, feeling himself to be (seemingly rightly) the main proponent of his ideas. In response to Derrida’s text ‘Signature, Event, Context’, a critique of Austin’s theories, Searle published the essay ‘Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida’ in 1977. In that same year, Derrida published (in France) *Limited Inc.*, a book in which he included a much broader defence of his earlier arguments. Further stages of the discussion with Searle moved onto the pages of the *New York Review of Books*. See also, J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge 1969 and ‘How Language Works: Speech as a Kind of Human Action’, in *Mind, Language And Society: Philosophy In The Real World*, New York 1998. See also J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1976. For more recent publications on this subject, see e.g. J. Culler, ‘Performative Language’, in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 1997, and K. Halion, ‘Deconstruction and Speech Act Theory: A Defence of the Distinction Between Normal and Parasitic Speech Acts’ (unpublished dissertation from 1999; accessed online Sept. 18, 2018).

Derrida's main objections to Austin's theories will come as no surprise. In his theoretical work, Austin established an opposition between speaking and acting (stating and doing), which, in turn, led to a division of spoken statements into 'constative utterances' (that are either true or false) and 'performative utterances' (that are judged by pragmatic criteria: effective/ineffective, appropriate/inappropriate, happy/unhappy, etc.). In the case of performatives, speaking was combined with a certain action they themselves 'created'.⁴³⁴ Although Derrida appreciated Austin's efforts to combine speech with action and the fact that in Austin's theory performatives were both self-referential and at the same time influenced reality, he also noticed various contradictions in the theory itself. According to Derrida, as could be expected, these contradictions were caused by the influence of metaphysics. Derrida also objected to the fact that the basic oppositions of speech acts in Austin's system were assigned a value: constative utterances were described as fundamental and frequent, and the criteria for distinguishing them, as universal, objective, common etc. Performative utterances were much less common, and for this reason Austin described them as 'pseudo-statements' or 'misses'. The criteria for their assessment were defined by Austin as variable, conventional, situational, etc. In addition, further typologies of speech acts (into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts) assessed the effectiveness of a given speech act according to consitutional (to which Derrida was not opposed) and intentional criteria (which Derrida considered very problematic). These classifications entailed further restrictive distinctions. For example, statements were divided into 'serious' and 'non-serious', 'real' and 'fictional', etc. Derrida pointed to Austin's tendency to establish hierarchies, under which statements could be evaluated as 'real' or 'serious', and expressed his disapproval of such arbitrary dualistic divisions. In contrast to Austin, Derrida argued that not only is there no possibility of separating performative utterances from constative ones, but that all constative utterances were also 'performative' – it is not possible to make a clear distinction between 'doing' and 'stating'. Derrida also claimed that there was a tension between the constative and the performative mode of language (as both coexisted in each utterance). This tension, as Jonathan Cullers observed, 'emerges clearly also in literature, where the difficulty Austin encounters of separating performative and constative can be seen as a crucial feature of the functioning of language' [LT 99]. In Derrida's opinion,

434 According to one of Austin's most famous examples, when the words 'I do' are spoken during the exchanging of marriage vows, it means that the marriage has actually taken place.

the same criteria for effectiveness applied to both performative and constative utterances. The philosopher ultimately reached a surprising conclusion: he claimed that constative utterances were 'generalized performatives,' which, contrary to Austin's views, were not superior to performatives.⁴³⁵ This did not mean that he was simply trying to reverse the oppositions introduced by Austin, but rather, was trying as he often did to adopt a point of view from which such oppositional distinctions (and hierarchies) would no longer be valid. He viewed other oppositions on which Austin's theory was based (e.g. the previously mentioned division into 'serious' and 'non-serious' or 'clean' and 'parasitic' utterances) in a similarly critical manner [MP 321–327]. Derrida considered controversial Austin's subordination of performatives to communication, defined as the 'site of passage of a *meaning*' [MP 309], and to the intention of the speaker. Derrida claimed that 'Austin, by his emphasis on the analysis of perlocution and especially illocution, indeed seems to consider acts of discourse only as acts of communication' [MP 321]. Meanwhile, he argued:

This category of communication is relatively original. Austin's notions of illocution and perlocution do not designate the transport or passage of a content of meaning, but in a way the communication of an original movement (to be defined in a *general theory of action*), *an operation*, and *the production of an effect* (emphasis mine, AB). To communicate, in the case of the performative, if in all rigor and in purity some such thing exists [...] would be to communicate a force by the impetus of a mark. [...] Differing from [...] the constative utterance, the performative's referent [...] is not outside it, or in any case preceding it or before it. It does not describe something which exists outside and before language. It *produces* or transforms a situation, it *operates* (emphasis mine – AB); and if it can be said that a constative utterance also effectuates something and always transforms a situation, it cannot be said that this constitutes its internal structure, its manifest function or destination, as in the case of the performative. [MP 321]

And finally, Austin's analysis of the felicities and infelicities of performatives in their 'total context,' meant that one of the basic elements of this context was

the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject for the totality of his locutory act. Thereby, performative communication once more becomes the communication of an intentional meaning, even if this meaning has no referent in the form of a prior or exterior thing or state of things. [...] Which sometimes compels Austin to reintroduce the criterion of truth in the description of performatives [MP 322].

Derrida argued, that Austin had earlier rejected this idea, replacing the truth/false opposition with 'the value of force, of difference of force (*illocutionary*

435 R. Nycz, *Tekstowy Świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze*, Warszawa 1993, p. 36.

or *perlocutionary force*)' [DIS 43]. But these were not the only contradictions Derrida found in Austin's theory.⁴³⁶ More problematically, the French philosopher also identified in Austin's model numerous unacceptable 'exclusions.' To begin with, Austin excluded 'the possibility that every performative utterance (and a priori every other utterance) may be 'cited"' [MP 324]. Secondly, Austin deprecated speech acts spoken on the stage (as well as in literature and in internal monologues), claiming that

a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not *seriously* [I am italicizing here, J.D.], but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use [MP 324–325].⁴³⁷

And thirdly, Austin associated performativity only with speech and not with writing, which, as might be expected, Derrida could not accept. The French philosopher painstakingly analyzed all these 'exclusions,' pointing to Austin's theoretical generalizations and misstatements. Derrida particularly opposed Austin's view that iterability is only a casual property of language, implying that speech acts can be repeated in various contexts. Unlike Austin, Derrida claimed that 'iterability' (an alteration of the same) is a fundamental property of all speech acts. As Jonathan Culler observed,

The possibility of repetition is basic to language, and performatives in particular can only work if they are recognized as versions of or quotations of regular formulas, such as 'I do,' or 'I promise.' (If the groom said 'OK' rather than 'I do,' he might not succeed in marrying.) 'Could a performative utterance succeed,' asks Derrida, 'if its formulation did not repeat a 'codified' or iterable [repeatable] form, in other words if the formula that I utter to open a meeting, christen a boat, or undertake marriage were not identifiable as conforming to an iterable model, if it were not thus identifiable as a kind of citation?' Austin sets aside as anomalous, non-serious, or exceptional particular instances of what Derrida calls a 'general iterability' that should be considered a law of language. 'General' and fundamental, because, for something to be a sign, it must be able to be cited and repeated in all sorts of circumstances, including 'non-serious' ones. Language is performative in the sense that it doesn't just transmit information but performs acts by its repetition of established discursive practices or ways of doing things. [LT 98]

Iterability, as John Lechte rightly noted, was also for Derrida a feature of language that

436 These are discussed in detail by Derrida on pages 230–232.

437 Austin wrote these now famous words in his book *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1962, p. 22.

irrevocably detaches the level of the signifier from the signified. Thus, if meaning is related to context, there is, with respect to the very structure of language, no proper context to provide proof of a final meaning. Context is unbounded, as Jonathan Culler has said. Derrida's debate, with the American philosopher, John R. Searle, about J.L. Austin's theory of 'performatives', turns precisely on this point. While Austin tried to make a felicitous performative [...] depend upon its being realized in the proper context by the proper person, an infelicitous performative – as when somebody says, 'I do' outside the marriage ceremony [...] – cannot be eliminated from language. This is so, Derrida notes, because infelicity is embedded in the performative's very structure: the quality of iterability means that language—including signatures—can be taken over by anyone at any time.⁴³⁸

Thus, as Ryszard Nycz observed, Derrida tried to demonstrate that:

if meaning is conditioned upon the fulfilment of a conventional, repetitive procedure, then 'imitation' (in the most general sense) is not a derivative in relation to the 'original' utterance but *vice versa*: it conditions its own possibility. Any linguistic sequence can be meaningful and understood only insofar as it is reproducible, as long as it can be played in different situations by different people. *Iterability* – a special principle discovered by Derrida, which necessarily involves repetition with a difference, distinction, and alteration – is considered in this case as a general condition of intelligibility with significant philosophical consequences.⁴³⁹

All of Derrida's arguments were undoubtedly compelling and, as we shall see, also had a significant impact both on his concept of 'performative writing' and on contemporary performance theories. Even more controversial, however, was Austin's depreciation of performatives used in theatrical and literary contexts, which he described as 'parasitic [...] etiolations of language.' However, as Richard Schechner explains, Austin's belief that 'all performatives uttered in theatre were unhappy'⁴⁴⁰ was caused by the fact that 'Austin did not understand, or refused to appreciate, the unique power of the theatrical' [PS 124], which Derrida also heavily criticized. For Schechner, this point in the 'discussion' between Derrida and Austin was a testament to the former's positive attitude towards the performative potential of the theatre. A quote from Derrida may serve as a confirmation of this statement:

438 J. Lechte, 'Jacques Derrida', *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers. From Structuralism to Postmodernity*, London-New York 1994, p. 109. I write more on the problem of 'iterability' and its relation to Derrida's thought in the chapter 'Textual Performace'.

439 R. Nycz, *Tekstowy świat...*, p. 37.

440 John Searle shared this belief; see J. Searle, *Speech Acts*.

For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, 'non-serious,' citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative? So that – a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion – a successful performative is necessarily an 'impure' performative [. . .]? [PS 125]

In Schechner's opinion, performance studies are heavily indebted to the philosophy of Derrida,⁴⁴¹ especially to his view that stage speech is 'a determined modification' of a 'general iterability'. This meant, as Schechner explained, that

meaning cannot be permanently fixed: every utterance is a repetition – just as stage speech is the repetition of a script. But Derrida's 'iterability' is not the parroting of a known script, but a quality inherent in language [...] Meaning is not singular, original, or locatable. Meaning is not owned by the speaker, the spectator, or even the circumstance. Meaning – and all and every meaning is contingent, temporary – is created in process through the complex interaction of all speakers – players – and their specific personal-cultural circumstances. [PS 125]

The next, and from Derrida's perspective, most important exclusion concerned the fact that Austin removed 'writing' from the space of performativity. According to Derrida, Austin was thus repaying a debt he owed to the Metaphysics of Presence, namely, asserting at all costs the 'purity' of his theory. 'It is as just such a 'parasite' that writing has always been treated by the philosophical tradition, —Derrida claimed— and the connection in this [Austin's theory] case is by no means coincidental' [*Limited Inc* 17]. By assuming that performativity is only a feature of the 'act of utterance' (i.e. speech and not writing), Austin, as Schechner observed, made his theory dependent upon the logocentric tradition, a dependence on which Derrida could not approve. Derrida consequently proposed his own theory of the performative that obliterated the performative/constative opposition and focused on 'iterability' as the most important property of 'writing', thus providing the basis for his theory of the 'graphematic structure of every "communication"' [MP 327].⁴⁴² Derrida tried to overcome the limitations and contradictions of Austin's and Searle's theories, expanding the semantic and effective scope of the performative. But in his critique of Austin, Derrida did not simply want to demonstrate that by establishing false hierarchies Austin was

441 For more on this topic, see Carlson [P 75-80].

442 Due to a lack of space, I do not go through the entire complicated process of justifying the performativity of writing. For more information on this topic, please see Derrida's text [PF 236-240].

adhering to the principles of 'metaphysical correctness'. By criticizing the metaphysical foundations of Austin's theory, Derrida ultimately wanted to formulate his own concept of writing. Indeed, for Derrida both 'writing' and 'written language' (and, consequently, also 'text' and 'reading') would be simultaneously 'constative' and 'performative', as these modes of language are integrally combined. As he explained in one interview:

I think that in the text, in language, from a certain point it is difficult to distinguish between the object or theme and the operation itself [...]. This morning we have talked for a long time about what some theoreticians call 'the performative' or a performative act of speech: it does not state anything but it creates an event. Language itself produces what it says, the thing it talks about, so there is no 'thing' that remains outside, it is the thing itself. When I make a promise or say, for example, 'yes' or 'thank you' or when I forgive, I do not speak about something external to the language, I create the event with language. Thus, 'what' and 'who' belong to the act, to the process of writing or to the experience of the written text or language [OS].

This did not mean, however, that Derrida's writing practices were purely performative. Rather, it meant that the philosopher wanted to dynamically combine in his writing both its 'formalizing (constative) and performative' aspects [TD 193]. As he further explained,

[deconstruction's] writing is not only performative, it produces rules [...] for new performativities and never installs itself in the theoretical assurance of a simple opposition between performative and constative. [PI1 23]

One of the most important distinguishing features of Derrida's texts, especially his texts on literature, is the 'contamination' of the constative and performative modes, that is, his interweaving them in oscillating, constantly changing, configurations. They would no longer only 'talk about something' (which also applies to literature), but would also 'do it'. And thus, during reading, Derrida would be able to reflect simultaneously on the 'signature, the proper name, singularity' [AL 62], in other words, on issues related to literature and the reading of it. Derrida's deconstruction, as one scholar commented, 'thus abolished the differences between [...] language in a constative (declarative) and performative (executive) function' [EI 71], oscillating 'between theoretical statements and textual execution' [EI 166]. Other scholars also paid special attention to this unique property of Derrida's writing practices. For example, Christopher Norris emphasized that Derrida's writing could be described as a philosophical critique that combines literature with theory and the constative with the performative. 'Depth of philosophic thought' in combination with 'stylistic virtuosity' allowed Derrida 'to reflect at every point on its own performative aspect, or on issues

raised in and through the practice of an answerable 'literary' style.⁴⁴³ Christopher Fynsk, in turn, observed that Derrida's readings can be defined as 'a speech act that opens the conditions of its own performance', the two being inextricably linked to one another.⁴⁴⁴ Derrida described his practices as a kind of performative writing, inextricably linking the 'executive' and 'declarative' aspects.⁴⁴⁵ By combining the constative and the performative mode in his writing practices, Derrida transgressed the limits of philosophical, theoretical, literary, and critical texts. Traditionally, such texts were meant to be exclusively 'constative', which did not agree with Derrida's 'practical' attitude, which was certainly influenced by his interest in theatre. As Arnold Berleant stated, 'theatre epitomizes human discourse in which language functions not as an artificial medium but as an act-producing reality.'⁴⁴⁶

In the book *Philosophy at the Limit*, devoted to Derrida, David Wood describes the French philosopher's practices as 'performative reflexivity', which Wood argued constituted the most important distinguishing feature of Derrida's writing, defying a centuries-long tradition in philosophy. As the title of Wood's book suggested, philosophy had been driven to its limit as a result of Derrida's radical treatment of the epistemological and ontological status of philosophical and critical statements. Both the philosophical text and commentary (for Derrida, a text 'recording the reading process') no longer conveyed coherent and comprehensive content, expressed in 'the pure language of concepts' or in a metalanguage constructed especially for literary criticism. The philosopher refuted the myth on which philosophy and hermeneutics had thrived since Plato and had been strengthened by the 'Kantian *episteme*'.⁴⁴⁷ Instead, Derrida modelled his philosophical writing on literature and the theatre – disciplines that philosophy held in contempt. Wood, however, was not just talking here about what was most commonly attributed to Derrida (or of which he was most often

443 C. Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism. Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy*, London 1990, pp. 67 and 160.

444 C. Fynsk, *Heidegger. Thought and Historicity*, Ithaca 1986, p. 196. In writing about literary texts, Derrida emphasized many times that they not only 'talk about' something, but also 'do' something about it. See e.g. [AN 79].

445 Cf. another statement by Derrida in the same interview: 'this can give rise only [...] to positioned readings which are themselves formalizing and performative' [AL 47].

446 A. Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rouge Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts*, Abingdon and New York 2017.

447 See R. Rorty, 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing', in *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972–1980*, Minneapolis 1982, pp. 90–109.

accused), namely his (in)famous treatment of philosophy 'as literature', though literature undoubtedly most inspired Derrida to reject traditional forms of philosophical discourse. Nor was Wood interested in summing up Derrida's views on the figurality of philosophical language, the belief that 'truth is a mobile army of metaphors', a view he shared with Nietzsche. Simply put, Wood drew attention to the fact that Derrida wished to defy the oppositions that determined the status of a 'truly' philosophical text and canonical commentary, separating their content from their language. As Wood explained, Derrida sought to find a mode of writing in which its object would seem not to exist prior to or separate from its writing but would be *produced* during the writing process, and thus, come into being 'performatively' in the course of its production. This would allow Derrida to reflect during his reading on the properties of all writing, defined as a practice that is essentially 'performative' in nature [PL 133]. 'Derridean theater', Wood concluded, 'holds a lesson for all writing' [PL 139].

These quotations clearly show Wood's understanding of 'reflexivity'. In traditional reflexive philosophy (whether in its Kantian, post-Kantian, Hegelian or Fichtean version), 'reflexivity', as opposed to a knowledge of external reality, was most often defined as self-discovery, i.e. self-reflection practiced by and in the thinking subject. What interested Wood, however, was not reflexivity in a traditional sense, but in the self-reflexive (and thus also self-critical) mode of Derridian writing, which in the process of its continuous creative production also yielded self-reflection. Thus, reflexivity did not refer to Derrida (as the thinking subject) but to his writing practice, understood not as mimetic representation but as dynamic production, during which the philosopher could simultaneously 'observe' and 'examine' its conditions. For Wood, the above implied the possibility of combining 'philosophical value' and 'textual performance' in one and the same text. As Wood further observed, Derrida transformed his writing practice not only through a critical revision of Austin's theories but also through literary and theatrical inspirations. The philosophical text thus became a specific contamination of 'event' and 'action' [PL 133], producing 'generalizing effects' [DI 56-60]. Consequently, as Wood concluded, for Derrida 'reflexivity does not point to a simple outside or beyond the text, but to the medium and practice of writing itself' [PL 145]. As such, however, it became clear that Derrida meant to undermine one of the basic dogmas of reflexive philosophy (discussed especially in the writings of Kant, Hegel, and Fichte), namely the ability to perceive oneself (self-reflectively) as a spiritual unity, independent of any changes or actions in the world – as an integral subject that extracts a universal meaning from fragmentary and individual experiences, endowing them with a coherent, comprehensive order (Hegel called it 'speculative life'). The subject in reflexive

philosophy was self-controlled and self-focused (in keeping with Heidegger's notion of *Versammlung*), 'control' (or supervision) over the disorderly events of his mental life. Undoubtedly, this 'theoretical fiction' of metaphysical philosophy, one of many based on a belief in the inner spiritual unity, identity, and self-control of the subject, was completely alien to Derrida. Indeed, because of the fact that his writing had become 'performative', his position as the 'subject of writing' had changed. The subject could no longer be separated from the object, and thus another set of traditional metaphysical oppositions was abolished. Wood also drew attention to this fact, emphasizing that, as a result, Derrida managed to avoid the 'subjective control' over his writing process, which, according to Wood, was akin to the 'principle of performance'. He claimed that performance was 'not an act under the subject of intentional control' [PL 148], but like every event 'happened' either unpredictably or only somewhat predictably. As the subject (and also the object) of his own writing, Derrida did not maintain an unchanging and stable position; on the contrary, he also changed, produced, and reproduced throughout the writing process, surrendering himself to its unrestrained and eventual course, unable to control it from a privileged position. Being the subject and the object of the writing process undermined the unity, coherence, and stability of the reflexive subject. In this way, the Derridean subject resembled the Mallarméan creative subject (who was integrally connected with the creative act) and the Artaudian 'subject of theatrical writing.'

Since 1972, especially in such works as *Glas* (1974), 'Pas' (1976), *Spurs* (1978), 'Envois' (1980), and many others, described by Derrida as 'practical re-presentations' [PO 45] or the 'manufacture of the performative scene' [*la scène performative*], the French philosopher practiced writing in which it was impossible to separate the 'scene' from its 'content.'⁴⁴⁸ The inseparability of the 'object' of writing from '*les actes de l'écriture*', abolishing the traditional form/content dichotomy, would prove fundamental for Derrida. As he explained,

What happens when acts or performances (discourse or writing, analysis or description, etc.) are part of the objects they designate? When they can be given as examples of precisely that of which they speak or write?⁴⁴⁹

Barbara Johnson described Derrida's practice as a 'transferring' of Mallarmé's literary pattern to 'reading', arguing that

448 J. Derrida, *Do droit de la philosophie*. Paris 1990, pp. 454–455.

449 J. Derrida, *La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà*. Paris 1980, p. 417.

Derrida's theory of writing turns out to have been, in fact, a theory of reading. The epigraph to his *Writing and Difference* is a quotation from Mallarmé: 'Le tout sans nouveauté qu'un espacement de la lecture' ('All without innovation except for a certain spacing-out of reading'). What does it mean to introduce 'space' into reading? For Mallarmé, it means two things. It means giving a signifying function to the materiality – the blanks, the typefaces, the placement on the page, the punctuation – of writing. And it also means tracking syntactic and semantic ambiguities in such a way as to generate multiple, often conflicting, meanings out of a single utterance. The 'meaning' of a Mallarmé text, like that of a dream, cannot be grasped intuitively as a whole but must be worked out rigorously by following each strand in a network of relations. What Derrida generalizes and analyzes in other writings is this 'spacing' that Mallarmé attempts to maximize. [...] Thus 'reading,' for Derrida, involves following the 'other' logics of structures of signification inscribed in writing that may or may not be in conformity with traditional logics of meaning, identity, consciousness, or intention. It involves taking seriously the elements that a standard reading disregards, overlooks, or edits out. [...] Derrida sees signifying force in the gaps, margins, figures, echoes, digressions, discontinuities, contradictions, and ambiguities of a text. When one writes, one writes more than (or less than, or other than) one thinks. The reader's task is to read what is written rather than simply attempt to intuit what might have been meant.⁴⁵⁰

This is undoubtedly what Derrida had intended – the Mallarméan (but also Artaudian) 'principle of writing,' which in his opinion best expressed the specificity of literary 'performativity' was first transferred to 'writing' and then to 'reading,' which eventually transformed into writing/reading.⁴⁵¹ The main purpose of such a transfer was to question the inferiority of 'critical' language to 'literary' language and to remove the dichotomy between the two established by the metaphysical tradition (the metaphysics of commentary [WD 214]), thus undermining the hierarchy of (secondary) reading and (primary) literature. For Derrida, this new antimimetic practice of *lecture-écriture* ceased to imitate its object (the literary text), rejecting the requirements of fidelity, adequacy, and verifiability, in other words, rejecting everything that the principle of the

450 B. Johnson, *Writing*, p. 346. See also G. Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* Chicago 1989, pp. 121–122 (on the role of space in Mallarmé).

451 The concepts 'writing' and 'text,' and consequently 'reading' (as the writing of a text) were essentially synonymous categories in Derrida's project. R. Barthes made the same claim, building on Derrida's ideas and stating categorically that 'the text is what is written' ('Theory of the Text'), and drawing on the consequences of Derrida's reflections on the nature of 'writing' for his writing style. Barthes therefore had in mind as much the physicality of the written notation as the particular characteristics of 'writing' that defined his concept of the 'text.'

'truth of representation' postulated [EI 227]. The concept of '*lecture-écriture*'⁴⁵² (reading-writing), present in almost all of Derrida's works, was meant to demonstrate that reading assumed a largely textual status – it was 'written', just as literature was 'writing' and not 'speech'. For Derrida, however, the most important thing was to prove that reading is (or can be) a process as creative as writing – it can 're-present' the literary text. This quest, similarly to that of Roland Barthes, was motivated by a dream. This was, as Derrida explained to David Attridge, an 'adolescent desire' that led him to 'obsessively' look for the 'theme of Proteus' [AL 34] – something that would not be a philosophical or a literary text (in the traditional sense) but writing 'in between', which would combine philosophical argument and the literary linguistic idiom. Derrida was largely inspired by 'poetico-literary performativity', which closely resembled '[a] performativity at least analogous to that of promises, orders, or acts of constitution or legislation which do not only change language, or which, in changing language, change more than language' [AL 55]. Derrida further explained in another text that

Art [...] and literature, represents only a certain power of indeterminacy that stems from the capacity of isolating *performatively* its own context for its own event, that of the 'œuvre'.⁴⁵³

Indeed, the most important practical postulate of Derrida was as follows: with the help of artistic experience one must always try 'to invent something new in the form of acts of writing which no longer consist in a theoretical knowledge, in new constative statements, to give oneself to a poetico-literary performativity' [AL 55]. Derrida's point was to break with the two traditional modes of writing: mimetologism (which he considered as naive) and its opposite, namely – metalanguage. Typically, Derrida has sought to occupy an 'in-between' position by linking theory with literary invention in a single text, whose performative qualities were supposed to weaken the asceticism and neutrality of theoretical language.

The imperative to change the way people wrote about artistic practices was generated by these very practices. Defined in the above terms, 'critical' writing

452 See e.g. J. Derrida and P. J. Labarrière, *Alterités. Avec des études de F. Gribal et S. Breton*. Paris 1986, p. 6. This term appears not only in Derrida, but also in many works by Barthes, Kristeva, Sollers and others. See, e.g. R. Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath, London 1977, pp. 161-163, and 'Ecrire la lecture', in *Essais critiques IV. Le bruissement de la langue*, Paris 1984.

453 J. Derrida, 'My Chances/Mes chances', in *Psyche Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, p. 374.

could become a truly creative act. Derrida certainly did not see why this could not be so. In an interview with Attridge, he asked,

‘Is it necessary to make a distinction between literature and literary criticism [...]?’ I don’t know [...] At any rate I wouldn’t distinguish between ‘literature’ and ‘literary criticism,’ but I wouldn’t assimilate all forms of writing or reading. These new distinctions ought to give up on the purity and linearity of frontiers. [AL 49–52]

In the same interview he stated firmly: ‘what applies to literary production’ also applies to ‘the reading of literature’ [AL 51]. Derrida consistently tried to implement this principle in his practices. This led even George Steiner (despite his reservations about Derrida’s philosophy) to admit that Derrida’s writing practices questioned the traditional ‘hierarchical distinctions drawn [...] between critique and so-called creation.’⁴⁵⁴ In general, such views were popular among French poststructuralists in the 1960s and 1970s – they all attempted to make writing about literature more creative by using the language of literature. As Vincent B. Leitch rightly observed,

Everything we have learned about ‘literary’ textuality forces itself upon ‘critical’ textuality. [...] The borders between the ‘literary’ text and the ‘critical’ text are giving way. And provocative texts on critical texts are springing up everywhere. The critical object and its modes of analysis and style are shifting – as the ‘nature’ and force of textuality come clearer.⁴⁵⁵

Derrida’s famous remark in *Of Grammatology*, that because ‘we are becoming to write, to write differently, we must reread differently’ [OG 87], expressed this need to seriously consider the changes in artistic language that had begun with the advent of modern literature and the need to adapt literary criticism to these changes. Like Vincent Leitch, Gregory Ulmer (in *The Object of Post-Criticism*) considered this tendency to be one of the most important steps on the way to reformulating the basic rules of literary commentary, noting that thanks to this ‘[c]riticism now is being transformed in the same way that literature and the arts were transformed by the avant-garde movements’ [OP 83], and in the process of these transformations, ‘literary commentary’ had actually become ‘paraliterary,’ appropriating from literature its performative ability to produce meaning [OP 87]. According to Ulmer, Derrida’s deconstruction of the traditional structure of *mimesis* was the most important factor in this process. And thus, Ulmer concluded, what avant-garde literature and art had accomplished (by rejecting

454 *Real Presences*, p. 117.

455 V. B. Leitch, *Hermeneutics, Semiotics and Deconstruction*, in ‘Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction, New York 1983, pp. 262–263.

realism) was afterwards reflected in writing about art.⁴⁵⁶ Challenging the linguistic status of the commentary, whose ontological foundation was established by the traditional structure of representation, led to the restitution of the romantic model of the critic-artist and the radicalization of the modernist notion of creationism. The most important aspect of all of these changes was turning the reader (interpreter, commentator of literature) into the producer of the text and not just its reproducer.⁴⁵⁷

Elizabeth Bruss devoted an entire book to this issue. In *Beautiful Theories: The Spectacle of Discourse in Contemporary Criticism*, she claimed that it was not only the (literary and even poetic) language used by poststructuralists that led to a situation in which we might say, paraphrasing the title of a well-known essay by George Hartman, 'the theory of literature became theory as literature' [BT 33–79]. This process was also influenced by the 'theatralization' of theoretical discourse, which Bruss described as 'the spectacle of discourse.' This involved a transition from theoretical observations and speculations (i.e. 'the deductive-nomological' model of theory and criticism [BT 37]) to a 'artistic/literary' model (to 'playing' theoretical questions). According to Bruss, in the face of the crisis of 'strong' theory, created by the gap between theory and literature/art (established by structuralism), an 'artistic' reform of literary theory and criticism was the only chance for its revival. Theorists and philosophers, explained William Righter, the author of the anti-theoretical book *The Myth of Theory*, began to fear that

bound by theoretical or logical considerations, [they] have lacked a sensibility to the concreteness and individuality of works of art [...] To specify is to limit, to create a well defined, but much narrower relation to literature. [BT 3]

However, in her monumental work, Elizabeth Bruss did not focus on Derrida. She was much more interested in the 'spectacles of discourse' in the works of William H. Gass, Susan Sontag, Harold Bloom, and Roland Barthes. It nevertheless seems that what she referred to as 'the spectacle of discourse', and to what Geoffrey Bennington referred as the 'theatricalization' of thought, is most evident in the practices of Jacques Derrida. These opinions coincide with the views of Erika Fischer-Lichte – specifically in relation to what lies at the heart of her

456 Steiner also pointed out that deconstruction, when read on the conceptual and methodological level, corresponded to the crisis of representation and realism in art. See G. Steiner, *Real Presences*, pp. 80–81. See also: D. Carroll [PA 95].

457 Barthes stated the same many times, see e.g. *S/Z: An Essay*, New York, 1975.

project to map out 'the aesthetics of performativity'. She likewise saw the demand to develop a new aesthetics as being motivated by transformations taking place in artistic practices (especially the 'performative turn' in the arts). In the face of such fundamental transformations, aesthetic theories needed to reformulate their cognitive assumptions and language of description. This specifically meant moving away from 'hermeneutic and semiotic aesthetics' because, taking into consideration the emergence of various artistic performative practices, such an aesthetics was associated with the failure of restrictive dualistic oppositions. As Erika Fischer-Lichte observed, this resulted in a situation where

the performance redefined two relationships of fundamental importance to hermeneutic as well as semiotic aesthetics: first, the relationship between subject and object, observer and observed, spectator and actor; second, the relationship between the materiality and the semioticity of the performance's elements, between signifier and signified. For hermeneutic and for semiotic aesthetics, a clear distinction between subject and object is fundamental. The artist, subject 1, creates a distinct, fixed, and transferable artifact that exists independently of its creator. This condition allows the beholder, subject 2, to make it the object of their perception and interpretation. [TP 17]

In her opinion, performance eliminated these divisions. Above all, the process of creation was combined with the 'artifact' in one artistic practice. Similarly, the object of the subject's 'perception and interpretation' became an inherent property of these practices. 'Performance' thus undermined the traditional dichotomy between subject and object and between production and creation. And it is not difficult to notice in these observations the echoes of the 'prehistoric' reflections of Jacques Derrida.

Derrida's writing practices were thus formed within a complex field of references. On the one hand, they were influenced by art, by literature (especially the works of Mallarmé), and the theatre (especially of Artaud). On the other hand, they were a response to the theory of language (particularly Austin's theory of speech acts). Undoubtedly, they were also influenced by the general atmosphere of poststructuralism, with its tendencies to remove the boundaries between literature, theory, and criticism. In practicing such revolutionary writing, Derrida did not try to explain the meanings of texts; he did not attempt to reproduce the process of its understanding, nor did he try to endow them with semantic consistency. Instead, Derrida took 'verbal actions' that produced 'generalizing effects', which, as 'representations', abolished all oppositions conditioning the traditional structure of the commentary. Indeed, as Derrida observed in the final pages of *The Theater of Cruelty*, representation (not in its 'classical' version but as defined by Artaud and Derrida himself) is able to abolish once and for all:

All the limits furrowing classical theatricality (represented/representer, signified/signifier, author/director/actors/spectators, stage/audience, text/interpretation, etc.) were ethicometaphysical prohibitions, wrinkles, grimaces, rictuses – the symptoms of fear before the dangers of the festival. [WD 308]

Textual Performance

...irreducible to any concept, to any knowledge ...

Jacques Derrida, *Shibboleth*. For Paul Celan

In her essay 'Culture as Performance: Theatre History as Cultural History',⁴⁵⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte quotes one of Austin's later statements, in which he revises his earlier views on the inferiority of 'parasitic' speech acts. Following this lead, Fischer-Lichte chooses to restore 'performance' to performative discourse in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. According to her, 'performance' should be seen as a fundamental category encompassing all kinds of cultural performances, while at the same time, also referring to the original meaning of the word 'performance'. Indeed, as Fischer-Lichte points out, regardless of how we conceive of performance as a cultural phenomenon, it inevitably involves performing. Thus, one of the oldest concepts in theatrical discourse has been given a new life in performance studies. Yet, a closer look at what Fischer-Lichte understands by performance from the perspective of 'performing culture' [CP 1] reveals that her concept differs from traditional notions of it. Fischer-Lichte outlines the basic features of performance by means of a four-point list of 'arguments':

1. A performance comes into being by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, by their encounter and interaction.
2. What happens in performances, is transitory and ephemeral. Nonetheless, whatever appears in its course, comes into being *hic et nunc* and is experienced as present in a particularly intense way.
3. A performance does not transmit pre-given meanings. Rather, it is the performance which brings forth the meanings that come into being during its course.
4. Performances are characterized by their eventness. The specific mode of experience they allow for is a particular form of liminal experience. [CP 1–2]

458 E. Fischer-Lichte, 'Culture as Performance: Theatre History as Cultural History', *ACTAS Proceedings, História do Teatro e Novas Tecnologias*, Lisbon 2004. Hereinafter CP, followed by the page number.

A number of other key properties of performance as a means of ‘performing culture’ can be found elsewhere in her essay as well, for example, that ‘[performance] brings forth itself in and through an autopoietic’ and it ‘is nonrecurrent and not to be repeated’, and that performance ‘actors and spectators alike, are involved insofar as they co-determine its course and let themselves be determined by it’ [CP 10–11].

In *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Fischer-Lichte draws attention to other key features of performance, including its dynamic complexity, based on a combination of performativity and eventness. She also explains how ‘the emergence of meaning’ in performance results from an ‘autopoietic feedback loop’ (i.e. the ongoing simultaneous co-creation of the event and its meanings). And finally, the scholar points to what is probably the most significant feature of performance, i.e. that ‘self-referential actions in these performances [...] constitute reality’ [TP 170–172]. Drawing on Artaud and Mallarmè, Jacques Derrida arrives at very similar conclusions in his deconstruction of the traditional (‘metaphysical’) model of performance (and representation). Consequently, his reading and writing practices essentially become ‘performative performances’ or ‘textual performances’.

The term ‘textual’ requires further explanation because performance in the space of real experience, as defined by Fischer-Lichte, differs significantly from the performance that takes place within the space of the text. Derrida was careful with his words in speaking about this issue, mentioning at one point, for example, that he was interested in a ‘certain kind of performative scene’ (*la scène performative*).⁴⁵⁹ This ‘certain kind’ referred to a procedure he employed in his practices: ‘transferring’ the properties of performance to ‘reading-writing’ [*lecture-écriture*]. In order to more clearly understand Derrida’s ideas here, we should review the key terms found in his ‘performative’ dictionary. After all, the terms it contains are very similar to those employed by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her four ‘arguments’,⁴⁶⁰ including: ‘event’, ‘iteration’, ‘production’, ‘interaction’, ‘materiality’, ‘mobility’, ‘effect’, ‘performing’, ‘scene’, and, ultimately, ‘experience’.

459 *Du droit de la philosophie*, p. 3.

460 Of course, it is not only Fischer-Lichte who considers these distinctions to be the most important. They are found in nearly all contemporary performance theories.

'Event'

The performance's aestheticity is manifested in its nature as event [...]

Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*

[Literature] *by producing events whose 'reality' or duration is never assured, but which by that very fact are more thought-provoking.*

Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature'

Derrida's philosophy is often described as a 'philosophy of event'. In recent years this phrase has even supplanted 'deconstruction', with which Derrida's name has been so inseparably linked. Derrida has always claimed that the notion of event was a primary concern of his, and his early deconstructionist practices directed against the Metaphysics of Presence were intended to prepare a foundation for his 'philosophy of event', which the metaphysical tradition tried to suppress.

Derrida's notion of event (inspired primarily by the Heideggerian concept of 'being') was largely responsible for bringing about a reassessment of the Western philosophical tradition. Because of this tradition – critics argued – the event, in all its forms, was 'blocked' by metaphysical qualifications, destroying its singularity and uniqueness. The 'event', the *arrivant* (who or what arrives or comes), as Derrida once said, constituted one of the greatest threats to metaphysics. The uncertainty, contingency, and unpredictability of events could not be accommodated by its systems. Events could only be excluded or 'theorized', just as 'being' in the Metaphysics of Presence became 'existence' (as Heidegger pointed out), a 'dead' but useful theoretical category. Derrida described his practice of deconstruction as 'what happens (*ce qui arrive*)',⁴⁶¹ and therefore, as he added, every deconstructionist reading is 'always other'; it becomes a singular 'event' characterized by variability and singularity. However, while the early practices of 'strategic' deconstruction were meant to critically reevaluate the metaphysical tradition, and thus, as Derrida would say, 'make way for what happens' at a later stage, he made a conscious attempt to practice a positive philosophy of event. This could best be accomplished in readings of literary texts, which due to their idiomatic nature became for Derrida the most perfect 'experience' of the event, and at the same time, of being 'on the edge of metaphysics'. The 'event' of a literary text and the corresponding 'event' of reading thus marked the most

461 J. Derrida, M. Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. G. Donis, Cambridge 2001, p. 64.

important landmarks in Derrida's philosophy of reading. In an interview with Attridge, Derrida declared:

I wrote a text, which in the face of the event of another's text, as it comes to me at a particular, quite singular, moment, tries to 'respond' [...] in an idiom which turns out to be mine. [AL 62]

Derrida also often spoke about his readings in terms of inducing 'stimuli' and described his responses as producing 'reactions' to them. Speaking of 'the event of another's text', which came to him at 'a particular, quite singular, moment' also suggested that the reading process was not planned in advance. Rather, it was 'stimulated', or even, as the philosopher once expressed it, 'provoked' by a sudden impulse coming from text.⁴⁶² Thus, reading for Derrida was not a systematic or methodical project with a clearly defined course of action or a specific goal. Nor did it constitute a list of tasks for the reader that the poetics of reception tried to compile. Its dynamics were defined solely by responding with the 'event' of his text to the 'event' of the literary text. What's more, this exchange of responses did not take place in some abstract time or space – it was therefore not defined by the relation of a theoretical subject to a distanced object. On the contrary: it was highly situational and as such, more concrete in nature. Derrida's readings were thus distinguished by their dynamism, spontaneity, variability, and unpredictability – features that can also be found in the semantic field of the 'event' – forming a sequence of 'situational' surprises. For obvious reasons, the rules of reading and the criteria for their evaluation formulated by hermeneutics likewise did not apply. The reading process was truly unintentional – it *took place* only 'as dictated' by the text.

The 'eventicity' of reading was also evidenced by – as Derrida emphasized a number of times – its singularity. For the philosopher, the reading process was always 'one of a kind'. And as such, it did not follow and it did not develop any pattern that could then be applied elsewhere. Derrida's philosophy of reading opposed all forms of universalism and essentialism. And naturally, this radical 'eventness' of reading corresponded to the most important, at least for Derrida, properties of literature, about which he said, 'there is no such thing as a literary essence or a specifically literary domain strictly identifiable as such [...] literature perhaps is destined to remain improper, with no criteria, or assured concept or reference' [AL 187]; likewise, there could be no universal recipe for reading. For Derrida, it was always 'reading' (continuous, unfinished) and never

462 Derrida very often emphasized that he wrote 'in response to solicitations or provocations', see e.g. [AL 41].

a finished 'read'. Each literary work, he explained, recreates its own 'institution'. Consequently, reading must be a unique 'event' each time it takes place, allowing it to free itself (as much as is possible) from the power of all generalizations. For Derrida, both literature and reading constituted an area of unconstrained freedom – it was an opportunity (greater than any other) to escape from metaphysical limitations. This freedom, however, did not entail negligence. The course of reading was defined by a 'dialogical' relationship with the text – a 'question' posed by the text and a 'response' given by the reader – and this relation determined its 'dramatic' character. Meanings were created on a continuous basis – in a one-of-a-kind relationship that constituted the only 'determinant' of reading. Reading was thus 'always already other'⁴⁶³ just as every performance is 'always already other'. However, this time this performance takes place on the 'textual scene'.⁴⁶⁴

'Iteration'

*there has to be this play of iterability in the singularity of
the idiom...*

Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange
Institution Called Literature'

Many contemporary performance studies scholars emphasize that one of the essential properties of performance is 'iteration' or 'iterability', defined as the repetition inscribed in the very structure of performance,⁴⁶⁵ Derrida is usually referenced in writings on the subject. Iterability, however, is understood in a specific manner – as both a basic condition of expression (be it linguistic, literary, or theatrical) and as its most important mechanism – and often discussed in the context of the arguments of Derrida and Deleuze on the production of deferred and differentiated repetitions.⁴⁶⁶ I have already discussed the question of iterability as it relates to the dispute between Derrida and Austin, but some further issues are worth addressing here.

463 It is worth recalling what R. Barthes wrote about the text: 'its reading is semelfactive (this rendering illusory any inductive-deductive science of texts [...])'. See also 'From Work to Text', *Image-Music-Text*, pp. 159–160.

464 The phrase 'textual scene' is Derrida's [PO 47].

465 See e.g. Schechner, [PS 125], Carlson, [P 76–79].

466 For more on this subject, see G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. See also the chapter 'Repetition Experience' in the present book.

In 'Writing and Telecommunication' (a section of 'Signature, Event, Context'), Derrida defined 'iterability' in the following manner, referring to its earliest etymology: "*iter* [...] comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows may be read as the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity" [WT 315]. The most important point here concerns 'the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity'. This principle was discovered by Derrida in the very nature of '*écriture*' (which, as we know, was for him a synonym for 'writing' and 'reading'). At this point, the main reason for this apparently bizarre idea that both literature and writing/reading should be based on the model of 'writing' and not 'speech' became clear.

For Derrida, iterability is for him one of the most important 'nuclear' properties of writing [WT 315] because, in contrast to inherently 'fleeting speech', it is characterized by 'material permanence', making repetition possible. It is also closely related to eventness ('eventicity'), and Derrida's theoretical reflections on the repetition 'inscribed' in the context of the event were for him among his most important. In criticizing Austin's theory of speech acts, Derrida observed, for example, that

we must first agree upon what the 'occurring' or the eventhood of an event consists in, when the event supposes in its allegedly present and singular intervention a statement which in itself can be only of a *repetitive* or citational *structure* (emphasis mine, AB), or rather, since these last words lead to confusion, of an iterable structure. Therefore, I come back to the point which seems fundamental to me, and which now concerns the status of the event in general, of the event of speech or by speech, of the strange logic it supposes, and which often remains unperceived. [MP 326]

This 'strange logic' indicates a special kind of contamination that can be discovered in the 'event', the cross-contamination between singularity and repetition, which in Derrida's opinion characterized performatives at their core. Thus, Derrida asks (rhetorically):

Could a performative statement succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable statement, in other words if the expressions [...] were not identifiable as *conforming* to an iterable model, and therefore if it were not identifiable in a way as 'citation'? [...] This is why there is a relative specificity, as Austin says, a 'relative purity' of performatives. But this relative purity is not constructed *against* citationality or iterability [...] within a general iterability which is the effraction into the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every speech act. [MP 326]

And then provides the following answer:

this unity of the signifying form is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated in the absence not only of its referent [...] but of a determined signified

or current intention of signification, as of every present intention of communication.
[WT 318]

Marvin Carlson commented thus on Derrida's reflections concerning iterability as a key feature of performative acts:

Derrida, like Bakhtin earlier, argues [...] that it is only by virtue of citation, or what he calls 'iterability', that performative utterances can succeed. [...] It is important to note, however, that for Derrida, citation is never exact because, like Bakhtin's utterance, it is always being adapted to new contexts. Any citation, indeed any sign, 'can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable.' This argument moves the concept of linguistic performance back into the realm of repeated (or restored) and contextualized activity that is so basic to performance theory. [P 76]

Drawing on the insights of Derrida, Carlson consequently challenged the utopian faith in the original and 'pure' eventness of performance professed by some performance studies scholars:

Modern art, performance, or the Theatre of Cruelty⁴⁶⁷ have sought by various strategies to bring about an occurrence uncontaminated by this derivative, secondary quality. Derrida, however, argues that escape from repetition (and thus theatre) is impossible, that consciousness itself is always already involved in repetition. [P 149]

Derrida's reflections on iterability had consequences above all in terms of his own views on reading, which he defined as a creative, always already other, 'repetition'. He also often commented on the paradoxical 'logic of difference and repetition', and thus the simultaneous and inseparable singularity and repeatability (or 'idiom and institution'), that characterizes both the literary text and its reading. Each text, Derrida argued, has the structure of a signature and as such 'takes place just once', but

This singularity is worked, in fact constituted, by the possibility of its own repetition (readings, indefinite number of productions, references, be they reproductive, citational, or transformative, to the work held to be original which, in its ideality, takes place just one single, first and last time). [AL 69]

He later added that 'any work is singular in that it speaks singularly of both singularity and generality. Of iterability and the law of iterability' [AL 68] and that

467 Artaud spoke out against repetition. In his view, each performance could essentially only take place once: 'Artaud wanted to erase repetition in general', Derrida wrote [WD 310]. See Derrida's analysis of this theme in Artaud's thought in 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' [WD 292–316].

‘an idiom is never pure, its iterability opens it up to others’ [AL 62]. This meant that in order for a text to be able to renew itself over time its absolute original singularity must be ‘repeated’ in reading practices. Because it is written down, the unique, ‘idiomatic’ literary text always inherently possesses (and carries) iterability which guarantees its vitality; this is the source of the paradox of its ‘singularity and universality’, its ‘uniqueness and repeatability’, its being ‘possessed’ and ‘shared’, etc., so often emphasized by Derrida. It is characteristic both of the ‘molecules’ of writing, i.e. the ‘signature’ (a synonym in Derrida’s texts for the linguistic uniqueness of the text), and for *lecture-écriture*, which responds with its own ‘countersignature’ to the signature of the other.⁴⁶⁸

By emphasizing the singularity of literature as well as the singularity of reading, Derrida once again draws on the idiographic tradition in literary studies.⁴⁶⁹ However, by exposing the paradoxical nature of the idiographic status of a literary text, he seems to draw much more far-reaching conclusions. The metaphorical definition of reading as ‘countersigning in your own idiom’ was employed to draw attention to the fact that reading (which is also the writing of a text) somehow ‘inherited’ the same existential paradox as literature. At the same time, however, thanks to iterability, reading remains creative. For Derrida, both texts, the text being read and its reading, were characterized by their linguistic singularity, which was always already ‘contaminated’ because it was essentially repeatable. ‘Countersignature’, Derrida argued, ‘signs by confirming the signature of the other, but also by signing in an absolutely new and inaugural way [...] each time in the same way and each time differently’ [AL 67].

468 ‘Signature’ was such a valuable concept for Derrida because it carried in a condensed formula the properties which in his opinion were characteristic of literature (and consequently of reading), because a signature is always signed only once, but its effectiveness as an action is conditioned by its repetition. For this reason, in the philosopher’s language, the terms ‘signature’ and ‘countersignature’ act as a kind of ‘metaphor’, because their task is to ‘show’ certain important issues concerning the ‘being’ of literature. They also functioned, as Derrida himself described it, as ‘traits of individuality’ (both in the literary text and its reading), and at the same time, as the paradoxical necessity of repetition, inherent in their very nature. The prefix ‘counter’ was supposed to signal an equality between the process of reading-writing a literary text in relation to the process of writing it. For this reason, Derrida often described reading as ‘countersigning’.

469 In his interview with Attridge, Derrida does not deny the parallels between his own way of thinking and the idiographical traditions that emerged in literary studies after the anti-positivist break, although he also notes important differences in his reflections on the subject [AL 67].

Thus, reading (like performance) always takes place during the repetition of the ‘singular’⁴⁷⁰ – in the never-ending process of ‘repetition with difference.’⁴⁷¹ As Derrida argued: ‘Reading must *give itself up* [*se rendre*] to this uniqueness, take it on board, keep it in mind, *take account of it* [*en rendre compte*]’ [AL 69]. However, in order to achieve this, the text that is read must be repeated in one’s own unique idiom. In other words, it has to be ‘produced’ anew.

‘Production’

*A performance does not transmit pre-given meanings.
Rather, it is the performance which brings forth the
meanings that come into being during its course.*

Erika Fischer-Lichte, ‘Culture as Performance’

It is no coincidence that Derrida considered the most revolutionary gesture of Mallarmè and Artaud to be their break with the idea of the work as a ‘product’ (of a creative act), leading to the formulation of a new aesthetics of ‘production’⁴⁷² in which the creative process became inseparable from its effects. The creative act took place in the ‘here and now’, in the self-presentational ‘movement’ of the literary text (for Mallarmè) or in the course of theatrical performance *in statu nascendi* (for Artaud). This is no coincidence because Derrida also discovered these properties in ‘writing’.

Derrida naturally began his own aesthetical revolution by analyzing the phenomenon of ‘writing’, and its ability to produce meanings,⁴⁷³ which is what interested him most. In ‘Writing and Telecommunication’, Derrida observed, for example, that due to the material permanence of writing, ‘to write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive’ [WT 316]. This was also the main reason for his insistence that the concept of literature (and all related writing practices) should be modelled on ‘writing’ (and

470 See also later in this section, the chapters titled ‘Repetition of Experience’ and ‘Shibboleth, or “only one time”’.

471 See also the last section of the Introduction to *S/Z* or Foucault comments on ‘przepisywaniu’ [AK 173].

472 ‘Production’ is a word Derrida uses very often, e.g. in *Positions* alone some form of it appears several times on dozens of pages. See e.g. [PO 27–28].

473 In Barthes’ and Kristeva’s terminology, just like in Derrida’s case, ‘signification’ [*signifiance*] is a modification of de Saussure’s *signifiant*, meaning something akin to ‘the site of the birth of meaning’, the production of which is always infinite.

not 'speech'). According to Derrida, this change led to the rejection of the idea of literature as a static work-product and to its recognition as a dynamic process of production. Derrida was guided by similar sentiments when it came to reading, which as we already know, he considered 'writing' with all its consequences. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida observed that 'what we call production is [...] a text, the system of a writing and of a reading' [OG 164]. In an interview he gave in Poland in 2001, Derrida expressed it even more succinctly: 'every production of meaning is connected with writing' [OS 20]. Calling the 'production' of meaning the most important function of writing-text, and of writing-reading ('*lecture-écriture*') was meant not only to highlight their dynamic and processual character (as well as to contextualize them as 'practices'), but also to emphasize that in literature, theatre (as defined by Artaud), and reading no meaning exists prior to these practices – all meaning is *produced in statu nascendi* (in the course of the text, theatrical production, reading).

The Derridean idea of *écriture* is very close to today's views on performance. According to the author of *The Transformative Power of Performance*, just as performance does not convey meanings that exist prior to it but only those that arise during the performance itself, so too in Derrida's *écriture* meanings are produced on their own. The identification of literature and reading with 'writing' marked a break, in Derrida's opinion, with the 'mechanical' (but sanctioned by modern literary studies and hermeneutics) separation of signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*) (begun by de Saussure), which consequently led the literary text to acquire the status of a 'work' in which meaning was 'deposited' beforehand. Derrida, Barthes, Kristeva, and Foucault contested such a view of literature because it led to the viewing of interpretation/reading (as sanctioned by phenomenology) as a 'reproduction' of the pre-existing meaning (in accordance with authorial intention), precluding the interpreter/reader from creatively participating in the process of textual 'production'. In their assessment, defining literature as a collection of 'written' texts (which it would in fact appear to be) could radically change our thinking about literature. 'Writing' would no longer be conceived of as simply a technical means of communication but rather as a specific model of communication that had carried specific consequences for both the understanding of literature and the specifics of its reading. Derrida described this in short as 'Scription contra-diction. To be reread' (*Scription contra-diction à relire*) [DIS 363].

Joseph Riddel aptly summed up the sense of this idea, stressing that this change from a 'speech' model to a 'writing' model, so important for poststructuralism, also transferred the centre of gravity from the 'aesthetics of product' to the 'aesthetics of production'. The term '*écriture*' itself, as he argued,

is not the name for the physical mark of writing, but the doubleness of which the physical mark is always a sign – a sign that has no signified except another sign. Thus the productive function of *écriture*, which, like *différance*, initiates by an instant re-play. The limitlessness of 'literature' is not the concealed fullness of language, but its disruptive and temporalizing function. 'Literature' is neither a full text nor an empty text, neither a presence nor an absence. [...] 'Literature' [...] is the purest function of the self-dissimulating movement of writing. 'Literature' is writing – the 'figure' of a productive function for which the produced text is only a simulacrum, a facsimile, a *fac-simile*, a 'factor'.⁴⁷⁴

Similarly, Jonathan Culler claimed that

To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting. [...] For the written to be written it must continue to 'act' and to be legible even if what is called the author of the writing [...] is provisionally absent [...] or if in general he does not support [...] that very thing which seems to be written 'in his name'. [...] The situation of the scribe and of the subscriber, as concerns the written, is fundamentally the same as that of the reader. This essential drifting, due to writing as iterative structure cut off from all absolute responsibility, from *consciousness* as the authority of the last analysis, writing orphaned, and separated at birth from the assistance of its father, is indeed what Plato condemned in the *Phaedrus*.⁴⁷⁵

Derrida would have certainly subscribed to these views. In his opinion, after all, if a literary work is understood as a 'text', this automatically implies 'breaking' it from the original 'moment of its production', i.e. from the 'initial' creative act, its author, and above all, from authorial intention: the 'desire to say' [WT 317].⁴⁷⁶ Enduring in time (thanks to the 'materiality of writing'), the text 'exposes itself' to a multitude of various 'recontextualizations', cut off from authorial 'control'.⁴⁷⁷

474 J. Riddel, 'From Heidegger to Derrida to Chance: Doubling and (Poetic) Language', *boundary 2*, vol. 4. no. 2, p. 589.

475 *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 316.

476 According to Derrida (and others), the link between a literary work and this 'original intended voice', inherent in the 'metaphysical' tradition of imposing upon literature the properties of 'speech' (transmission), at the same time obliges us to 'read' it in accordance with this original intention, and thus gives interpretative practices a restorative character.

477 The need to subordinate a statement to such 'control' is clearly expressed in Plato's *Phaedrus*, in particular when Plato argues (through Socrates) that, in writing, speech is threatened by indiscriminate interpretation and 'always needs its father to help it; for it is incapable of either defending or helping itself.' The freedom of what is written from the author's control was for Plato one of the main arguments against writing.

‘Writing’ also records the very process of making meaning in the text, because, as Derrida argues, even in the ordinary sense of the word, it is ‘a mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription’ [WT 317]. Reading defined as ‘writing’⁴⁷⁸ could therefore take the form of ‘re-production’ and be created by the reader, who actively participates in the process and assumes, in a sense, the role of the ‘author’. The poststructuralists, in turn, as in so many previous situations, focused their efforts on stimulating the creative potential of literature and reading as well as making the reader an active co-creator of meaning (or even ‘the processor’ as Derrida described it after Artaud). Similarly, Roland Barthes claimed that the recognition of literature as ‘writing’ meant a break with the ‘aesthetics of reproduction’, which implies accepting the idea of the ‘infinite work’.⁴⁷⁹ In ‘The Death of the Author’, he even stated that writing is for obvious reasons ‘performative’, because it involves an active production of meanings in which readers participate because, after the ‘death of the author’, they are the only legitimate producer of the text.⁴⁸⁰ Thus, as Derrida claimed, the meaning-making potential of ‘writing’ could be found in its very nature, in ‘the perpetual restoration of meaning in its virginity’ [MP 165]. And thanks to this, the reader, now regarded as the ‘writing reader’ (which for Derrida was a consequence of combining reading and writing into one and the same practice of producing meanings), could be included in processes of producing meaning initiated not by the ‘author’ (or *écrivain*) but by the ‘writer’ (*écrivain*).⁴⁸¹ Such a terminological change, so very important in poststructuralist discourse, was meant to express the transformation of reading into an active practice. However, the opposition between the product/process and reproduction/production expressed in this concept of ‘writing’ also carried other consequences. ‘Production’, as Derrida and other poststructuralists understood it, was never meant to yield a ‘final’ product – it was a radical process that was supposed to be remain unfinished and incomplete. The same was true of the ‘differentiating’ potential of writing, which formed the basis for what Derrida termed *différance*,

See Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. C. J. Rowe, London 2015, pp. 63–64. This, in turn, was the main reasons for Derrida’s attacks on Platonism, in which there is a tendency to restrict freedom of interpretation, leading, on the basis of onto-hermeneutical theories, to the establishment of various restrictions that pre-determine it.

478 Or ‘re-writing’ (*réécriture*); such a term appears often in poststructuralist discourse.

479 ‘The Theory of the Text’, p. 199.

480 R. Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, *Image-Music-Text*, New York 1977, pp. 145–146.

481 This distinction was introduced by R. Barthes in his essay ‘Authors and Writers’, in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. S. Sontag, New York 1983, pp. 185–193.

i.e. an unending 'movement according to which language [...] is constituted' and which makes possible 'the movement of signification' [DF 12–13]. When applied to the 'text' and 'reading', this neologism coined by Derrida, was to express the constant deferral of meaning. Derrida repeatedly emphasized that *différance* (functioning in his project as an 'arche', understood dynamically, not statically as it was in ancient metaphysical theories, which defined it as the beginning or 'first principle') was defined by him as a 'quasi-basis' for the above-mentioned 'movement of signification'. Defining *différance* as a quasi-basis challenged the metaphysical (and hermeneutical) dogmas of 'source' and 'presence', from which the view was derived that interpretation should be a search for the source of 'ultimate meaning' or, as Derrida put it, the 'protective *signifié*', in order to reproduce its 'primordial presence'.⁴⁸² According to performance theorists, Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysical concept of presence and his emphasis on the 'aesthetics of absence' [P 149], as Marvin Carlson put it, and thus his recognition that 'pure presence' does not exist because something prior to it always existed, had profound philosophical consequences for performance studies. Henry Sayre and Josette Fèral also held this view, observing that in Derrida's philosophy 'presence' is always paired with 'absence', which leads to the acknowledgement that it is 'a field perpetually in process, always in-between' [P 149] is created in the *here and now*. This constant process of differing and deferring which produces meaning also lies at the heart of performance. As Carlson observed,

This removal of a center, a fixed locus of original meaning, brings all discourse, all action, and all performance into a continuing play of signification, where signs differ from one another but a final, authenticating meaning of any sign is always deferred. (Combining differing and deferring, Derrida creates one of his best-known neologisms, speaking of the '*différance*'.) [P 149].

Herbert Blau also commented on this aspect of performance. In his article 'Universals of Performance' (largely drawing on the philosophy of Derrida), Blau strongly rejects the idea of a 'pure' non-mediated presence. The very nature of performance, he claims, 'implies *no first time*, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction'.⁴⁸³ However, this also means that there is no 'last time'. 'Writing' as defined by Derrida is a synonym for a permanent productive disposition, an

482 Fischer-Lichte draws attention to the elimination of the difference between 'presence' and 'representation' in relation to performance in a separate section of a chapter devoted to this issue. [TP 147–150].

483 H. Blau, 'Universals of Performance; Or, Amortizing Play', *SubStance* 1983, vol. 11, no. 4, p. 148.

‘active space’ in which meaning is created, giving rise not so much to polysemy, because, as he claimed, it is always subjected to some *telos*, but to an unending ‘dissemination’ of meaning.⁴⁸⁴ Derrida was fully aware, however, that recognizing literature as ‘*l’objet écrit*’ (a term coined by Barthes) could not only put an end to mimetologism and the aesthetics of the product, but also create an entry point for a completely different reading practice, namely one that would draw practical lessons from the properties of writing he viewed as crucial: material permanence, repeatability (iterability), dissemination, and, above all, the ability to be applied to various contexts due to being ‘detached’ from the sender’s intention, and thus the lack of need for ‘belonging to a saturable and constraining context’ [WT 320]. This reading practice was to be based on ‘the absence of the referent and even of the signified sense’ [WT 318], or, to paraphrase Erika Fischer-Lichte – on the absence of anything external to the performance itself. Indeed, applying the principles of ‘*écriture*’ and ‘*différance*’ to reading required a completely new definition of it, far removed from its traditional understanding. Derrida announced this new reading practice in *Of Grammatology*. It would be, he claimed, ‘the discipline of a future reading’ [OG 149], in which meaning was derived from ‘a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*’ in a manner that would not ‘transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent [...] outside the text’ [OG 158]. Derrida believed that such a dynamic model of literature as a *process* (production of meaning) had already been introduced by literary (and theatrical) avant-garde practices which themselves questioned the notion of the literary and theatrical work as a product, as demonstrated by the practices of Mallarmè and Artaud.⁴⁸⁵ According to Derrida, the very fact that such artistic practices arose required one to change their views on the practice of reading, describing this situation as ‘the retroaction of the modern text on the procedures of analysis’ [PO 89]. As we can recall, Fischer-Lichte also argued that aesthetics needed to change in response to changes in the arts. However, while Fischer-Lichte derived her aesthetics from the experience of the performative turn in the arts, Derrida (and other poststructuralists) saw modern literature and the twentieth-century theatrical practices as the primary

484 This new neologism was introduced by the philosopher in his book *Dissèmination*.

485 This was also pointed out by, e.g. Philippe Sollers, who wrote: ‘Mallarme posits, through writing, a principle of interpretation which is both singular and universal – a meaning to be made’. See P. Sollers, ‘Literature and Totality’, in *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, trans. P. Barnard and D. Hayman, New York 1982, pp. 63–85. Derrida repeatedly stressed the creative character of Mallarmè’s writing. (e.g. in *The Ear of the Other*, p. 121); Roland Barthes described it similarly in *S/Z*, p. 56.

source of the need for reform in aesthetic theory. Nevertheless, both arrived at very similar conclusions, which is especially evident in the writings of Derrida. He was inspired by artistic practices that could be described as the arche-sources of contemporary performance. They acted as a powerful incentive to change traditional views on literature as well as the language and structure of what was traditionally called 'commentary'. He believed that reading should not be about 'reproducing' pre-existing meanings in a work and presenting this as a finished product (the effect of a process of interpretation), but should consist of an active and creative production of meaning – '*lecture-écriture*'. The stakes in this undertaking were clear: writing about literature was to be creative (just as literature is creative) and literary commentary (if it wanted to extricate itself from its situation of crisis)⁴⁸⁶ likewise had to become both a 'literary' text *par excellence*, and in Derrida's opinion, a 'theatrical' text, as well. Such views corresponded with Linda Hutcheon's thoughts on the postmodern 'work of art', and especially with her famous thesis in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* that the most important feature of postmodernist artifacts was their transition from 'mimesis of product' to 'mimesis of process', and thus, their break with the aesthetics of the work/product established by 'high' modernism.⁴⁸⁷ This is also where one can find the sources of both the transformations in twentieth-century art that led to the emergence of various kinds of 'performative art', and to the theories that arose alongside them. In proposing his new concept of reading, Derrida also transformed the existing 'methodological' optics by, for example, criticizing the traditional hermeneutic-semiotic interpretive model (which Erika Fischer-Lichte also points out). Within that model, as Derrida said,

reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos.
[OG 14]

Thus, as Fischer-Lichte observed, just as performance combined the production and interpretation of signs in one and the same process, Derrida's⁴⁸⁸ goal was

486 For more on this subject, see R. Barthes, 'The Crisis of Commentary', in *Criticism and Truth*, trans. K. P. Keuneman, London 1983, pp. 23–24.

487 L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York-London 1988.

488 These views were also very close to those of Barthes, whose works I do not discuss in detail here. For more on this, please refer to his major works, such as *From Work to Text*, *The Pleasure of the Text*, and 'The Theory of the Text', especially p. 189.

likewise to break with the aesthetics of passive consumerism in reading. The reader, as defined by Derrida, but also by Barthes, Foucault, and Kristeva, was to actively participate in the reading process.⁴⁸⁹

‘Interaction’

The autopoietic feedback loop, consisting of the mutual interaction between actors and spectators, brings forth the performance.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*

The work's performance produces or institutes [...] a new competence for the reader.

Jacques Derrida, *This Strange Institution Called Literature*

According to Fischer-Lichte and many other contemporary performance scholars, interaction is one of the most important features of performance, distinguishing it from the classic notion of a performance. Of course, the latter always involves a relationship between actors and spectators, but this relationship did not affect its shape or course, as is the case with performance. It is clear, however, that when performance takes place in real space, where actors and spectators come into direct contact, close relations are established between them, creating an ‘autopoietic feedback loop’ (as Fischer-Lichte put it). The final effect of performance is thus a result of the actions of both of these actively participating parties. But how can we carry this type of interaction over into the sphere of the text, making its reading a form of cooperative action? How to find an equivalent for the immediacy inherent in such a relationship? Who is involved in it?

In his texts Derrida tried to tackle this problem, with the ‘interactivity’ of his practices manifesting itself in many ways. His efforts to ‘establish relationships’, as these attempts could be called, took place on at least three levels: between the reader and the writer, between the reader and the text, and between the reader of the text and the reader of their text. It could be said that traditional theories

489 Hutcheon has also drawn attention to this, emphasizing the change in the viewer's position in practices based on the process of *mimesis*. Carlson also writes about the links between Hutcheon's concept and performance studies research [P 145-147]. The conviction that the addressee (reader) takes an active part in the processes of producing textual meaning was one of the strongest held by many poststructuralists (especially Barthes and Kristeva).

of interpretation, and especially the twentieth-century theories of reading, were also interested in these relations. However, Derrida's practices differed from those of the past, primarily because he did not refer to semiotics or theories of literary communication. Instead, Derrida attempted to create an impression of immediacy (or at least of contiguity) between the textual relationships listed above – at least to the extent that their occurrence in the text made this possible. First of all, he said, the creator of the text (the author) was always involved in a process of 'writing-reading'. Let me emphasize: the author was *involved* and not consigned to some abstract realm of 'intentional acts of consciousness', as phenomenologists would have it, initiating the twentieth-century tradition of recognizing the author as a theoretical instance that controls the process of reading the text. In Derrida's readings, the 'Other' – the 'signatory' and owner of the text – was almost always present, or 'called by name'. In the course of reading, Derrida repeatedly signalled the Other's existence, reminding the reader that it is her text, her 'idiom', that they are appropriating. The philosopher also addressed the 'Other' directly, again, not as the hypothetical author or the speaking subject, but as a person. The 'Other' became a concrete (or rather identifiable) person, who signed her text with her own name. This was particularly evident, for example, in *Signéponge*, in which Derrida repeatedly invoked Francis Ponge [SP 2]. Indeed, *Shibboleth* is subtitled 'for Paul Celan'. In the course of reading Celan's works, Derrida tried, as he described it, to 'listen to' [SD 4] what the poet had to say about the 'date' – the main theme of 'Shibboleth'. In this way, the creator of the text became a fellow participant ('protagonist') in the 'performance' staged by the writer writing about his text and, as Derrida put it in reference to Ponge, they would appear 'in person'. The reader also spoke only 'in a responsible way', 'if [they] put in play, and in guarantee [*en gage*], [their] singularity' [AL 66] and facing the 'singularity of the Other'. Jacques Derrida-the reader, and not the reader of Derrida, neither established any reading patterns nor claimed to be objective – a given reading was his own personal and unique experience; 'it took place' as an effect of a one-time, unique interaction between the writer and the reader.

The philosopher, not without reason, described this interaction metaphorically as 'countersigning' ('signing by confirming the signature of the other', 'both at once'). For if 'signature' for Derrida was 'a trace of singularity', a 'trace' left by the Other, then reading someone else's text was a collaborative 'meeting' between two equals. He described the relational and dialogical nature of this meeting thus: 'I wrote a text, which in the face of the event of another's text, as it comes to me at a particular, quite singular, moment, tries to [...] 'countersign'" [AL 62]. Putting his own 'signature' next to the 'signature' of the writer meant, therefore,

that both processes, the writing of the text and the writing of its reading, are, in the full meaning of the word, a game of equals, or even, as he called it, 'a duel of singularities' [AL 69]. Such a dynamic interaction also took place between the reader and the text. This was also unique (an 'event'), because, as Derrida argued, every text 'produces' its own reader. For obvious reasons, this reader did not reproduce or decode the 'intention of the work'. They were not, therefore, the hypostasis of a 'model reading' or a 'model reader' that could exist as a pre-conceived ideal. They were above all an 'individual', who, stimulated by the 'call of the text', responded to this call. Derrida did not intend to discover a universal recipe for literature, reading, or, for that matter, a model reader. The philosopher emphasized instead the crucial role of the reading process, in which the reader never existed in the abstract but was 'produced' by the text and whose competence was each time different.⁴⁹⁰ For this reason, Derrida argued, '[b]y definition the reader does not exist. Not before the work and as its straightforward 'receiver''. Each text 'produces its reader' performatively, while the reader is 'invented' [AL 74] by the text. Derrida further explained that

performance [...] produces or institutes, forms or invents, a new competence for the reader or the addressee who thereby becomes a countersignatory. It teaches him or her, *if s/he is willing*, to countersign. What is interesting here is thus the invention of the addressee capable of countersigning and saying 'yes' in a committed and lucid way. But this 'yes' is also an inaugural performance, and we recover the structure of iterability which would prevent us, at this point, from distinguishing rigorously between performance and competence, as between producer and receiver. As much as that between the addressee and the signatory or the writer and the reader. [AL 74–75]⁴⁹¹

During reading, Derrida—the reader was never distanced or detached. In fact, it was quite the opposite, the reading process transformed him and changed him, even though, as he often pointed out, he was not at all prepared for this. The text being read would surprise him, altering his situation and momentarily influencing his practice. For obvious reasons, Derrida's reading was nothing like the pre-programmed monologue of the 'ideal reader'. The relation between the reader and the 'text of another' was created only during the process of reading – it was a completely unpredictable process that took the form of a series of

490 This does not mean, however, that reading does not require a knowledge of contexts, genre rules or conventions; the 'competence' Derrida speaks of here is rather a dynamic relationship between what the work 'shares' and what is its absolute 'singularity' (invention). Derrida sometimes also describes this as interplay between the institution and the idiom. For more on this subject see e.g. [AL 73–75].

491 He devoted his book *The Post Card*, among others, to deconstructing this opposition.

'responses' to textual 'events'. These 'responses' constituted the most important element of the reading process, foregrounding the fact that it was only initiated by the 'event' of the text. Consistent in his use of the term, Derrida tried to demonstrate that the reading process was always determined by a specific situation – a response, after all, is given to a specific question. The notion of reading as 'responding' to (the 'call' of) the text created the illusion that the relationship between the text and the reader was very direct – almost like a conversation. It also delineated the horizon of all of Derrida's practices. A 'response' does not exist in an abstract realm of generalizations but implies the presence of a person who asked a question. In using the term 'response', the philosopher wanted to emphasize that it may be given not only to another text but above all to the text of the Other. And it is the Other (whom the reader should constantly bear in mind) that is the most important point of reference. Derrida thus tried in various ways to create an illusion that the author was present in the text, so that reading could become dialogical and personalized in nature. Reading, as Derrida repeatedly emphasized, must always take into consideration '*the text of the other*, its very singularity, its idiom, its appeal' [AL 66] and 'allow for the passage'.⁴⁹² In fact, the only requirement for this was the authenticity of the 'meeting' with the writer, its intimacy, which Derrida so beautifully described in 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan'.

The relationship to the reader was very similar. Derrida did not so much address his texts to the reader as required their active participation. While it could be said that every text and every utterance assume the presence of an addressee, as evidenced by theories on the communicative functions of language, Derrida did not 'assume' the presence of an addressee, but instead wrote his texts in such a way as to engage or interact with them performatively. Employing Paweł Mościcki's distinctions introduced in *Polityka teatru* [*The Politics of the Theatre*], one could even say that both in relation to the person whose text he was reading and to the person who was to read his text, Derrida's writing was not so much 'engaged' as 'engaging'.⁴⁹³

Defying closure, leaving everything he wrote in a state of 'energetic openness', Derrida activated the reader, inducing them to think for themselves and take specific actions. In his texts, Derrida very consciously presented himself as the creator of a 'textual' performance, while the reader was given the status of a 'spectator'.⁴⁹⁴ The reader would be addressed directly, making the reading process

492 See J. Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1, p. 45.

493 Mościcki introduces this distinction in the title of his book, which in full reads *Polityka teatru. Eseje o sztuce angażującej* (Warszawa 2008).

494 This is clearly evident in *Signéponge* and in *Spurs*; I will return to this later in the book.

aleatoric. At times, it even seemed that Derrida did not intend to address a given issue – this would ‘happen’ as an effect of a sudden and unexpected discovery in the text. A (violent) change, the unexpected appearance of a new topic, would follow. These chaotic, incoherent and changeable rhythms in the reading were to make the experience as much like the actual situation of the average reader as possible.⁴⁹⁵ It undoubtedly also brought Derrida closer to the aesthetics of performance.

Reading for Derrida was therefore an ‘autopoietic feedback loop’, in which the reader was (actively) created in (the course of) the text, and the text was (re) created by the reader in ‘a conversation’ with its author (writer). Reading was not a planned theoretical project but an unpredictable process during which various interactions ‘happened’. The positions of the participants were never assigned or fixed permanently, and their roles could be reversed (the reader simultaneously produced the text and was produced by it, etc.). Fischer-Lichte similarly observed that

The perceptible workings of the autopoietic feedback loop, apparent in all forms of role reversal between actors and spectators, allows all participants to experience themselves as co-determinate participants of the action. Neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others, everyone experiences themselves as involved and responsible for a situation nobody single-handedly created. [TP 165]

According to Derrida, the complex nature of these relations, and above all the fact that they could appear in the space of the text, was connected to the very nature of ‘writing’. In contrast to speech, the philosopher claimed, ‘writing’ does not require the ‘presence’ of the sender and receiver of the message [WT 318]. The sender and the receiver only meet in textual space as active (co)participants in the process of producing meaning. Thus, if literature is ‘writing’, then the sender and the receiver should be included in this process. Such a notion, however, excluded any outlying positions – all participants in this ‘game’ took part on equal terms and, like the actors and the spectators in a performance, were subject to change. Meaning was produced as a result of their active participation. This even in some sense resulted in one of the distinguishing features of performance, the principle of ‘liveness’ (the direct and ‘live’ participation of the performer and the spectator), finding its way into the space of the text. However, this space, like a live performance, did not impose any ready-made roles. On the contrary, it

495 Roland Barthes’ readings are similar; see e.g. R. Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. R. Howard, Evanston 1972. Barthes saw his book *The Pleasure of the Text* as a kind of ‘treatise’ on the subject of reading understood in this way.

constantly re-produced the dynamic relationship between its participants during the course of a unique 'performance' of reading on the 'stage' of the text. Such an understanding of the reading process represents another correspondence with the writings of Erika Fischer-Lichte, who (in reference to Philip Auslander⁴⁹⁶) commented on the current tendency in which 'live' performances give way to 'mediatized performances' utilizing various media techniques.⁴⁹⁷ It could be said that Derridean reading practices were a kind of '(linguistically) mediatized performance' that retained some characteristics of a 'live' performance – in particular, due to the situationality, volatility, randomness, dynamism, and productive interactivity of its participants. In consequence, they likewise became a staging of personal encounters with the Other, or even attempts to 'recover the presence' of the Other. While this may not be fully attainable in reading, it remains greatly desired.⁴⁹⁸

'Materiality'

A [literary] event whose intangible singularity no longer separates the ideality, the ideal meaning as one says, from the body of the letter.

Jacques Derrida, *Che cose la poesia?*

The performance redefined [...] the relationship between the materiality and the semioticity of the performance's elements, between signifier and signified.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performances*

Let me refer to the apt observations of Erika Fischer-Lichte once again, and specifically to a topic she defined in *The Transformative Power of Performance* as 'performative generation of materiality'.⁴⁹⁹ Fischer-Lichte draws attention to a fairly obvious issue: it is clear that performance always operates through

496 From the book: P. Auslander, *Liveness – Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, London-New York 1999.

497 See in particular the section titled 'Liveness' [TP 67-74].

498 Roland Barthes also wrote about this desire in many places (see e.g. *Sade. Fourier. Loyola* and *The Pleasure of the Text*), expressing his belief in the possibility of a 'friendly return of the author' after 'the death of the author' in textual theory.

499 Fischer-Lichte treats this problem in a separate chapter titled 'The Performative Generation of Materiality' [TP 75-136].

its materiality (corporeality, sensuality, spatiality, soundness, etc.). It is equally obvious that the materiality of performance is fleeting; it disappears when the performance comes to an end. While it may be recorded, for example, on tape, such documentation never truly conveys what actually happened on the stage. Indeed, the material aspects of performance are often distorted when recorded [TP 75–76]. ‘The performance’s specific materiality, however, eludes one’s grasp. The performance brings forth its materiality exclusively in the present and immediately destroys it’ [TP 76]. These remarks may appear to have very little to do with the question of textual performativity that so interested Derrida. Indeed, while Derrida wrote extensively on the materiality of linguistic signs, the materiality of language and text is not the same as the materiality of performance. It may even be the reverse of the ‘live’ performance described by Fischer-Lichte: the materiality of writing emphasized by Derrida gives the text permanence so that it can be ‘repeated’ and recontextualized. Fischer-Lichte formulated the task before her thus:

This chapter [...] examines how performance, given its fundamental transience, generates and presents its specific materiality. It remains to be seen whether the materiality of performance is still compatible with the notion of a work of art. [TP 75]

Following Derrida’s lead, we could define the task he set for himself somewhat differently. Taking the material permanence of texts as his starting point, he examined not only how materiality (performatively) operates but also what consequences it has for the understanding of the literary text (and all other texts) and for understanding the nature of reading. Undoubtedly, like Fischer-Lichte, he was interested in the materiality of performance and the compatibility of this concept with the notion of a work of art. Derrida asked himself what status the materiality of text had and how his definition of materiality related to a more general concept of it. As could be expected, Derrida’s definition transcended conventional philosophical, theoretical, literary, and hermeneutic thinking – the question of the materiality of sign and text had not been addressed, or even acknowledged, in traditional thought. Although in her book Fischer-Lichte meticulously analyzes various aspects and means of producing materiality in performance, it seems that such a description was not an aim in itself. What she truly wanted was to draw attention to the fact that performance abolishes the traditional divisions between the material and the immaterial, and thus, as she put it, between ‘the body and the sign’, or, referring to de Saussure, between the signified and the signifier. In the next chapter of *The Transformative Power of Performance*, devoted to ‘the emergence of meaning’, Fischer-Lichte states that the moment material elements appear in performance they

appear de-semanticized because they are perceived in their specific materiality and not as carriers of meaning; they are neither put in relation to other elements nor to any other context. In this sense, the elements are insignificant – devoid of meaning. [TP 140]

She further adds that:

Once perceived in their materiality, these isolated emergent phenomena trigger a wealth of associations, ideas, thoughts, memories, and emotions in the perceiving subjects, enabling them to make connections to various other phenomena. They are evidently perceived as signifiers which refer to diverse ideas and contexts and can be related to a range of signifieds. [TP 140]

Because performance works simultaneously on the level of materiality and signification, and the two cannot be separated, a non-dualistic aesthetics is established. Performance thus questions the traditional idea of theatrical performance, in which, as Weber argued, the materiality of performance, reduced to the role of a transparent medium, was to convey the tragic plot (as postulated by Aristotle). This also meant that the aesthetics of performativity questioned the materiality/conceptuality dichotomy of the sign, sustained by semiotic and hermeneutical theories of the work of art. And at this point, we again come very close to Derrida's anti-dualistic philosophy, which allowed him to think about the text (and its language) beyond such oppositional divisions. This was undoubtedly one of the most important reasons why Derrida introduced the category of 'writing' to humanistic discourse and then based his concept of literature and reading on this model. By deconstructing 'speech', Derrida wanted to remind philosophy and literary studies about the materiality of the sign, which, like corporeality and sensibility, was marginalized or excluded by metaphysical thought. In modern semiotics, this opposition (and hierarchy) was strengthened by de Saussure's theory. As Derrida observed that the 'difference between the signifier and the signified has always reproduced the difference between the sensible and the intelligible' [PO 98]. The philosopher sought to introduce a non-dualistic notion of the sign, in which materiality and conceptuality (the signified) would no longer be separated. Traversing the 'strange space [...] between speech and writing', as he poetically expressed it, was aimed at ridding the philosophy of language of the illusion that the two do not differ [DF 5]. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida stated, for example, that 'it seems to us in principle impossible to separate, through interpretation or commentary, the signified from the signifier' [OG 159].

Emphasizing the inseparability of the materiality and meaning of the written sign, which, as we can recall, the philosopher first discovered in Husserl's notes, Derrida opposed a way of thinking that Roman Ingarden described accurately

and succinctly: in a hermeneutics founded on metaphysics (phenomenology), 'the verbal body is simultaneously grasped as an 'expression' of something other than itself',⁵⁰⁰ thus becoming transparent and a function of the message. According to Derrida, this gesture of erasing the materiality of the sign was widespread in traditional hermeneutics, especially as practiced by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. For example, when Heidegger examined the issue of the essence of truth in language, he located it in the 'experience of the effacement of the signifier in the voice' [OG 20]. Heidegger's attempts to describe the parallels between poetry and thought [AL 48], his glorification of art as the 'appearance of truth' [PO 11], and his notion that listening to poetry offered a means of experiencing immediate contact with logos [PO11] expressed the German philosopher's faith in the Platonic notion of speech as superior to writing [DF 23–27]. In 'Science and Reflection', Heidegger observed that: 'The written word of literature is at any given time the spoken word of a language.' [QCT 175]. Derrida argued that in 'onto-hermeneutic' discourse⁵⁰¹ writing simply disappeared – it became 'a voice' because the materiality of the sign, which, like everything material, troubled idealistic metaphysics, also had to disappear. According to Derrida, this swift (perhaps too swift) effacement of writing was a testament to the abuses of metaphysics. In the metaphysical tradition, writing could only be a means of recording speech, and as Plato argued in *Phaedrus*, writing down 'live' speech was not only harmful but even dangerous: the written message would distance itself from the sender's 'original' intentions and "alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support." And, as Derrida observed in *Of Grammatology*, when such a model of writing and speech was transferred to literature, it became subordinate to the ideology of 'speech', and the literary text began to be treated like a 'document' and not like a 'text'. The philosopher argued that 'all the Western methods

500 R. Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. R. A. Crowley, K. R. Olson, Evanston 1973, p. 21.

501 Derrida's term, see e.g. 'onto-hermeneutics', 'hermeneutologist', 'onto-hermeneutical assumption' (i.e. an arbitrary, 'pre-critical relation to the signified') [S 113]. It refers to the metaphysical foundations of hermeneutics. In Derrida's opinion, this concept is typological rather chronological in character – it reveals itself in all those forms of hermeneutics whose indebtedness to metaphysics (Platonism and its Cartesian-Kantian-Hegelian variants) is most visible. In contemporary hermeneutics – from Schleiermacher to Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. For all these hermeneutics, the requirement to make the sense prior to the text manifest, clearly indicating their metaphysical pedigree, and this led Derrida to label them 'onto-hermeneutic', which as he used it was not meant as a compliment.

of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation' developed on the basis of logocentrism never addressed the 'question of writing,' a question concerning the materiality of the written sign [OG 46]. Consequently, as Derrida observed,

The security with which the commentary considers the self-identity of the text, the confidence with which it carves out its contour, goes hand in hand with the tranquil assurance that leaps over the text toward its presumed content, in the direction of the pure signified. [OG 159]

The example of Paul Ricoeur is particularly interesting in such a context. The paradox of Ricoeur's thought was that his concept of hermeneutics was derived from 'written texts,' which he then subordinated to a model of 'speech.' Writing for Ricoeur is always a 'manifestation of discourse' and a paradigmatic mediation between two verbal events (primary and secondary).⁵⁰² In the process of its interpretation, the materiality of writing was irrelevant – it was only a means to an end which disappeared at the *parousia* of meaning, so as not to cause any difficulties to the reading subject on their noble quest for (self-) understanding. Indeed, ultimately for Ricoeur, understanding the text was synonymous with 'listening' to it.⁵⁰³ Metaphysics (and hermeneutics) disregarded materiality, and searched instead for unmediated presence, a living and self-aware logos. 'The effacement of materiality' was largely motivated by the close relationship between thought and speech postulated by Plato (best expressed in the concept of logos). Writing, on the other hand, was seen as an intruder, disrupting the perfect harmony of thought and speech. Derrida thus dubbed the history of metaphysics the history of 'the effacement of the trace' [OG 167], which consequently led to the suppression of textuality. 'The entire history [of metaphysics] was compelled to strive toward the reduction of the trace' [OG 71], primarily because 'the trace transgresses the question: 'what is it' and makes it possible at the same time'. 'Writing, defined as 'leaving traces' [OS 20], makes its 'mark' (*marque*) and reminds us of materiality. It resists the uninterrupted flow of pure ideas that always 'desires' to leave no mark. From the point of view of the Metaphysics of Presence, the 'trace' (materiality) has always been inconvenient – it was a sign of presence, which, however, is never present and which can never be fully manifested.⁵⁰⁴

502 P. Ricoeur, 'Existence and Hermeneutics,' trans. K. McLaughlin, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, London 2000, pp. 6–8.

503 *Ibid.*, p. 322.

504 Derrida's concept of the 'trace' draw largely on Lèvinas. He himself drew attention to this in *Of Grammatology*: 'I relate this concept of *trace* to what is at the center of the latest work of Emmanuel Levinas and his critique of ontology: relationship to the

The question of the materiality of the sign was also addressed in a different text, namely 'La Parole Soufflée,' devoted to Artaud. Derrida observed here that Artaud strived to overcome the duality of the body and the soul, which bore a very strong resemblance to the metaphysical oppositions of speech and writing (intelligibility and materiality). For Derrida, the integral combination of the bodily and the sensible visible in Artaud's practices served as a stimulus for deconstructing both the traditional idea of performance (in which the 'materiality' of staging was subordinate to 'spiritual meaning') and the Metaphysics of Presence itself. As Derrida argued,

In pursuit of a manifestation which would not be an expression but a pure creation of life, which would not fall far from the body then to decline into a sign or a work, an object, Artaud attempted to destroy a history, the history of the dualist metaphysics which more or less subterraneously inspired the essays invoked above: the duality of the body and the soul which supports, secretly of course, the duality of speech and existence, of the text and the body, etc. The metaphysics of the commentary which authorized 'commentaries' because it *already* governed the works commented upon [...] Artaud knew that all speech fallen from the body, offering itself to understanding or reception, offering itself as a spectacle, immediately becomes stolen speech. Becomes a signification which I do not possess because it is a signification. Theft is always the theft of speech or text, of a trace. [WD 219–220]

It can be clearly seen here that, in Derrida's view, the 'materiality' of the body is treated on a par with the 'materiality' of the written sign: both have been marginalized by the metaphysical tradition. By reviving the body and 'the body of the word', Artaud's practices eluded the metaphysical ideology of, as Derrida put it, the 'whispered word' (*la parole soufflée*). Instead of this 'secondary' word, he wanted to introduce the 'lived' word to the theatrical stage. Derrida employed the terms 'whispered word' and 'lived' word in a very similar sense in 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation' to distinguish between the spoken and the written word. Here, however, he pays particular attention to the question of materiality in a response to the word '*soufflé*':

illeity as to the alterity of a past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence [...]. this notion signifies [...] the undermining of an ontology which, in its innermost course, has determined the meaning of being as presence and the meaning of language as the full continuity of speech. To make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words 'proximity', 'immediacy', 'presence' [...]. [OG 70]. See also [DF 21]. In introducing this term to his discourse, Derrida also made reference to Condillac [WT 313–314], Husserl, Freud, Nietzsche, and Heidegger [D 16–27].

[...] at the same time let us understand *inspired* by an *other* voice that itself reads a text older than the text of my body or than the theater of my gestures. Inspiration is the drama [...] of theft, the structure of the classical theater [...] [WD 220]

And as Derrida eloquently concluded, Artaud's rebellious gesture against these 'whispers' involved 'spiriting away the prompter'. Artaud wanted

the machinery of the prompter [*souffleur*] spirited away [*soufflé*], wanted to plunder the structure of theft. To do so, he had to destroy, with one and the same blow, both poetic inspiration and the economy of classical art, singularly the economy of the theater. And through the same blow he had to destroy the metaphysics, religion, aesthetics, etc., that supported them. He would thus open up to Danger a world no longer sheltered by the structure of theft. [WD 221]

In 'The Theater and its Double' Artaud is quoted as saying that 'As soon as I speak, the words I have found (as soon as they are words) no longer belong to me, are originally *repeated*.' [WD 223] He did not want to 'repeat' words. Instead, he wished that his own words (his 'handwriting') would not come from the outside, but exist on the theatre stage in their self-presence and materiality. According to Derrida, such an understanding of the role of words had profound consequences for a non-dualistic notion of language. In the dualistic model, on which traditional hermeneutics was based, seeing and listening take place through language, effacing its materiality. Opposed to this idea, Derrida claimed that the materiality of the sign could not simply be effaced, because in the process of signification it plays as important a role as the signified. The war Derrida waged with the help of 'writing' was intended to protect what he believed was 'irreducible'. He would use the notion of 'trace' [*trace, gramme*] not only to undermine metaphysics but above all to question the myth of the 'transitivity' of language. By criticizing seeing and listening through language, the philosopher opted for the visible, but as perceived by the senses and not made transparent when transposed into meaning. Thanks to the trace, as Markowski aptly observed, 'the scene of writing, the textuality of the text, cannot be reduced to the mental scene' [EI 251]. Though the trace is not *present*, it undoubtedly still *operates* – a crucial distinction in Derrida's understanding. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explained that

The presence-absence of the trace, which one should not even call its ambiguity but rather its play [...] carries in itself the problems of the letter and the spirit, of body and soul, and of all the problems whose primary affinity I have recalled. All dualisms, [...] as well as all monisms, spiritualist or materialist, dialectical or vulgar, are the unique theme of a metaphysics [...] The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the

gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence. [OG 71]

The trace ‘is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, refers itself, it properly has no site’ [DF 24]. In the framework established by modern linguistics only the signifier is a ‘trace’,⁵⁰⁵ while the signified is ‘a meaning thinkable in principle within the full presence of an intuitive consciousness’ [OG 73]:

The signified face, to the extent that it is still originally distinguished from the signifying face, is not considered a trace; by rights, it has no need of the signifier to be what it is. [OG 73]

Dualistic theories of language were therefore based on a blatant contradiction: the ‘trace’ (the materiality of the signifier) was separated from the signified and at the same time effaced so that ‘the signified’ could be ‘thinkable and possible outside of all signifiers.’ Derrida’s entire argument (and in particular his thorough analysis of de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* in *Of Grammatology* [OG 27–73]) led to the conclusion that the trace stimulates the entire sign (both its material and conceptual side). What is more, the signified is ‘*always already in the position of the signifier*’ [OG 73], because materiality both conditions and determines signification. ‘[T]he idea of the sign,’ says Derrida, ‘must be deconstructed through a meditation upon writing’ [OG 73], writing as trace, gramme, or grapheme becomes ‘the condition of all other differences, of all other traces.’ [...] ‘*The trace is the differance* which opens appearance [*l’apparaître*] and signification’ [OG 65]. And if the trace, this ‘arche-phenomenon of “memory”’,

belongs to the very *movement of signification*, then signification is *a priori* written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a ‘sensible’ and ‘spatial’ element that is called ‘exterior.’ [OG 70]

In the philosophy of Derrida, the ‘trace’ ultimately became a kind of a source (and also a tool) for the sensibilization and spatialization of language, sign, meaning, and, consequently, text. It became ‘a kind of a source’ not only because it could not be described or classified using established (i.e. metaphysical) categories, but also because it was essentially non-substantial and dynamic. ‘[T]he trace whereof I speak is,’ Derrida emphasized, ‘not more *natural* [...] than *cultural*, not more physical than psychic, biological than spiritual.’ It defies such dichotomies and especially the ‘oppositions between *physis* and its other’ [OG 47–48]. Derrida thus claimed the following: firstly, ‘all reality has the structure of

505 See also J-L. Houdebine’s comments [PO 79–80].

a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this 'real' except in an interpretative experience';⁵⁰⁶ secondly, 'every process of signification' is 'a formal play of differences. That is, of traces' [PO 26]; thirdly, there is no meaning in a 'pure' state, because its production is always marked by various 'traces'; and fourthly, 'literature is only exemplary of what happens everywhere, each time that there is some trace'.⁵⁰⁷ In *Dissemination* Derrida also observes that

There remain only traces, announcements and souvenirs, foreplays and aftereffects [*avant-coups et après-coups*] which no present will have preceded or followed and which cannot be arranged on a line around a point.⁵⁰⁸

Therefore, reading a text, 'reading' and not 'interpreting', cannot be reduced to generalizations. Because, as Peggy Kamuf points out in relation to the 'movement of the trace': 'Generalization is always limited, constricted by an unassimilable and singular other that is each time different'.⁵⁰⁹ Similarly to performance – it cannot be reduced to generalizations due to its materiality, which, as Fischer-Lichte concludes, 'eludes one's grasp'. [TP 76]. Performance is always engaged in movement.

'Mobility'

Sense, being temporal in nature, [...] is never simply present; it is always already engaged in the 'movement' of the trace.

Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*

Josette Fèral also argued that performance is 'continual movement, displacement, or repositioning' [P 150]. Derrida meanwhile described his deconstructive practices as follows: 'it is more necessary [...] to transform concepts, to displace them [...] and thereby produce new configurations' [PO 24]. Fèral's views are shared by many contemporary performance scholars:⁵¹⁰ movement, change, and displacement are undoubtedly key attributes of performance, related to its open and dynamic nature.

506 *Limited inc.*, p. 148.

507 J. Derrida, 'Passions', trans. D. Wood, *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Wood, Oxford 1992, p. 34.

508 J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 211.

509 *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, p. xx.

510 See e.g. Schechner, 'Transportations and Transformations' [PS 72–73]

The 'movement of signification' is also an essential aspect of Derrida's readings, deriving from the philosopher's views on the nature of signification in language and literature. As one commentator aptly observed, for Derrida 'signification is always production, movement, and not a fixed structure of presence'.⁵¹¹ The very idea of 'writing' which shaped Derrida's understanding of 'reading' was 'without any center of absolute anchoring' [WT 320]. From the very outset, Derrida saw reading and writing as processual and dynamic, combining them into one, single practice. The process of making meaning was described as the 'movement of difference' [OG lxx] or simply as the 'movement of signification' [OG 70]. Such an understanding of the nature of signification meant that the traditional approach to it had to be questioned. According to Derrida, the classical, especially de Saussurean notion of the sign, was only this 'ideal motion' of signification. In Hegelian terms, it implied that 'the soul of the material thing expresses itself' [OG 12]. De Saussure's theory assumed a one-way movement from *signifiant* to *signifié*. Derrida, on the other hand, argued that 'the movement of signification' should become real and not just idealized – the sign should no longer be protected from its materiality, as was the case in the metaphysical tradition, which prevents any word, any concept, any major enunciation from coming to summarize and to govern from the theological presence of a centre the movement and textual spacing of differences [PO 14].

Derrida was inspired by the Heideggerian conviction that just as 'being' is an element of thought, the movement of meaning is an element of reading. As Krzysztof Michalski observed in his commentary on Heidegger, this 'field' of thought is

constantly escaping presence: being. There is no permanent presence which thought could achieve in order to lay the foundations for the edifice of human knowledge. Being, that 'gap' constantly shaping the meaning of the time in which we live, constantly escapes thought.⁵¹²

Similarly, for Derrida the 'being' of literature meant constantly escaping the presence of meaning. Therefore, reading, he claimed (this time after Nietzsche), could only live by means of an 'exile's truth', which by nature was not intended for searching for conceptual security, but for opening up to an unpredictable, literary 'event'. Preserving the text in writing ('archiving' it) could halt this movement,

511 B. Banasiak, *Filozofia "końca filozofii"*. *Dekonstrukcja Jacquesa Derridy*, Warszawa 1995, p. 137

512 K. Michalski, Introduction to: M. Heidegger, *Budować, mieszkać, myśleć. Eseje wybrane*, Warszawa 1977.

which is why Derrida put so much effort into preserving its dynamics. The influence of Heidegger is clear, especially when he observes that:

Therefore procedure must be free to view the changeableness in whatever encounters it. Only within the horizon of the incessant-otherness of change does the plenitude of particularity [...] show itself. But the facts must become objective [gegenständlich]. Hence procedure must represent [vorstellen] the changeable in its changing, must bring it to a stand and let the motion be a motion nevertheless. [QCT 120]

This is not the first and not the last paradox of Heidegger's thoughts that can be clearly seen in Derrida's writing. If, as Derrida observed in *Positions*, 'writing' (literature, text, reading, etc.) was an endless chain of signification devoid of a transcendent signifier, in constant motion, deconstructive reading could also be described as 'movement'. Derrida claimed, for example, that: 'The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*' [OG 24]. He also observed that in reading 'we must proceed using a double gesture' [PO 41], and in an interview talked about the 'infinite movement of deconstruction' [OS]. Joshua Harare aptly summarized Derrida's practices, observing that 'the deconstructive movement is at the same time a close reading of texts and a commentary on its own practice of writing.'⁵¹³ This 'slow but effective', as Derrida used to say,⁵¹⁴ movement of deconstruction and his readings, both characterizes Derrida's practices as actions (and not statements) and emphasizes their difficulty. Questioning all restrictions (or, as the philosopher called it, 'merger', 'formalization', or 'totalization'⁵¹⁵), Derrida's practices had to be in constant motion – 'in opening, in uncloseting, destabilizing foreclosure structures.'⁵¹⁶ The mobility of Derrida's reading practices was inspired by Nietzsche, who wrote that

We are not *subtle* enough to perceive that probably *absolute flow of becoming*; the *permanent* exists only thanks to our coarse organs which reduce and lead things to shared premises of vulgarity, whereas nothing exists *in this form*. A tree is a new thing at every instant; we affirm the *form* because we do not seize the subtlety of an absolute moment.⁵¹⁷

513 J. Harari, 'Introduction', *Textual Strategies*, p. 36.

514 Or even 'march' (as in Derrida's statement on deconstruction: 'it marches ahead and marks a trail' [AL 337]). He also indicated many times that 'effect was an important aspect of deconstruction, e.g. the 'effect' he sketched out in *Dissemination* [PO 84–86], 'critical operation' [PO 42], etc.

515 J. Derrida, [AL 43, 34].

516 J. Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1 p. 45.

517 Cited by Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, pp. 60–61.

Gilles Deleuze recognized Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as philosophers who effectively questioned the 'static' Hegelian thought ('He represents concepts instead of dramatizing ideas'⁵¹⁸) and thereby 'moved' philosophy. It is worth quoting here a longer fragment from Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* discussing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche because it not only reflects the dynamic character of Derrida's practices, but it also points to another aspect that Derrida's practices and performance have in common:

[They] want to put metaphysics in motion, in action. [...] It is not enough, therefore, for them to propose a new representation of movement; representation is already mediation. Rather, it is a question of *producing within the work a movement* capable (emphasis mine, AB) of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind. This is the idea of a man of the theatre, the idea of a director before his time. In this sense, something completely new begins with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. They no longer reflect on the theatre in the Hegelian manner. Neither do they set up a philosophical theatre. They invent an incredible equivalent of theatre within philosophy, thereby founding simultaneously this theatre of the future and a new philosophy.⁵¹⁹

'They invent an [...] equivalent of theatre within philosophy' – these words probably best articulate the conceptual goals behind the proposals of Derrida and his followers to 'create movement' in texts that had once been viewed merely as 'mediate representations.' These texts would no longer be just mediate representations, Deleuze said, but would 'produce effects of generality' by contaminating the constative and the performative mode. And given that 'mobility' (or as Nietzsche put it 'flow') was to become one of the most important features of Derrida's performative reading and writing practices, it was due to the philosopher's rejection of ready-made forms in his thinking in favour of dynamic motion. He made a conscious effort to avoid becoming rooted in his arguments, and these movements were neither constant nor regular, but rather variable and unpredictable. The reader of Derrida (and Derrida-the reader) should always be in motion. Like a performer dynamically moving around the 'scene' of the text, they transform and reinvent themselves again and again in the course of reading. It could be said (verging on tautology) that they 'moved by moving'. In Derrida's language this meant they produced various 'effects' through their 'actions'.

518 G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, New York 1994, p. 10.

519 *Ibid.*, p. 8

'Effect'

Theatre has always taken aesthetic experience – regardless of how it is defined – as a means to a specific end. It is always about the transformation of the spectator

Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Cultural Performances'

Deconstruction is both a process and an effect

Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms'

In *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*,⁵²⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte attempts to compare and contrast traditional theatrical aesthetics, focused on effect, with the new aesthetics of performativity. At the same time, she draws attention to the fact that from ancient times the theatre had been viewed from within the aesthetics of the effect, including the ancient theory of catharsis and the Aristotelian model of the tragedy described in *Poetics*. The history of the theatre from that point on was marked by similar concepts. For example, in the Enlightenment era, the main emphasis was placed on the educational role of the theatre. However, in Romanticism, the aesthetics of the effect came into conflict with a competing theory which postulated the autonomy of art. Although, Fischer-Lichte points out that in the letters of Goethe and Schiller, one can find evidence that they still believed that the theatre could 'lead to a permanent change in the spectators – at least for regular theatre-goers', though the 'repetition of the experience is a prerequisite for its lasting effect' [RI 166]. A return to the aesthetics of the effect took place at the turn of the nineteenth century and this continued throughout the twentieth century thanks to various avant-garde trends. As Fischer-Lichte argued, this era

brought a new wave of interest in and proclamations about how man could be changed in and by the theatre. Georg Fuchs and Meyerhold, Brecht and Artaud, all proclaimed the creation of a 'new man', created by the theatre. Of course, their ideas about these 'new men' diverged significantly. In some cases they were diametrically opposed to each other. [RI 166–167]

The scholar noticed similar 'proclamations' in the theatre practices of the 1960s and 1970s. Many theatrical performances in the second half of the twentieth

520 Originally published in German as *Theaterwissenschaft. Eine Einführung in die Grundlagen des Fachs* [Eng. *Theatre Studies. An Introduction to the Subject*]. Cited in the present book are parts of Chapter Nine, titled 'Cultural Performances'. Hereinafter RI, followed by the page number.

century 'have predecessors in the transformative initiatives of the first half of the twentieth century, if not in even older forms of transformative aesthetics' [RI 167–168].⁵²¹ According to Fischer-Lichte, a striving to achieve an effect may be considered another essential property of all performative artistic actions. Regardless of how it is defined, she concluded, performance always aims to transform its participants [RI 166]. Interestingly enough, the term 'effect' was also often employed by Derrida. This concept may even be considered one of the key terms in his philosophy. He used it both in relation to the strategies of deconstruction and to his other reading practices. It undoubtedly influenced Derrida's interest in the theatre, especially in Brecht and Artaud, to whom Fischer-Lichte attributed the revival of the contemporary aesthetics of the effect. Or perhaps Derrida was inspired by Mallarmè's letter to Cazalis, in which Mallarmè wrote that he wanted 'To paint, not the thing, but the effect it produces'.⁵²² Notwithstanding the above, for Derrida the word 'effect' was intended to express the performative aspect of his practices. Deconstruction, he explained, 'operates' in the text (as a reading practice), but it has consequences outside the sphere of the text. It is both a 'process' and an 'effect'⁵²³ – it 'happens' in the text but its 'effects' transgress the text, transferring its 'actions' beyond the text. Derrida also talked about the 'effects of experience' or the 'effects of generality' produced while reading [AL 62]; his deconstructive writing was meant to produce 'effects of deconstruction'.⁵²⁴ They were to disorganize 'not only the axiomatics of philosophical and scientific discourses as such, of epistemological discourse, of the various methodologies of literary criticism (New Criticism, formalism, thematism, classical or Marxist historicism), but even the axiomatics of knowledge'.⁵²⁵ Yet another function of the 'effect' was associated with the interventionist actions of deconstruction, especially in regard to ethics and politics, and specifically in terms of questioning hierarchies, exclusions, ideologies, and oppressive social structures. Each time, however, Derrida wanted to achieve the same goal, which could be described as

521 Due to lack of space I will not discuss them here. For more information on this subject, see this and other works by Fischer-Lichte.

522 *Dissemination*, pp. 256–257, see reference to this letter in footnote 56.

523 J. Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and other small Seismisms', in *The States of Theory*, ed. David Carroll, New York 1989, p. 84. It is worth recalling that the term 'effect' was also often used by Freud, e.g. in the chapter on 'Symptomatic and Fortuitous Actions' in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. A. A. Brill, London 2002, pp. 183–207.

524 'Some Statements and Truisms...', p. 83.

525 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

transgressing the temporal framework of representation. So, as Derrida would formulate it, his practice transcends reading and is 'transposed [into different contexts]; which we call 'teaching', 'knowledge', and 'applications'.⁵²⁶

It could be said that this is always the case: if any text is considered in terms of its effect (which literary studies has attempted numerous times during its long history), this effect always transgresses the text and affects the reality outside of it. So what would be the difference between 'producing effects' as defined by Derrida and by 'traditional' literary theories? First of all, it should be emphasized that the philosopher consistently used the term 'effect' rather than 'result' or 'consequence', which referred to the cause-and-effect (teleological) model he resented. Derrida opted for the term 'effect' because (just like the sign) it was 'inherently split'. It defied closure, initiating or provoking something that was supposed to happen on its own.

This concept corresponded to Derrida's understanding of 'agency' (as described in his essays devoted to Artaud). The performative strategy of 'producing effects' in writing allowed Derrida to avoid theoretical constative speculations. 'Effect' after all was always produced as a result of some 'action', but also exceeding it at the same time. It was always produced *ex post*.⁵²⁷ Indeed, Derrida's 'aesthetics of the effect' also bears the distinct influence of Brecht and his famous concept of the 'alienation effect'. Brecht claimed that this effect was based on an 'internal separation' – the actor would never fully identify with the character played. The audience was constantly aware that the actor was only playing a role, 'quoting' the character without immersing themselves in it. This distanced style of play not only challenged the realistic vision of the theatre, but it also had a unique impact on the audience – it produced specific 'effects' in the spectators. The audience did not allow themselves to be drawn into the illusion of the world depicted on stage and did not identify with it completely. The performances of Brecht touched the audience in a unique way by exposing the technology of the theatre and demonstrating that the 'living' man (the performer present in the same situation and time as the audience) never truly becomes the character in the drama. Derrida was fascinated by the Brechtian 'internal separation' of the stage 'presence' of the character played by the actor – such a concept of presence was certainly very close to the philosopher. What was more important for him, however, was

526 J. Derrida, *Points... Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. E. Weber, trans. P. Kamuf, et al., Stanford 1995, p. 200.

527 I write about the meaning of 'effect' in connection with the pragmatic dimension of Derrida's philosophy in my book *Dekonstrukci i interpretacji*.

the way in which the 'alienation effect' influenced the Brechtian audience and, more specifically, the very process of 'transcending' the stage in order to get into the minds of the spectators. Derrida was also interested in another principle of Brecht's aesthetics connected with the 'alienation effect', namely in 'making the familiar strange' (staging a situation that that the audience knew very well from real life, but in a completely different, abstract, or improbable, context).⁵²⁸ In Brecht's opinion, such a practice was meant to challenge the audience and question their stereotypical views of the world. Derrida wanted to achieve almost exactly the same with the 'effects' of his reading. A conscious performative strategy to *produce* 'effects' may be seen in all of Derrida's readings. For example, in his analysis of the system of meaning built around the word *pharmakon* ('medicine') in Plato's texts, the philosopher states at the very beginning that he intends to make certain 'displacements' in that system so as to stratify it. Then, however, he noticed that

The possibilities and powers of displacement are extremely diverse in nature, and, rather than enumerating here all their titles, let us attempt to *produce some of their effects* (emphasis mine, AB) as we go along, as we continue our march through the Platonic problematic of writing.⁵²⁹ [DIS 96]

At this point in the text, constataion was brought to a close and the inducement of the 'actions' ('work') of Plato's text began, as Derrida described it in a different text [PO 44–45]. No conclusions of a more general nature were ever formulated explicitly, and no allegations against Plato were ever made. In Derrida's reading, Plato's text itself ('stimulated' to produce 'effects') exposed the internal contradictions and tensions of the semantic field built around the concept of *pharmakon*, and it was the reader of Derrida's text who was supposed to draw their own conclusions. The 'effect' of Derrida's reading was to demonstrate that the 'textuality' of Plato's text is 'being constituted by differences and by differences from differences, it is by nature absolutely heterogeneous and is constantly composing with the forces that tend to annihilate it' [DIS 98].

Derrida very often emphasized the 'effectiveness' of his later readings of literary texts. The 'economy' of Derrida's readings of Joyce, Celan, or Blanchot would produce '[effects] of relative generality.' As a result, the philosopher's reading practice was 'offered [...] as reflections on the signature, the proper name, singularity' [AL 62]. These 'effects' were not produced according to a plan

528 Similar theses concerning literary language were formulated by the Russian formalists, whose achievements Derrida held in high esteem.

529 Emphasis mine – AB.

but simply 'happened' during reading – reading 'stimulated' the text in such a way as to produce them. Therefore, although some formulations of a more general nature could be considered 'effects of generality,' they were never imposed on the text from the outside, for example, in the form of arguments or general conclusions, nor were they based on any pre-conceived assumptions. In fact, it could be said that their 'initiative'⁵³⁰ was triggered by the text and the practice of its reading. That is why Derrida's readings, devoid of inference and interpretation, would sometimes give the impression that they lacked a specific purpose. However, by exposing the intra-textual conflicts of meanings (or the conflicts between conceptual projects and their rhetorical 'execution'), Derrida allowed the reader to draw their own conclusions. By introducing 'an element of perturbation, disorder, or irreducible turmoil,'⁵³¹ Derrida simply attempted to draw attention to a given problem. Thus, to produce an 'effect' meant simply to open up a possibility – the rest was supposed to happen on its own. Indeed, all Derrida's readings were 'singular and unrepeatable;' they 'happened' (like a performance) in a strictly defined context but the 'effects' were to transgress the 'text' (into the fields of meta-philosophy, meta-economy, meta-history, ethics, and politics). As a result, Derrida was able to genuinely engage the reader in the problematic issues he was most interested in exposing.

'Effects' could also be produced in a different context, namely in connection with something that could be described as an 'energetic' concept of reading, which is considered one of the most characteristic features of the practices of Derrida and the American deconstructionists. The process of reading was meant to proceed in such a way as to only open up certain possibilities, suspending them in 'active potentiality,'⁵³² but was not supposed to produce verifiable results (in terms of true/false or correct/wrong categories). Deconstructive readings

530 Derrida spoke of deconstruction as an 'initiative or deconstructive inventiveness' [PII 45]. I have written about the meaning of 'effect' in Derrida's practices in [AT 318–320].

531 'Some Statements and Truisms...', p. 84.

532 Although deconstructionists described this using the now famous phrase 'misreading,' this term was intended to have an antiteleological meaning. It was thus supposed to indicate the absence of closure in the reading process rather than mistakes in reading (as was often claimed in hostile comments on the issue). This interpretation was misguided in that the 'effects' of reconstructive reading do not fall into the category of truth/false, but are valued in a completely different – 'energetic' I would call it – manner, that of whether (or not) it maintains the vitality of reading and stimulates further reading.

and the effects they produced were not subject to conventional evaluation criteria, as was the case with 'traditional' interpretations of literary texts. The imperfect mode of these readings entailed completely different criteria for their evaluation – they were primarily meant to 'provoke' further readings. Indeed, as Derrida put it, 'If my own 'economy' could provoke other singular readings, I would be delighted' [AL 62]. Such a notion of reading again brings Derrida close to the concept of performativity, especially to the 'energetic' and provocative potential of the performance often emphasized by performance scholars. According to Derrida, one of the most important 'effects' of reading was to invite or even compel 'inventiveness', so that reading itself could become a unique and creative 'event'. Such an 'effect' could be produced by 'performing'.

'Performing'

Every literary text plays and negotiates the suspension of referential naivety...

Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature'

In many of his readings, Derrida 'performed' what 'happened' in the text being read, repeating its linguistic 'mechanisms'. Naturally, this 'repetition' was not a mimetic reproduction of the text, but, as already emphasized, 'repetition with a difference'. For obvious reasons, such a strategy of *'lecture-écriture'* implied an affinity with the aesthetics of 'performance'. Derrida would himself define practices in terms of 'performance', stating, for example, that his readings actively performed certain 'actions' and thus became 'writing performances' [AL 60–61]. It could also be said that such a form of 'performance' corresponded almost ideally with Derrida's notion of what a philosophical or a critical text should look like. This very formula was 'paradoxical', and thus quintessentially Derridean.⁵³³ As Derrida put it, one could say that the 'logic of performance' is always paradoxical. For performance is 'always already other' (even if it is 'the same'). It fails to reach the full presence of the presented thing but only 'performs' it in various ways. Thus, performance essentially 'suspends referentiality' – the thing that is performed simultaneously 'is' and 'is not,' it exists somewhere 'in between'. Derrida identified the same properties in the literary text, which in his opinion also always *'plays'* (emphasis mine, AB) 'the suspension of referential naivety' [AL 47]. Therefore, the poetics of 'performance' was for Derrida the only

533 In reference to the situation of the reader or translator, Derrida very often used the terms 'paradox of the reader' or 'paradox of the translator', as previously discussed.

legitimate (or even justified) way of 'representing' the 'staging machinery' of the text in the process of reading. Reading, as 'executed' by Derrida, thus became an exceptional and unique 'performance' of the literary text. Indeed, according to Derrida, each text operates 'differently, singularly', though never as 'itself as such' [AL 47]. However, what was the object of the performance defined in the above terms? For example, in the case of 'The Double Session', the 'performance' took place on two levels: Mallarmè's *Mimique* 'performed' the text of Margueritte's pantomime and Derrida's reading 'performed' Mallarmè's text 'performing' the text of Margueritte, imitating the poet's strategy in a specific way. In *The Object of Post-Criticism*, Gregory Ulmer, referring both to the pantomime and the writings of Mallarmè, called this way of reading 'mimicry' [OP 93]. One more reference could be made regarding the meaning of 'mimicry'. Indeed, in the field of natural sciences, 'mimicry':

is a similarity of one organism, usually an animal, to another that has evolved [...] between different species, or between individuals of the same species. Often, mimicry evolves to protect a species from predators [...] The resemblances that evolve in mimicry can be in appearance, behaviour, sound or scent.⁵³⁴

Derrida was guided by a similar principle. His reading was based on 'adaptation' – it was meant to resemble the text being read by 'adapting' some of its properties. And just as an insect is only *similar* to another insect (i.e. it is not exactly the 'same' because it only imitates certain aspects of its behaviour), so too was Derrida's reading a 'mimicry' of the literary text. Ulmer also described Derrida's strategy of '*lecture-écriture*' as 'the model of the mime'. In his opinion, the philosopher's practices were primarily influenced by the conclusions on the nature of the pantomime which Derrida drew from the texts of Margueritte and Mallarmè. Indeed, as Derrida observed in 'The Double Session', the mime does not perform any pre-existing actions. On the contrary, everything that the mime 'performs' is created directly on the stage. The most important principle of the pantomime was 'the order given to the Mime to imitate nothing that in any way preexists his operation' [DIS 198]. Mallarmè adopted a similar 'principle' in his *Mimique*: his text did not recreate any external reality but produced it (on an on-going basis) thanks to individual language games. In his 'mimic' (and not mimetic) reading, Derrida 'performs' the principles of Mallarmè's text so that: 'We are faced then with mimicry imitating nothing [...]: the simulacrum as the copy of a copy it became' [DIS 206]. A careful analysis of the mechanisms of literary language also led Derrida to the conclusion that the literary text does

534 'Mimicry', Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mimicry> (accessed: 18.09.2018).

not only constitute a linguistic 'event' ('idiom') but that it also 'performs' its own 'eventicity'. By analogy, therefore, the reading process should 'stage the law of literature', becoming an 'infinitely rapid oscillation between the performative and the constative'.⁵³⁵

Another term which often appeared in Derrida's texts and which for obvious reasons may be associated with 'performing', should be analyzed in more detail at this point – namely 'game'. The word 'game' seemingly has no affinity with theatrical performance. This is because Derrida drew his inspirations from philosophy (especially from the 'late' Wittgenstein and his concept of 'language games') and Peirce's semiotics [OG 48], and mainly used the term in the meaning of 'the game of language' (or, in other variants, 'the game of signifiers'), which in his opinion was constrained by linguistic theories rooted in metaphysics (especially by de Saussure's theory).⁵³⁶ Derrida also noticed this 'constraining' tendency in traditional hermeneutics, in which, as he claimed, there could not be 'a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language'. [OG 7]. Thus, in this tradition, 'the permutation or the transformation of elements [...] is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained *interdicted*' [SSP 248]. 'The game of language' was subordinated to the interests of the (metaphysical) subject – after all the wish 'to dominate and contain' the game was motivated by the desire to discover the 'original' unmediated meaning, which, in turn, led to a sense of cognitive security. The philosophical tradition has always 'contained' the game of language [OG 50] in order to control it. 'With this certitude', as Derrida argued, 'anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were from the very beginning at stake in the game' [SSP 248]. If one were to reconstruct Derrida's train of thought and combine it with his concept of reading, it could be said that all theories of interpretation that adopted a 'static' concept of (literary) language wanted to quickly and safely discover the 'final *signifié*'. However, the notion of language as the dynamic 'interplay of signification' [SSP 249] implied a completely different approach to language in general, to literary language in particular, and to the process of reading a literary text. The properties which the notion of 'game' implied, such as unpredictability, situationality, eventness (eventicity), dynamism, variability,

535 See *Psyche*, p. 13.

536 See J. Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (in WD) and *Of Grammatology*, where he writes (about theories based on metaphysical foundations) that the 'desire to restrict play is [...] irresistible' [OG 59].

and (possible) failure, had to be acknowledged and embraced. For if language is a 'game', then, as Derrida observed, it is necessary to accept the situation in which 'whoever loses wins, and in which one loses and wins on every turn' [DF 20]. The notion of language as 'game' was above all meant to challenge the traditional teleological model of interpretation, in which a 'game' was not allowed on principle. Therefore, by replacing 'interpretation' with 'reading', Derrida based it on the 'principle of the game'. This game, as he explained, was not supposed to be 'a game within language' – Platonic 'childishness' [*paidia*] contrasted in *Phaedrus* with the solemnity, maturity [*spoude*], and dignity of speech [OG 50]. It was, however, meant to 'play the game of language' characterized by 'the unity of chance and necessity' [DF 7]. But not only. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida also implied that the world was inherently a game – 'It is therefore *the game of the world* that must be first thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world' [OG 50] – and then (bombastically but not accidentally) quoting Heidegger who, in turn, quotes Nietzsche.

The notion of 'the game of language' on which Derrida based his notion of reading also had an affinity with performance theory. For example, Derrida understood it (in this case after Peirce) as 'variability', that is, as a substitute for 'iterable' forms in the field of language, and, as we know, 'iterability' always involves 'difference'. In his response to Jean Hippolite in a discussion that followed his lecture 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences', presented at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, Derrida emphasized that the most important feature of 'the game of language' is its variability.⁵³⁷ By variability, Derrida meant 'iterability', 'repetition with a difference', which constituted for him the most important property of language in general, and of literary language in particular, as well as of all its mechanisms 'repeated' in reading. The 'game' understood in this way referred directly to Derrida's understanding of performativity. Or, to put it differently, the properties of language as a 'game' conditioned performativity, and the 'rules' of this game, as Derrida emphasized, were never external to it – they neither 'ruled' nor dominated it.⁵³⁸ All of these

537 'Structure, Sign, and Play...' [WD 365 ff.].

538 Derrida also pointed out that the word 'rule' is too burdened with its traditional uses, as it suggests that there is some instruction that precedes language play. (*The Structuralist Controversy*, pp. 267–268). If the term 'rules' can be used in relation to language play, it is only in an 'operational' sense and not in an 'instructional' one; thus, only if it is possible to modify the 'rules' situationally. Likewise, he understood the 'rules of the game' of Lyotard (from *The Postmodern Condition*) and Fish ('Consequences' in *Against Theory*).

reflections about the ‘game of language’ once again brought Derrida to the theory of performance. The aforementioned attributes of the game (unpredictability, situationality, eventicity, dynamism, variability, (possible) failure, ‘the permutation or the transformation of elements’, internal rules) could also constitute the properties of performance. Not to mention the fact that the notion of ‘game’ also implied ‘interaction’ between its participants (players). Thus, the terms ‘game’ and ‘performing’ were meant to describe the dynamic and aleatoric nature of language, the language of literature and, of course, the language of reading. Such a process required a designated space. For Derrida, this was simply a ‘scene’.

‘Scene’

[It] was less [about] the multiplicity of their contents, conclusions, and demonstrative positions than [...] the acts of writing and the performative stage to which they had to give rise and from which they remained inseparable and hence not easily capable of being represented, transported, and translated into another form.

Jacques Derrida, ‘Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis’

[...] the space in which the performance occurs can be regarded as a performative space.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*

The term ‘scene’ had to eventually appear in the writings of Derrida – the ‘most theatrical thinker’. Indeed, the philosopher used this term very often and in different contexts. For example, he talked about a ‘textual scene’ [PO 47], ‘scene of writing’,⁵³⁹ ‘scene of utterances’ [MP 326], ‘incalculable scene’ (‘scene of signature and countersignature’) [AL 70], and even a ‘textual proscenium of the word’ [F 42]. However, in the quotation cited above,⁵⁴⁰ a different, yet equally interesting, term appears, namely, the ‘performative stage’. For Derrida ‘the performative stage’ is both a synonym for ‘the acts of writing’ and the space in which they take place, the two being essentially inseparable. It is also synonymous with ‘text’, defined by Derrida as the ‘active space of signification’. Indeed, it will come as no surprise that the philosopher’s definition of ‘scene’ differs from the one

539 J. Derrida, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ in WD.

540 J. Derrida, ‘Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis’, *Eyes of the University, Right to Philosophy*, Stanford 2004, p. 125.

found in 'traditional' theatre. It is not a theatre stage separated from the audience by a ramp. However, much in keeping with the conventional definition, Derrida's 'scene' is still a place where actions are exposed, visualized, or, to use Derrida's term, 'demonstrated'. The scene sharpens and at the same time organizes the perception of the spectators (addressees), who are able to see more and more clearly. In one conversation, Derrida commented on the importance of 'scene' for his deconstruction practices: 'I systematically tried to introduce philosophy to the *scene* (emphasis mine, AB), the scene that it no longer governs'. Drawing on Weber, it could be said that by rejecting the classic model of the 'scene', Derrida introduced philosophy to the 'scene of questioning', where philosophical speculations are confronted by active processes (e.g. taking place in the language of texts). And such processes may no longer be mastered with 'one imperious glance' (as Aristotle wanted). This 'scene' ceases to be governed by metaphysics and onto-hermeneutics and exposes their shortcomings, 'demonstrating' them in the deconstruction procedure (rather than simply 'stating' them in a critical essay). And just like the Freudian 'scene of writing', whose mechanisms Derrida brought to light in his essay devoted to the theory of dreams, undermined the hegemony of speech, so too the 'scene of deconstruction' exposed the distortions of metaphysics and hermeneutics.

Derrida's concept of the 'performative stage' may also be linked to these contemporary performative theories, which are based on a clear opposition between 'scene' defined as a space of performance and 'theatre scene' defined in more traditional terms.⁵⁴¹ However, such distinctions are not synonymous with the typological classification introduced by, for example, Fischer-Lichte, who divided theatre spaces into 'permanently installed' (theatre buildings) and 'provisional' [TP 107]. Derrida was definitely more interested in what was 'happening' on this 'scene' – in the processes of performative actions and in the relations between their participants. And in this sense, the philosopher's reflections on the function of the 'scene' echo what Fischer-Lichte understands by 'performative space'. In fact, while Fischer-Lichte never introduced such a rigid distinction between the (traditional) 'theatre scene' and the (performative) 'scene' (as did Josette Fèral, for example), she consistently employs the term 'space', avoiding the term 'scene' with its 'traditional' connotations. For Fischer-Lichte, all kinds of 'theatre spaces' are 'performative spaces' [TP 107], where, as Derrida points out in 'Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis', the space

541 This is related to the aforementioned distinction between 'theatre' and 'performance' (e.g. in Josette Fèral's work).

of the performance and the performance itself become inseparable. The space gives rise to the performance and the performance transforms the space. All kinds of 'theatre spaces' may thus be 'performative', but, as Fischer-Lichte adds, in specific contexts:

the space in which a performance occurs can be regarded as a performative space. [...] Every movement of people, objects, lights, and every noise can transform this unstable and fluctuating space [TP 107]. However, the fact that the performance space structures and organizes movement, perception, and the overall relationship between actors and spectators does not automatically imply that it controls them entirely [TP 108]. The performative space is characterized by that very possibility of being used in unintended ways. [TP 108]

At least three important points are addressed in the above quote. First of all, space itself also has a performative function: space 'produces' meanings; it is 'active;' it 'participates' in the performance; it is not just a 'decorative background'. Secondly, the performative space is 'unstable', dynamic and changeable. Thirdly, it creates specific relations between performer/performers and spectators. Therefore, space does not only constitute an integral element of the performance, but it also actively engages the audience. This is certainly not the kind of space that we saw in Plato's 'theatre'. Derrida defined the 'performative stage' (or the 'textual scene') similarly to Fisher-Lichte. For him, 'scene' was not just a background for a 'performance'. On the contrary, it was an integral part of performance; it was changeable and dynamic. It was also integrated into the reading process: it was produced during reading and produced specific effects itself. Using the metaphor of the 'scene', Derrida wanted to emphasize that '*lecture-écriture*' does not 'represent' (an object, i.e. the literary text, that remains outside of it) but 'performs' the internal language mechanisms of the literary text.

In his discussion with Austin about 'intentionality' (in which Derrida challenged the intentionality of performative acts of speech), the philosopher stated that he intended for the 'category of intention' to disappear and to designate a place from which 'it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene [...] of utterances [MP 326]'. Thus, for Derrida, all utterances, and literature in particular, were 'scenic' (performative) in nature. Consequently, writing about literature had to become 'scenic' (and thus performative). 'Scene', as understood by Derrida, was the space of various 'linguistic events' and 'actions' which were, in the full sense of the words, unintentional, random, and arbitrary. The metaphor of the 'scene' was also meant to convey that the parties involved (the writer, the reader, and the reader of Derrida's text) are never neutral, external, or passive spectators, but are active participants. The traditional division into the scene and

the audience is thus no longer valid. Inspired by Artaud, Derrida observed in *La Parole Soufflée* that

The public is not to exist outside, before or after the stage of cruelty, is not to await it, to contemplate it, or to survive it – is not even to exist as a public at all. Whence an enigmatic and lapidary formulation, in *The Theater and Its Double*, in the midst of abundant, inexhaustible definitions of 'directing,' the 'language of the Stage,' 'musical instruments,' 'lighting,' 'costumes,' etc. The problem of the public is thereby exhausted: '*The Public*. First of all this theater must exist.' [WD 419]

The integral relationship between participants in the 'performative performance' and the 'scene of writing' was also conditioned by Derrida's unique concept of the subject. 'Within that scene [of writing],' Derrida observed, 'the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found.' [WD 285]. In Derrida's view there is no critical distance, no opposition, between the subject and the object – the traditional 'fourth wall' has been removed between them. On the 'textual scene,' the reader is always 'inside' the process of reading and inside the text in which they are actively 'acting.' The traditional stage gives way to the 'performative stage.' Indeed, Berleant was right to observe that 'theatre has stepped down from the traditional raised stage to carry out its action.'⁵⁴² So, let us finally ask what 'action' was carried out on the Derridean 'stage'?

'Action'

Reading is a sequence of actions.

Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms...'

the performance's semioticity can only be adequately described within the context of the aesthetics of the performative, and not in opposition to the sphere of performativity.

Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*

In *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Erika Fischer-Lichte also commented on the opposition between meaning and action, maintained by the traditional aesthetics of theatre [TP 150–152]. The scholar strongly opposed such a division, recognizing that in performance (in the understanding in which it appeared in her works), both aspects are integrally (inter)connected. The performance, she

542 A. Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts*, Oxon 2016, p. 46.

claimed, affects the audience through the meanings that it carries and through the feelings it evokes. And *vice versa*, specific emotions are triggered not only by various strategies which activate the audience's perception but also by the semiotics of performance [TP 154].⁵⁴³ For Fischer-Lichte, performance 'acts', or 'affects', a result of various 'actions' undertaken by performers in the 'performative space', which transform both the performers and the spectators, sanctioning the existence of the 'feedback loop' [TP 152]. Such a way of thinking is undoubtedly also very close to Derrida's anti-dualistic philosophy. Indeed, both for Fischer-Lichte and Derrida meaning and effect are closely connected (Derrida came to such a conclusion once he established a close relationship between constativity and performativity). Thus, similarly to Fischer-Lichte's notion of performance, Derrida's notion of 'lecture-écriture' involved taking certain 'actions' in order to affect the recipient. That is why the functional and productive aspects of reading were so important for Derrida. Indeed, he sometimes referred to them using the word 'work' (e.g. 'work of the reading' which corresponded to 'work of the text').⁵⁴⁴ Deconstructions, as concisely described by one of the critics (and this phrase can be applied to all kinds of reading practices undertaken by Derrida), were thus constantly '*at work in the work*', i.e. they were 'actions' corresponding to the 'actions' of the text itself.⁵⁴⁵ This functional and productive character of performance was also emphasized by Fischer-Lichte. The scholar claimed that it was connected with the situation of performers and spectators, for whom, as she argued, participation in the performance was never just a 'hermeneutic' but an 'experiential situation' [TP 157–159]. Indeed, performance 'affects' on many different levels: while it triggers cognitive and perceptive processes, it also elicits an emotional response. These aspects are inseparable. Derrida was guided by

543 Fischer-Lichte also adopts a non-dualistic definition of meaning as a state of consciousness in which emotions are integrally connected with intellectual activity [TP 140–143]. She also gives many examples of performative representations, in which this link is particularly evident, and which I forced to omit for lack of space when referring to her work.

544 Derrida also often uses a similar phrasing: 'critical operation' [PO 43], 'a strategy of the textual work' [PO 59], 'the work of my reading' [PO 52], etc. Barthes was thinking in a similar way when he attributed to both the text and reading the character of 'productive work' ('belonging to a production plan, as he said in 'The Theory of the Text', not a production plan).

545 D. Esch, 'Deconstrucion', in *Redrawing the Boundaries: Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. S. Greenblatt and G. Gunn, New York 1992, p. 375. See also J. Derrida, *Mémoires Pour Paul de Man*, p. 73.

a similar assumption: the course of 'actions' he undertook during reading was usually either completely random or planned only in principle (and thus open to changes). In fact, Derrida's readings were defined by only one principle: they had to respond to specific 'situations' encountered in the text. And, as Derrida often emphasized, it was the text which suggested the topic. It could be either a 'motif' (as he called it) found in the work of a given writer or a philosophical problem – the 'performance' could take place around both. Every time, therefore, an 'impulse' found in the text stimulated Derrida to specific 'actions' in the course of reading, such as, the motives (and problems) of 'proper names', 'signatures', 'things' in his readings of Ponge's texts; 'dates' in Celan's poetry; justice, law and 'the law of the text' in Kafka's prose; or mimesis in Mallarmé's texts, etc. Each of these 'performances' had its beginning and end in literature. All these textual 'actions' exposed the same problem: the paradoxical 'being' of literature and the paradoxical nature of its reading.

Derrida's reading of Ponge is a good example of such a practice. Derrida's reading revealed that individual fragments (sometimes even individual sentences) of text form philosophical 'associations'. The 'law of things' turned out to be 'the law of literature', while the 'modalities of the signature' turned out to be the 'modalities' of the literary text, etc. A similar process could be observed in *Préjuges: devant la loi*. In the course of reading Kafka's *Before the Law*, Derrida discussed the paradoxical status of literary text, the relations between individuality and generality, and the oscillatory nature of the constative and performative aspects of literature. In *Shibboleth* (devoted to the poetry of Paul Celan), Derrida addressed the problem of uniqueness (of a 'literary' event) and the necessity for its 'repetition' in reading (including idiom, institutions, and '*partage*'⁵⁴⁶) referring to the logic of 'date' and the paradoxes of 'dating'. Another great example, this time of 'performing' linguistic mechanisms of literary text (its self-referentiality, internal logic, performative and constative modes), is Derrida's reading of Francis Ponge's 'Fable'. Similarly to 'The Double Session', 'Fable' was chosen by Derrida for a reason. For, just as Mallarmé *Mimique* 'performs' the description of Margueritte's pantomime, so too 'Fable' 'performs' its theme, as evidenced by the opening lines of the poem: 'With the word *with* begins then this text/Of which the first line states the truth.' The referent of the poem could not be found outside text. The subject of reference, or rather 'reference', was reference itself, 'its mechanism, its processuality, its problematic nature' [EI 219]. The constative mode

546 I discuss these readings in more detail in the section on experience.

and the performative mode were impossible to separate. Indeed, as Derrida observed, the constative

is the performative itself, since it points out nothing that is prior or foreign to itself. Its performance consists in the 'constation' of the constative – and nothing else [...] producing the event in the very act of recounting it. [PI1 12]

Fable was thus a 'poetic performative', which, as Derrida argued, both '*describes*' and '*carries out* [...] its own generation' [PI1 11], 'producing the event in the very act of recounting it' [PI1 12]. Analogical 'action' was undertaken by the philosopher in the course of reading: Derrida 'performed' the textual process of 'performing'. Indeed, on the 'scene' of his own text, he 'repeated' what 'happened' on the 'scene' of Ponge's text.

Sometimes, Derrida would adopt a different strategy. For example, when he wished to comment on something, he would not do it directly but instead performatively produce the desired 'effects'. The best example of such an 'action' is the 'performance' staged around one sentence by Friedrich Nietzsche found in Derrida's book *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*.

A Warning in Spurs

...in order to outmaneuver the hermeneutic hold...

Jacques Derrida, *Spurs. Nietzsche's Styles*

The shortest answer to the question ‘What is the theme of this “performance”?’ would be ‘the possibilities of reading’ and, more specifically, ‘discrediting the excessive demands and cognitive optimism of onto-hermeneutics’. While it may seem like a rather strange theme for a performance, this text effectively demonstrates Derrida’s strategy of ‘theatrical’ presentation. In fact, Derrida’s ‘performance’ could be entitled:

‘I forgot my umbrella, or disconcerting the hermeneut’

Derrida begins his discourse on Nietzsche with a prologue:

‘I have forgotten my umbrella’
«I have forgotten my umbrella»
These words were found, isolated in
quotations marks, among Nietzsche’s
unpublished manuscripts.
Maybe a citation.
It might have been a sample picked up
somewhere, or overheard here or there.
Perhaps it was the note for some phrase to
be written here or there.
[...] We never will
know *for sure* what Nietzsche wanted to
say or do when he noted these words.⁵⁴⁷

Derrida’s subsequent ‘actions’ constituted attempts at interpreting the meaning of the sentence ‘I have forgotten my umbrella’ (written by Nietzsche in pencil on the margin of his manuscript), demonstrating the failure of ‘traditional’ methods of interpretation. Or, as Derrida somewhat ironically describes it, various instances of ‘hermeneutic somnambulism’ [S 125] are ‘played out’ on the text: persistent and unsuccessful efforts to explain the meaning of this mysterious sentence are repeated numerous times. The conflict between deliberate hermeneutical

547 [S 123]. I preserve here the original visual layout.

attempts to explain the sentence, so that it would 'fit' into Nietzsche's writings, and the 'resistance' displayed by it in the face of such endeavours, lies at the heart of this dramatic 'performance'. The first act of Derrida's 'performance' involves him 'playing' (parodying)⁵⁴⁸ the role of various interpreters of Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts. Derrida first plays the role of a serious 'hermeneut', ironically mocking his 'profound' deliberations. Derrida jokingly asks: if this seemingly ordinary sentence was written on the margin of Nietzsche's work, perhaps it means something more? Something extremely important? Perhaps the hidden meaning of this sentence will shed new light on the entire philosophy of Nietzsche? What extraordinary secret does it hide? As Derrida points out, this sentence is after all 'intelligible': 'No fold, no reserve appears to mark its transparent display. In fact, its content gives the appearance of a more than flat intelligibility. Everyone knows what «I have forgotten my umbrella» means' [S 129], but perhaps this intelligibility is illusory? Perhaps it conceals layers and layers of deeper meanings? Perhaps it is the (only!) key with which the mysterious vault housing the hidden truth about Nietzsche's philosophy can be opened? Perhaps this sentence should be taken very seriously? In order to demonstrate the opposing perspective, Derrida then plays the role of Nietzsche, 'performing' the experience of forgetting (and maybe even losing) the umbrella. As he observes,

But now I don't have it anymore. At hand. I must have forgotten it somewhere, etc. I remember my umbrella. I remind myself of my umbrella. An umbrella is that sort of thing that, just when it is really needed, one might either have *or not have any more* (*n'avoir plus*). Or else one still has it when it is no longer needed, Simply a question of the weather at the time (*of temps*, time and/or weather). [S 129]

As it turns out, the experience of the hermeneutic philosopher resembles the experience of Nietzsche. Indeed, they both experience loss: Nietzsche has lost his umbrella and the hermeneut is at a loss to interpret the meaning of the sentence when he most needs it. However, sympathizing with the situation of a person who has forgotten an umbrella (lost meaning) neither helps nor solves anything. Therefore, in the next acts of Derrida's 'performance' this sentence has to undergo 'much more elaborated [interpretative] operations' [S 129]. The first such operation is a '«psychoanalytic» reading' [S 129].⁵⁴⁹ Derrida's 'performance' unfolds as follows:

548 Derrida openly admits at one point that his intention was 'parodying'. [S 99].

549 The very quotation marks Derrida uses with the word 'psychoanalytic' suggest that it will not really be an actual interpretation of this sentence in the spirit of psychoanalysis, but a staged interpretive 'fitting'.

The umbrella's symbolic figure is well-known, or supposedly so. Take, for example, the hermaphroditic spur (*éperon*) of a phallus which is modestly enfolded in its veils, an organ which is at once aggressive and apotropaic, threatening and/or threatened. One doesn't just happen onto an unwonted object of this sort in a sewing-machine (*machine à recoudre*) on a castration table. [S 129–131]

In the above quote, Derrida clearly parodies and 'performs' the style of psychoanalytic interpretations. Indeed, Derrida not only makes a mockery of the psychoanalytical concept of dream symbolism (and Freud's pansexual interpretations), but also focuses on popular Freudian anecdotes and sayings, such as 'Freudian slip'. Derrida concentrates on the most attractive and well-known topics, as if he consciously wanted to reach as big an audience as possible. This scene may therefore be addressed both to less-sophisticated 'spectators' (who may laugh at the umbrella-as-phallus association) and to more refined viewers who recognize Derrida's parody of the psychoanalytic method of 'free association'. One association, distant at first, later proves very important, but doubtlessly not for the so-called 'average reader'. Derrida quotes Lautréamont's *Maldoror* in his 'performance', as if sampling⁵⁵⁰ the sentence 'the chance juxtaposition of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table!'⁵⁵¹ The parody of psychoanalysis ultimately becomes an experimental attempt to 'face' Nietzsche's sentence, demonstrating (as could be expected) the ultimate failure of psychoanalysis. While Derrida respects Freud (he has employed some Freudian terms in his deconstruction practices⁵⁵²), as he explains in *Spurs*, his admiration for the father of psychoanalysis does not mean he respects interpreters who use psychoanalytical methods. And as it later turns out, unfortunately, a clash with Nietzsche's 'stubborn' sentence does not end well even for Freud. Derrida makes an ironic remark about Freud, observing that

The umbrella, though, is not just a symbolic object for Freud. The metaphor of a metapsychological concept, like the famous *Reizschutz* of the perception-consciousness system, it is in fact itself almost a concept. Furthermore it is not only the umbrella that is recalled but also its having been forgotten. And psychoanalysis, familiar as it is with forgetting and phallic objects, might yet aspire to a hermeneutic mastery of these remains. [S 131]

550 Because he incorporates the quote into his own words without a reference to its source, it forms an integral part of his text.

551 Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, trans. P. Knight. London–New York 1978, p. 217.

552 See the chapter titled 'Czytanie symptomów' in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*.

The reasons for this parody are clear. As Derrida explains, even though Nietzsche's sentence may be translated without difficulty from German, and its literal sense is obvious, the meaning of the sentence eludes interpretation. As Derrida ironically points out,

Given this lack of assurance, the note which the editors have appended to their classification of these unpublished pieces is a monument to hermeneutic somnambulism. In blithest complacency their every word obscures so well a veritable beehive of critical questions that only the minutest scrutiny could possibly recover there those questions which preoccupy us here.' [S 123–124]

The interpretive impasse of this sentence, which Derrida cherishes so dearly, arises from the conflict between, on the one hand, its simplicity and intelligibility, and, on the other, its undefinable interpretational context. The sentence creates a burning desire to decipher it, while at the same time eluding interpretation. As Derrida argues,

that unpublished piece, precisely because it is readable as a piece of writing, should remain forever secret. But not because it withholds some secret. Its secret is rather the possibility that indeed it might have no secret, that it might only be pretending to be simulating some hidden truth within its folds. Its limit is not only stipulated by its structure but is in fact intimately con-fused (*sic.*) with it. The hermeneut cannot but be provoked and disconcerted by its play. [S 133]

The most important goal of Derrida's 'performance' is thus clearly defined and expressed by a figurative sentence (one that explicitly references 'stage action'): 'disconcerting' the hermeneut. By experimentally 'wrestling' with Nietzsche's sentence, Derrida demonstrates the failure of optimistic metaphysical hermeneutics, which has always aspired to a 'mastery' of the text [S 131] or at least one sentence or fragment of it. Derrida continues to ironically play the hermeneut, pointing out that the psychoanalyst is less naïve than:

The impulsive reader or hermeneut ontologist in their common belief that this unpublished piece is an aphorism of some significance. Assured that it must mean something, they look for it to come from the most intimate reaches of this author's thought. [...] Because it is structurally liberated from any living meaning, it is always possible that it means nothing at all or that it has no decidable meaning. There is no end to its parodying play with meaning, grafted here and there, beyond any contextual body or finite code.' [S 132]

Derrida's seemingly passing suggestion that Nietzsche's sentence 'parod[ies] play with meaning' proves highly significant. Derrida 'performs' the same action in his reading: he parodies 'play with meaning' that ultimately proves to be merely 'somnambulistic wandering.' This happens mainly because this seemingly clear

and intelligible sentence is also 'idiomatic'; it is both 'the idiomatic code [...] of this event' [S 137] of language and an 'absolute', and therefore an intimate secret of Nietzsche that nobody can unlock. However, as Derrida points out, perhaps someone has discovered the 'non-secret's secret' of this sentence. But even if they have, as Derrida 'theatrically' concludes, 'the scene would not be changed [S 137]. Ultimately, 'the totality of Nietzsche's text' is just as 'cryptic and parodying' as Nietzsche's short sentence scribbled on the margin. 'Nietzsche's text' is thus:

cryptic and parodying (and I tell you that it is so through and through. I might as well tell you since it won't be of any help to you. Even my admission can very well be a lie because there is dissimulation only if one tells the truth, only if one tells that one is telling the truth), still the text will remain indefinitely open, cryptic and parodying. In other words, the text remains closed, at once open and closed, or each in turn, folded/open (*ployé/déployé*), it is just an umbrella that you couldn't use (*dont vous n'auriez pas l'emploi*). You might soon forget it, as if, over your head like that, you never heard tell of it. As if you didn't even heed me, since I have said nothing you could heed anyway. It is easy for you to think that you can rid yourself of this umbrella either because it hasn't rained or else just because you don't like it (*pour autant qu'il n'a pas plu*). [S 137–139]

This passage probably best reflects the fully intended 'theatricality' of Derrida's 'performance'. The philosopher addresses the reader ('spectator') directly and uses a prop (an authentic umbrella which 'plays' Nietzsche's sentence), while balancing on the verge of truth and falsehood, reality and appearance. By 'wrestling' with Nietzsche, Derrida 'performs' a more general problem – an uncomfortable situation in which all scholars of the German philosopher find themselves sooner or later. Because Nietzsche uses a cryptic language and, as Derrida puts it in *Of Grammatology*, 'has written what he has written' [OG 19], reading his work is problematic on at least two levels. Yet, Derrida's 'performance' does not end there: 'yet one step (*un pas encore*)' [S 135], the philosopher adds, giving the impression that he actually is on stage. In this last step, he focuses attention on the possible 'effects' that transcend his 'performance'. He thus (rhetorically) asks: if it 'contained a certain ballast of rhetorical, pedagogical and persuasive qualities' [S 135]. This phrase conveys one of the most important reasons for Derrida's 'performing' the failures of interpretation. According to him, the interpreter's belief in the possibility of obtaining a final explanation (of a sentence, fragment, text) is illusory, because some texts resist such procedures (Derrida considers them to be the most valuable form a literary perspective⁵⁵³).

553 'A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance.' [LD 63]

By juxtaposing Nietzsche's 'cryptic' sentence against its (failed) interpretations, Derrida wants to 'demonstrate' that for the (traditional) hermeneut everything in the text *must* have a deeper sense (just as he demonstrates in *Structure, Sign, and Play in Discourse of the Human Sciences* that for the structuralist, every element, even the smallest, in the structure has a specific purpose, function, and position in the overall system). The more such a belief encourages continuous interpretative efforts (or the search for a structural 'whole' in the work), the more intense, the more difficult it is to explain the meaning or determine the function (and role) of a given element. This practice often leads to absurd findings, for example, when one tries to discover in the text something that is not there. Or when, as it was succinctly and eloquently put by the Prague structuralist Jan Mukařovský, one 'puts into a sentence, even by force, a comprehensive meaning.'⁵⁵⁴ Indeed, Nietzsche's sentence resists interpretation because the German philosopher put quotation marks around it, which may suggest that it is a quotation, but its source and the reasons for its use remain unknown. Derrida says that this sentence is a 'remainder'⁵⁵⁵ (like the umbrella), it is suspended, it may not be caught up 'in any circular trajectory. It knows of no proper itinerary which would lead from its beginning to its end and back again' because 'its movement [does not] admit of any center' [S 131] which could control it. Finally, as Derrida explains, this sentence only creates an illusion that it really means something. Most likely, it does not conceal any significant truth, but only 'pretends' to conceal it. Thus, the only thing this sentence does (and that can be done with it) is to make the naïve interpreter 'play'. This is what Derrida's 'performance' does: it 'performs' Nietzsche's sentence (and text). With each subsequent 'scene', it awakens curiosity in the audience as to whether something will be explained, and at the same time, continually 'defers' explanation. These considerations lead Derrida to a somewhat surprising generalization. In the finale of his 'performance', Derrida observes that 'to whatever lengths one may carry a conscientious interpretation', it may turn out that 'the totality of Nietzsche's text' is 'of the type "I have forgotten my umbrella." Perhaps Nietzsche's text simply does not succumb to traditional interpretations or demands for semantic coherence and 'totality'. Perhaps there is no such thing as 'the totality of Nietzsche's text', because

554 J. Mukařovský, 'O jazyku poetyckim', in *Praska škola strukturalna*, ed. M. R. Mayenowa, W. Górny. Warszawa 1966, pp. 189-190.

555 In the original: *rectance*. The suffix *-ance* (as in *différance*, *mouvance*, *resonance*, etc.) indicates a suspension between the active and passive voice, and thus an activity that is not actually an activity.

it is essentially 'fragmentary' and 'aphoristic' [S 133-135]. Derrida constantly questions the interpretability of 'Nietzsche's text', thus questioning the goals of traditional hermeneutics. The last 'step' that he takes is to question his own discourse [S 135]. Everything that Derrida has demonstrated during his 'performance' about Nietzsche's sentence eventually becomes like the sentence itself. For, just as the sentence does not convey meaning in spite of its intelligibility, Derrida's 'textual performance' of various interpretative attempts ultimately likewise says nothing about what could be discovered in (or through) Nietzsche's line. On the contrary, as Derrida observes in the finale of his 'performance', 'there is no measure to its indecipherability' [S 135]. Derrida does not want to discover the meaning of the sentence written on the margin of Nietzsche's manuscript or establish whether it is possible to interpret a note that is devoid of context (and therefore may mean everything or nothing at all). The theme of his 'performance' is the problematic condition of hermeneutics. Indeed, as David Hoy observes,

The case not only defeats, but exposes the unquestioned and all-too-metaphysical assumptions of the serious hermeneutic reader who thinks that a text cannot be understood unless the surrounding context or the underlying reference can be discovered. A text with no decidable meaning would show the poverty of hermeneutics [...].⁵⁵⁶

Thus, if *Spurs* is meant to demonstrate Derrida's sceptical and critical view of hermeneutics (and convince the reader of this), it is precisely because in and through this 'performative play' with Nietzsche's sentence, Derrida questions traditional philological analysis (the first step to exegesis), the traditional hermeneutic method (seeking a hidden meaning), and all of its twentieth-century variants. Of course, Derrida does not want to convince the reader that Nietzsche's writing eludes reading or interpretation. Derrida's 'performance' merely suggests the following: 'what if Nietzsche himself meant to say nothing, or at least not much of anything, or anything whatever? Then again, what if Nietzsche was only pretending to say something?' Indeed, as Derrida concludes, 'it is possible that we will never know [what the meaning and the context of this sentence were] and that powerlessness (*impouvoir*) must somehow be taken into account' [S 127]. Derrida could, of course, say this directly, but he knows well that the 'effect' ('economy') of such a statement would be less powerful. Therefore, he prefers to 'play', to stage a 'performance' about the futility of interpretation, confronting and testing the 'useful art of exegesis' against the 'indecipherability' of meaning. The 'effect' of this 'performance' is clear: onto-hermeneutics (and metaphysics)

⁵⁵⁶ D. Hoy, 'Derrida', in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, ed. Q. Skinner, Cambridge 1985, p. 56.

surrender in the face of a single, short, and simple declarative sentence. *Spurs*, therefore, warns against ‘the hermeneutic hold’ [S 99] and the unrestrained desire to discover the ‘ultimate signifié’. According to Derrida, this ‘theoretical horizon’ (*telos*) of interpretation paralyzes the interpreter. The interpreter’s persistent search for meaning obliterates nuance, ‘beautiful possibilities’, as Nietzsche puts it; worse yet, it kills the unpredictable, destroys ‘eventicity’, which for Derrida is the greatest value and strength of reading. Reading then hardens into a standardized strategy, and the text becomes merely a deposit of ‘proper meaning’. Derrida demonstrates the failure of theory with one short ‘marginal’ sentence not without reason. In his ‘textual performance’, hermeneutic attempts prove futile in a confrontation with something so insignificant and irrelevant. The defeat of hermeneutics thus becomes overwhelming.

Another good example of such a performative ‘spectacle’ is Derrida’s text ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’ written for the Italian magazine *Poesia*.⁵⁵⁷ The theme of this ‘performance’, concerning essentialist statements about the nature of literature, is again not very ‘theatrical’. But once again, to demonstrate that the answer to the title question is simply impossible, the philosopher employs some very ‘theatrical’ practices. The issue addressed in Derrida’s ‘performance’ is to answer the title question ‘What is poetry?’ Or more precisely, to answer the question: ‘What is the poetic?’ And just like in *Spurs*, Derrida tackles this question experimentally by ‘performing’ various hypothetical answers. Derrida’s ‘performance’ thus stages a situation experienced by almost every literary scholar (at least since the beginning of the twentieth century up to the end of structuralism), with every subsequent school of theory trying to answer fundamental questions such as ‘What is literature?’ and ‘What is poetic language?’ Undoubtedly, however, the way Derrida formulates his answer in his text is unprecedented. Derrida’s very first words place us in the middle of a ‘scene’, which once again refers to Kierkegaard’s notion of ‘repetition’. Derrida begins by saying:

the answer *sees itself (as) dictated (dictation)*. I am a dictation, pronounces poetry, learn me by heart, copy me down, guard and keep me, look out for me, look at me, dictated dictation, right before your eyes: soundtrack, *wake*, trail of light, photograph of the feast in mourning. [CCP 223]

557 J. Derrida, ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’ trans. P. Kamuf, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. P. Kamuf. New York 1991, pp. 221–237. Hereinafter CCP, followed by the page number. See also M. P. Markowski’s commentary on this text, ‘Bajeczna spekulacja. Derrida, Heidegger i poezja’, *Literatura na świecie* 1998, no. 11–12, pp. 162–175. Hereinafter BS, followed by the page number.

This prologue is rather bizarre but its most important part is: ‘the answer *sees itself (as) dictated*’. ‘Dictate’, as Peggy Kamuf explains, can mean ‘a common pedagogical exercise in which students write under a teacher’s dictation.’⁵⁵⁸ It can also be a reference to Heidegger’s ‘thinking’ that ‘says what the truth of Being dictates.’⁵⁵⁹ Or, as Michał Paweł Markowski observes, dictation may simply mean ‘repeating words uttered by someone else’, and in doing so (as Heidegger claims), ‘repeating the voice of Being’ [BS 170]. Writing poetry is also ‘repeating’ and so is, as Derrida clearly suggests in the first sentence of his text, answering the question ‘What is poetry?’ Derrida’s performance is thus arranged as a sequence of ‘repetitions’ which repeat other ‘repetitions’. Just as the answer *sees itself (as) dictated (dictation)*. I am a dictation, pronounces poetry’; this answer, as performed by Derrida, involves ‘playing (with)’ the impossibility of defining the elusive essence of literature. As Blanchot observes, ‘The reading of a poem is the poem itself.’⁵⁶⁰ The role of the poem (the essence of poetry) is unexpectedly played by a ‘hedgehog’ in the road – ‘solitary, rolled up in a ball, next to (it)self. And for that very reason, it may get itself run over’ [CCP 223]. Derrida invites this bizarre ‘protagonist’ to the ‘scene of the text’ for many reasons,⁵⁶¹ but the most important one is expressed directly:

Our poem does not hold still within names, nor even within words. It is first of all thrown out on the roads and in the fields, thing beyond languages, even if it sometimes happens that it recalls itself in language, when it gathers itself up, rolled up in a ball on itself, more threatened than ever in its retreat: it thinks it is defending itself, and it loses itself. [CCP 229]

It is a somewhat similar (dramatic) situation to the one Derrida arranges in *Spurs*: a poem (a hedgehog rolled up in a ball on the road) is ‘threatened’ (this time by theory) and tries to defend itself from being ‘run over’, i.e. from extracting the truth of its being. ‘The poem’, Derrida says, ‘can roll itself up in a ball, but it is still in order to turn its pointed signs toward the outside’ [CCP 235]. And just

558 See the chapter on this text in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. New York 1991, p. 222.

559 M. Heidegger, cited in: D. F. Krell (trans.), ‘Heidegger, the Anaximander Fragment’, *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 1973/1974, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 583.

560 Qtd. after: [EI 369].

561 All of these reasons are discussed in detail by Markowski in [BS 165–172] and [BS 172–174].

as one cannot let the hedgehog 'be led back into the circus or the menagerie of *poiesis*' [CCP 233], the poem should not be abused as well. So what can you do with it? Derrida's answer is surprising: it 'teaches the heart, invents the heart', allowing us to experience it [CCP 231] – experience 'the impossible'. Derrida explains further:

you would like to retain by heart an absolutely unique form, an event whose intangible singularity no longer separates the ideality, the ideal meaning as one says, from the body of the letter. In the desire of this absolute inseparation, the absolute nonabsolute, you breathe the origin of the poetic. Whence the infinite resistance to the transfer of the letter which the animal, in its name, nevertheless calls out for. That is the distress of the *hérisson*. What does the distress, *stress* itself, want? *Stricto sensu*, to put on guard. Whence the prophecy: translate me, watch, keep me yet awhile, get going, save yourself, let's get off the autoroute. Thus the dream of *learning by heart* arises in you. Of letting your heart be traversed by the dictated dictation. In a single trait – and that's the impossible, that's the poetic experience. You did not yet know the heart, you learn it thus. From this experience and from this expression. I call a poem that very thing that teaches the heart [...] [CCP 229–231]

'Learning by heart' (or as Derrida also puts it 'miming mechanics') is an attempt to repeat the poem ('by heart') – it is an attempt to repeat something that is essentially unrepeatable. Derrida expresses this Kierkegaardian paradox by saying of the heart that it reiterates 'in a murmur: never repeat' [CCP 233]. The 'effect' of this 'performance' can be described as follows (which, of course, Derrida expresses in his own language):

You will call poem from now on a certain passion of the singular mark, the signature that repeats its dispersion, each time beyond the *logos*, ahuman, barely domestic, not reappropriable into the family of the subject: a converted animal, rolled up in a ball, turned toward the other and toward itself, in sum, a thing – modest, discreet, close to the earth [...]. [CCP 235]

This 'effect' is supposed to transform knowledge and culture and be a warning to them against their tendency to try to 'master' objects. By performing the impossibility of defining literature, Derrida abandons knowledge and culture for the sake of art, but that does not mean that he forgets them. He says (to himself):

you will have had to disable memory, disarm culture, know how to forget knowledge, set fire to the library of poetics. [CCP 233]

Knowledge and culture are abandoned, but only for the duration of a 'performance' that 'transgresses' the horizon of scientific speculation. Knowledge and culture are then invited back 'to the scene', which, as Derrida once put it

in reference to philosophy, they are no longer able to 'master'. On this 'scene' Derrida 'performs' the inability to define a poem ('a certain passion'), which (in a very 'theatrical' manner) ends with a dialogue. An undefined woman clearly provokes her interlocutor:

- But the poem you are talking about, you are getting off the track, it has never been named thus, or so arbitrarily.
- You just said it. Which had to be demonstrated. Recall the question. 'What is...?' [...] 'What is...?' laments the disappearance of the poem – another catastrophe. By announcing that which is just as it is, a question salutes the birth of prose. [CCP 237]

The question 'What is poetry?' may not be answered in the traditional way, as it has been practiced for years by essentialist theories of literature, and, as Derrida adds, by history, epistemology, and philosophy. The very formulation of this question may cause 'the disappearance of the poem.' The question cannot be answered in the language of scientific discourse (Derrida anarchically urges us 'to forget knowledge, set fire to the library of poetics' [CP 233]) or in the language of prose. So how can you formulate an answer? You can only 'perform' the futility of such an endeavour – 'demonstrate' that it cannot really be given, because that would be the end of poetry. You can only approach the poem and 'venture toward' it, which is what Derrida does during his 'performance'. Thus, just like in *Spurs*, 'performance' is meant to expose the pretence of traditional hermeneutics. 'Che cos'è la poesia?' exposes as an usurpation the epistemological claims of literary criticism to the right to define poetics. Markowski comments insightfully on the performative strategy employed by Derrida in 'Che cos'è la poesia?', quoting Peggy Kamuf in the process:

[Derrida] as always, devotes as much attention to the judgments on poetry as to his own text, *which performs what it is talking about*, or, in other words, it abolishes 'the distance between what he is writing about (poetry, the poem, or as he will finally call it: the poematic), and *what his writing is doing*' (emphasis mine – AB) [BS 162].

However, we must finally ask: 'What is the purpose of all this?' What is the purpose of 'performing' the futility of formulating definitions? What is the purpose of demonstrating the failures of hermeneutics or theory? Is it to spread scepticism or even defeatism (of which Derrida has so often been accused)? Perhaps the point is to stop readers, philosophers, theoreticians, literary scholars, and critics from, as Heidegger puts it, 'calculative thinking'. Even if just for a moment. For the duration of the 'performance' on the 'scene' of the text.

The Scriptor on the Scene of the Text

The modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text.

Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'

Writing is [...] a performative.

Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author'

It was Roland Barthes who introduced the 'scriptor' to theoretical and literary discourse, but this term is also found in the writings of Derrida. Indeed, this 'figure' suits Derrida's practices very well. The 'scriptor' in a 'textual performance', who is no longer an 'actor' but an actual 'performer', has replaced the author and the traditional notion of the reader. The differences between the actor and the performer have been analyzed in detail in performance studies.⁵⁶² Simply put: the main difference arises from the division between (classical) theatre and performance. In contrast to the actor who presents (or rather re-presents) on the stage a text that has been written in advance (before the play), the performer creates the 'text' during the performance – in the 'here and now'. Of course, there may be (and very often is) some preliminary scenario, but it is usually not final (in contrast to the text of a theatrical play) and is often subject to significant modifications during the performance itself as a result of interactions between the performer and the audience. Performance is open, aleatoric, and unpredictable, and thus it is impossible to define or impose anything on the performer. Indeed, no superior, or, as Derrida would say, 'teleological', instance supervises the actions of the performer. There is no author. 'Writing', which for Derrida, Barthes, and Foucault is synonymous with the practices of modern literature, as Foucault poetically puts it, 'has undermined the speaking subject' who, now liberated, has revealed their infinitely creative potencies. Instead of the 'classical subject', Roland Barthes conceives of an 'instance' that is integrally linked to the act of writing – it generates meaning and is generated in the process – calling it the 'scriptor' [*scripteur*]. The 'scriptor' has replaced the virtual 'author' (the theoretical instance controlling 'proper' interpretation). Introducing the 'scriptor' to

562 See e.g. Schechner [PS, in particular, the section titled 'From Total Acting to Not Acting', pp. 174-176].

the 'scene of the text', as Barthes writes in 'The Death of the Author', changes the traditional balance of power. As Barthes argues, the author is 'diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage' and 'maintains with his work the same relation of antecedence as a father maintains with his child.' His role ends there. The scriptor, on the other hand, 'is born simultaneously with the text;' he is 'in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding writing'. 'There is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally *here and now*'.⁵⁶³ Once literature is liberated from the constraints of 'final signification', it can unlock its creative potential, and literary experimentation, a fertile 'field of play for signs', gives rise to an equally dynamic and fertile reading practice performed by the 'SCRIPTOR' (the 'performer'). 'Mallarmé's entire poetics', Barthes writes in 'The Death of the Author', 'consists in suppressing the author for the sake of the writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader)'.⁵⁶⁴ Indeed, the author, sentenced to banishment, is replaced by the 'SCRIPTOR' – 'the writing reader'. And it is this person, one 'without history, biography, psychology', who turns out to be 'that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted'.⁵⁶⁵ He also (performatively) produces the text in reading.

Liberation from the constraints of 'final signification' (which the presence of the author implies) was therefore to strengthen the role of the reader/'SCRIPTOR' and redefine reading, which was no longer governed by 'intention' but by 'invention'. And like the transition from imitation to creation (from representation to production), and this transition from intention to invention was to indicate the direction of change in thinking about the reading of literature. In this way, literary and 'readerly' discourse had come full circle: the 'SCRIPTOR' existed as a result of '*écriture*', and because modern literature had removed the creative 'I', the 'SCRIPTOR' could now epitomize creative 'writing'. Unlike literature from the 'era of the author' (a person or construct, but always distanced from the work, as in classic theatre, where the actor is separated from the audience), modern literature embraces writing, united now with the scriptor fully in a process of signification. The modern 'SCRIPTOR', Barthes adds, is 'the object' (*agens*) of this creative act, and does not 'pre-exist' his work, but 'is born simultaneously with his text' and thus 'is not the subject with the book as predicate [...]'.⁵⁶⁶ Thus, it could be said

563 R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 145.

564 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

565 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

566 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

that Derrida is indeed a performer in his 'performances' (or a reader who writes performatively), with all the consequences of assuming such a role. He is not an 'actor' who only reconstructs the process of understanding a (pre-existing) text, but a performer whose dynamic 'actions' take place 'live' during the performance. The scriptor plays a crucial role in the signification process – just like the mime in Margueritte's and Mallarmé's texts, he 'does not refer to any action which has preceded' the performance. During reading (and writing), he is always inside his 'textual performance'. However, moving about within the space of the text, the 'scriptor' also transfers the 'effects' of his 'actions' beyond this 'scene', trying to influence his readers – the 'participants in his performance'. Erika Fischer-Lichte emphasizes that every performer and participant in the performance 'completes' the process of creating meaning [TP 18]. By analogy, while it is not a 'situation of here and now, transforming everyone present [the performer and the spectator] into co-subjects' [TP 18], Derrida-the reader and the reader of Derrida's text also both participate in a 'textual performance'. By consciously transforming his readings into performances, Derrida creates an impression, at least to a certain extent, of the intimate relationship between its participants. For Derrida, this strategy of performative writing ('lecture-écriture') is supposed to abolish all the divisions and (metaphysical) oppositions that have defined 'traditional' interpretation, such as understanding the meanings of the text vs. writing commentary (the text's mimetic representation), the external world vs. the world presented in the text, representation vs. performance, meaning vs. action, distance vs. commitment, sender vs. receiver, author vs. reader, and finally, subject vs. object. Derrida achieves this by transforming his writing into 'performance', because, by its very nature, performance defies all these divisions. Indeed, as Erika Fischer-Lichte aptly observes in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, performance 'collapses binary oppositions', because it is beyond all dualities – it exists in the active space 'in-between'. Therefore, performance creates a situation of 'multistability' in which each different aspect 'constantly oscillates between these various states' [TP 66]. As could be expected, for Derrida such a situation is ideal.

In her essay 'Culture as Performance: Theatre history as cultural history', Fischer-Lichte comments on this subject, using Derridean language:

What, traditionally in Western cultures, is held to be an opposition which is grasped by pairs of dichotomic concepts such as: autonomous subject vs. subject determined by others; art vs. social reality/politics; presence vs. representation, in performances is experienced not in the mode of either-or, but in that of an as-well. The opposition collapses, the dichotomies seem to dissolve. The moment this happens, the moment when the one can also be the other, our attention is attracted by the passage from one

state to the other, by the instability, which, in its turn, is experienced as an event. The space between the opposites, an interval opens up. The 'betwixt and between', thus, becomes a privileged category. [CP 11]

Respectively, in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* Fischer-Lichte devotes a separate chapter to the power of performance that is able to 'collapse dichotomies', observing that

performative, self-referential speech acts set in motion a dynamic which collapses terminological binaries and, as Sybille Kraemer puts it, 'destabilizes the dichotomous terminological scheme as a whole' [...]. As we have seen, particularly those terminological binaries central to our culture, such as art and reality, subject and object, body and mind, man and beast, or signifier and signified, lose their unambiguous meaning, are set in motion, begin to oscillate, and possibly collapse entirely. [TP 169]

The dichotomy of representation and reality collapses as well. 'Dichotomies, such as aesthetic vs. social, aesthetic vs. political, and aesthetic vs. ethical', as Fischer-Lichte points out, have 'been collapsed demonstratively' in performance [TP 170]. Dichotomies such as art/reality, aesthetic/un-aesthetic, and body/mind have been collapsed in performance equally ruthlessly [TP 172–173]. Indeed, as Fischer-Lichte concludes,

Performances that undermine and undo such dichotomies constitute a new reality in which one thing can simultaneously appear as another; this reality is unstable, blurred, ambiguous, transitory, and dissolves boundaries. [...] As performances destabilize the structure of binary opposites with the help of which we are used to grasping and describing reality. [...] When oppositions dissolve into one another our attention focuses on the transition from one state to the next. The space between opposites opens up; the in-between thus becomes a preferred category. [TP 174]

This transgressive power of performance, to which Fischer-Lichte (after Victor Turner⁵⁶⁷) refers to as 'liminality', is the main reason for Derrida's fascination with performance, and at the same time, the main reason for performance scholars' fascination with Derrida. Instead of stable and artificial divisions, performance sustains movement and change. As Marvin Carlson explains,

567 V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, London 1969, and 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality', in *Secular Ritual*, ed. S. F. Moore, B. C. Myerhoff. Amsterdam 1977, where he talks about the threshold phase of a 'state of liminality' (from Latin *limen* – threshold). He defines this state as being 'betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial' (*The Ritual Process*, p. 95). See also: [TP 175].

Derrida constantly warns against the temptation of merely reinscribing a binary system by reversing its terms. Derrida's project is rather to suggest a constant field of interplay between these terms, of presence impregnated with absence, a field perpetually in process, always in-between as it is in-between absence and presence. Such art 'rejects form, which is immobility, and opts, instead for discontinuity and slippage.' [P 149]⁵⁶⁸

Indeed, in his practices, Derrida consistently rejects immobility, opting instead for movement, discontinuity, and change. He 'performs', 'shows', and 'demonstrates'. In fact, the philosopher 'demonstrates' at least two important meanings of the Latin word *demonstratio*, which correspond to the subversive nature of performance. Derrida 'shows something', 'does something with a specific effect in mind', and at the same time, 'protests', 'manifests', and 'questions'. Derrida himself expresses it succinctly: my texts do not talk about something in the usual way – they 'intervene performatively'.⁵⁶⁹

568 The anti-dualistic way of thinking in performance studies was obviously influenced not only by Derrida, but also by many other postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers, especially Paul de Man, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard (eliminating the division between appearance and reality), Lyotard, Deleuze – the precursor of postmodernity, and others.

569 J. Derrida 'Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments,' *Critical Inquiry* 1989, vol. 15, no. 4, p. 836.

To Testify to the Event

The point of the performative, then, is that, itself an event, it 'transmits' rather than represents the events to which it testifies.

Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier*

'Performance challenges,' Jon McKenzie observes in reference to the provocative and controversial character of all kinds of performative practices [PE 32]. However, performance challenges not only politics or ethics, but also, and perhaps above all, theory. Indeed, as McKenzie further argues,

Performance Studies [...] has challenged theory to get real, while also challenging itself with theoretical questions concerning the status of that 'real' ('real bodies,' 'real materiality,' 'real life'). [PE 33]

This is true: performance and performance studies have challenged theory as well as literary studies and hermeneutics. However, one look at the effects of this challenge in the field of literary studies reveals an intriguing pattern: literary studies wants to 'performatively' revive and revamp its research field but, at the same time, it struggles to transpose performative experiences into the sphere of language, text, or reading. The growing popularity of performance and the new methodological perspectives it has brought means that performative language is increasingly being used to describe literary phenomena. A very good example of this tendency is a book published in the US in 2006, whose title seems to echo the language and philosophy of Jacques Derrida: philosopher and aesthetician Peter Kivy's *The Performance of Reading*, published as part of the 'New Directions in Aesthetics' series.⁵⁷⁰ The title of the book sounded promising;⁵⁷¹ in light of the popularity of performance studies, many literature scholars are convinced that this 'new aesthetics,' as Erika Fisher-Lichte describes it, can revive literary studies, offering new reading strategies. Another reason performativity appeals to literary scholars is because it allows them to study both literary texts

570 P. Kivy, *The Performance of Reading. An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature*, New York 2006.

571 M. Sugier also points this out in her accurate and detailed assessment of Kivy's book in [KT2 388–389], to which I will refer in my discussion here.

and commentaries in terms of their 'effects.' It is possible to analyze the actual impact of writing on human beliefs, worldviews, and experiences, and thus to transform them. Such a perspective, of course, is not a novelty for literary studies (for example, it is visible in the so-called 'theory of influence' or different theories of literary communication). However, the language of performance can undoubtedly infuse it with fresh energy, leading to the redefinition of various literary phenomena, categories and terms. Unfortunately, in her discussion of Kivy's book, Małgorzata Sugiera dashes such hopes:

anyone who expects that the foundational performative notion of 'liveness' will be challenged and that the category of performativity will be broadened to include phenomena that go beyond the artistic and the social will be disappointed [KT2 389]

Worse yet, Sugiera adds, Kivy uses a notion of performance from before the performative turn, and, in fact, simply uses the term 'in its good, old theatrical sense' [KT2 389]. We may thus assume that Kivy's book will not exhaustively explain the complexities of literary performativity. Indeed, while Kivy has a solid grounding in the philosophical tradition (he draws on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Locke, and Kant⁵⁷²), he does not really reference contemporary performance studies scholars such as Schechner, Carlson, McKenzie, or Fischer-Lichte, nor does he mention Austin. The very concept of 'performance' is used in its most general, even colloquial, sense. Ultimately, Kivy neither specifies his understanding of contemporary 'performance,' nor list the properties he considers crucial to his concept. His perspective on literary theory is also rather limited, although the views of Roman Ingarden are discussed on two pages of the book.

Such a poor conceptual background does not necessarily discredit *The Performance of Reading*. The main problem lies not in the book's details, but in the general approach expressed in the title, i.e. in the manner in which Kivy tries to solve the difficult problem of the performativity of reading. Kivy first discusses the fairly old theory of Nelson Goodman (found in *Languages of Art*⁵⁷³), which distinguishes between the 'allographic arts' (e.g. painting) and 'autographic arts' (e.g. music and theatre). Goodman makes a distinction between artistic practices in which the work is the final result of a creative process (as is the case with painting or literature) and artistic practices which may be described as scores or scenarios to be performed by someone else (as is the case with music or theatre).

572 There is also one reference to Derrida, but it is provided second-hand through Martha Nussbaum.

573 N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Indianapolis 1968.

Using this distinction, Kivy goes back to Antiquity and Plato's *Ion* in which he finds a description of a 'performance' by a rhapsode. The rhapsode gives a 'live' recital and lecture on Homer, which constitutes 'a staged performance' of an epic – an allographic work of art. According to Kivy, this performance marks the beginning of a very important phenomenon, i.e. the reading aloud of a literary work of art (silent reading became popular only in the eighteenth century; reading aloud persisted until the nineteenth century). Such a model of reading literature aloud (presentation) is the basis of Kivy's theory. He argues that literature, unfairly deprived of the possibility to be performed, has tried to somehow deal with this lack, as evidenced, for example, by the eighteenth-century epistolary novel, in which the reader is both the recipient and the performer. Kivy formulates the main thesis of his book thus: the universal contemporary model of silent reading can be seen as 'performing' the old model of reading aloud. Kivy observes that the reader, even if he or she is reading silently, is not passive but, in the full sense of the word, is 'performing' the literary text. Such a way of reading may be compared to the performance of the rhapsode described by Plato, even though it only takes place in the mind of the reader.⁵⁷⁴ However, Kivy's argument may sound innovative only to a person who is not familiar with the works of contemporary performance scholars (such as Schechner, Carlson, McKenzie, or Fischer-Lichte) or to a person who is not aware of the fact that Goodman's arbitrary distinctions have been challenged. Indeed, while Kivy references Ingarden's theory of concretization, he disregards its subsequent reformulations, including Sartre's famous book *What is Literature?* (1948), the Constance School of Reception Aesthetics, and the semiotics of reception (e.g. the works of Umberto Eco). All of these focus on the 'performative' aspect of reading, naming the reader as the main 'performer' in the reading process. Although they have not gone so far as to transfer the model of reading aloud to the model of silent reading, they did not have to scrutinize the entire history of reading to arrive at conclusions that are similar to Kivy's.⁵⁷⁵ In turn, the term 'the score to be performed' as a synonym for a literary work has been employed in literary studies for some time now and Kivy's metaphor of 'reading of the musical score' thus seems outdated. Indeed, Kivy appears not to be familiar with the history of research into the 'agency' of the reader in the process of reading, and thus discusses this phenomenon within

574 See also Sugiera [KT2 391].

575 I have written extensively about the pitfalls and contradictions inherent in this kind of thinking about the reader and reading in the chapter 'Teoria i lektura. Niebezpieczne związki' in [AT 175–228].

a fashionable performative framework. Although it may be possible to reinterpret prehistoric literary notions in the context of performativity, and it could even bring interesting effects, it should not be done in such a simple manner as in Kivy's book. It quickly becomes clear why Kivy draws on Ingarden's phenomenology: Kivy uses Ingarden's theory of 'appearances' (which was criticized in the first half of the twentieth century) because, as Sugiera aptly points out, his understanding of 'performance' boils down to 'representing a fictitious sensible world on the stage of the theatre of the imagination' [KT2 391-392]. 'Performance' for Kivy is thus simply a good, old 'updating of appearances' in the process of reading. However, it is not enough to conceive of reading as performance. This somewhat long commentary on *The Performance of Reading* is meant to discourage attempts at such mechanical transfers of the performative perspective and terminology into literary studies (simply because they are fashionable). Despite its drawbacks, however, Kivy's book poses a serious question as to how performativity can function, as Małgorzata Sugiera puts it, 'beyond the artistic and the social'. And in what sense can reading or interpretation of literature be performative? As I have pointed out earlier, this problem is not at all an easy one. The efforts of Derrida and the attempts of other literary scholars demonstrate the complexity of the issue and do not provide 'ready-made' solutions. Having said that, Derrida's works undoubtedly prove to be the most inspirational.

The complexity of the issue of performativity is acknowledged, for example, in Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory*, in which the scholar discusses the issue of 'performative language'.⁵⁷⁶ Culler refers both to Austin's theory and Derrida's critique of Austin. According to Culler, the most important consequences of these two visions of performativity for literature and literary criticism concern the characteristics of literature. The emphasis is no longer on true/false, but (as Austin wanted) on appropriate/inappropriate. The link between meaning and intention is also cut ('what act I perform with words', Culler observes, it 'is not determined by my intention but by social and linguistic conventions') [LT 97]. Iterability, emphasized by Derrida (but not by Austin), is recognized as a basic feature of language. For Culler, iterability is the most important property of literary language, because as he explains (referencing Derrida):

a work succeeds, becomes an event, by a massive repetition that takes up norms and, possibly, changes things. [...] Its performativity isn't a singular act accomplished once and for all but a repetition that gives life to forms it repeats. [LT 106]

576 'Performative Language' is also the title of one of the chapters in Culler's previously cited book *Literary Theory. A Very Short Introduction*.

According to Culler, Derrida's writings, particularly his critique of Austin in regard to the (lack of) performative potential in 'non-serious' (theatrical and literary) statements, mark a key moment in the history of performance and performativity in literary studies. Derrida's critique of Austin on the distinct nature of the performative and the constative allows for 'a complex, paradoxical combination of the performative and constative' [LT 99] which characterizes literature at its core. Culler's evaluation of Derrida's contribution is quite accurate. Trouble starts, however, when the author of *Literary Theory* attempts to formulate his own views on the performativity of the literary text, mainly because he assumes that the literary text is always performative in the sense that it 'does not refer to a prior state of affairs and is not true or false' [LT 96]. Culler thus reformulates in the language of performance the well-known theory on the fictionality of literature, repeating Ingarden's notion of literary *quasi-judgements*. His next point, that literature always creates what it refers to (for example, by bringing to life protagonists or 'ideas, concepts, which they deploy'), is also not convincing. Nor is Culler's next argument that literature influences its readers and their beliefs, worldviews, or experiences. Such a vision of performativity in literature is not very innovative (old findings are expressed in new language, as in the case of Kivy's book), diminishing the critical potential of Culler's argument. He wants to prove the thesis that literature is performative, but does not reflect fully on what performative effects literature might produce.⁵⁷⁷ However, if we agree that the literary text is by definition performative, then there is no point in defining to what degree and thanks to what means it produces 'effects.' In the final pages of his book, however, Culler formulates a number of questions that can stimulate further discussion about performativity in literature. They are as follows:

First, how to think about the shaping role of language: do we try to limit it to certain specific acts, where we think we can say with confidence what it does, or do we try to gauge the broader effects of language, as it organizes our encounters with the world? [...] Third, how should one conceive of the relation between what language does and what it says? This is the basic problem of the performative: can there be a harmonious fusion of doing and saying or is there an unavoidable tension here that governs and complicates all textual activity? [LT 106–107]

577 A very similar tendency can be traced back to certain concepts in theatre studies related to the performativity of theatre, in which the seemingly self-evident assumption that a theatrical spectacle is always performative does not resolve many of the problems connected with this issue.

Although Culler does not solve any problems here related to performativity in literature, all his questions are valid. Although Culler's text was written fifteen years ago, little has changed since then in literary studies. There are still more questions than answers, and those attempting to make literary performativity an integral part of literary studies are more determined than ever.

The term 'performance' first appeared more than twenty years ago (i.e. even before Culler's book) in a dictionary of literary theory titled *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Leentricchii and Thomas McLaughlin. It arrived on the scene alongside such new literary terms as 'writing' and 'ideology' (in a new perspective brought about by the ethical-political turn). The term was defined by Henry Sayre, an American art and performance scholar and author of *A World of Art* and *Discovering the Humanities*. Today his definition reads as problematically as Kivy's book. Sayre attempts to define performativity in the context of literary language, but the examples he gives are primarily what we would call today 'paratheatrical' or cultural, concerning feminist performances and performances against the war in Vietnam. Such examples help clarify the characteristics of performance 'in general' but trouble begins when Sayre attempts to demonstrate how performance works in literature. One of the best examples of literary performativity to which Sayer refers is a work by the Dadaist poet Kurt Schwitters titled *Ursonate* ('Primordial Sonata'). The poem consists of sequences of inarticulate sounds by means of which the artist, as Sayre writes, 'attacks natural language in the same manner that Duchamp's urinal attacks the norms of traditional sculpture.'⁵⁷⁸ Sayre thus suggests that performativity in literature begins when meaning disappears (i.e. when the linguistic sign cuts its ties to its referent and becomes self-referential).

A similar approach (one also close to Derrida's understanding of the phenomenon) can be found in Walter Benn Michaels's *The Shape of the Signifier*. The scholar also asks questions, including 'how can a text achieve the performative? How can a text cease merely to represent an act and instead become the act it no longer represents?'⁵⁷⁹ Unlike Kivy, however, Benn Michaels refers primarily to Austin and to his famous example of the marriage ceremony: 'When I say, before the registrar or altar, &c., 'I do', I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it.'⁵⁸⁰ Benn Michaels then comments on this example, noting that we

578 H. Sayre, 'Performance', in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, Chicago 2010, p. 95.

579 W. Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier*. Princeton 2004, p. 142. Hereinafter SS, followed by the page number.

580 J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 6.

are dealing here with the opposition of being informed about and of being joined [indulging] in marriage; the purely informative function of the phrase 'I do' is undermined by the specific action that is accomplished through it. If we were to transfer this formula in an analogous manner to a literary text, its informative function would be undermined by its effect (i.e. a concrete action that the text or part of it performs). At this point, however, things get complicated. After all, most literary texts inform us of (or represent) something, so it would be difficult to reduce them only to inarticulate sounds by which they merely produce sensory stimuli. The Russian formalists sought to build a theory of poetic language based on the purely sensory poetry written by the most radical Russian and Italian futurists, but were unable to do so, despite their best efforts. Derrida and many French poststructuralists (especially Foucault and Barthes) have to some extent followed in their footsteps. They argue that the ultimate embodiment of literary 'writing' is self-referential and – as Derrida and other poststructuralists put it – 'silent' literature, which performatively produces 'effects of writing'. However, it could be said that in the case of such literary practices that the text ceases to be a message and thus must 'perform', providing sensual and emotional stimuli. But do these diagnoses apply to literary texts that are both 'material' and 'communicative' (as formalists and the Prague school of structuralists discovered, stressing the tensions between the cognitive and poetic (autotelic) functions of literary language)? Despite his admiration for 'silent' literature, Derrida attempts to solve this dilemma by introducing the concept of the contamination (or 'oscillation') of the constative and the performative in one and the same text; but is this enough to validate the notion of literary performativity? The situation becomes even more complicated when instead of talking about a literary text, we speak in terms of 'reading' or 'interpretation'. How can we talk about the performativity of reading (interpreting) literature? And in what categories should we think about the 'text of reading' (the 'commentary'), which, as Derrida postulates, both 'performs' the self-referential mechanism of the literary text and informs about its 'content'? Although contemporary pragmatic theories of literature claim that the 'intelligibility' of the text does not condition its literary character,⁵⁸¹ it would be absurd to claim that the most important feature of literature is its incomprehensibility. While Derrida does value 'unintelligible' texts, he does so because he uses them as a weapon against simplifying interpretations and methods which ignore linguistic (and rhetorical) complexities (in which Derrida is very much interested) in their quest to reach the 'truth' deposited in the text.

581 See e.g. J. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 37.

Derrida has proposed several ways of practicing performative reading. For example, as has been mentioned earlier, he ‘performs’ in his texts the self-referential mechanisms of literary texts or ‘repeats’ the perpetual oscillation between the constative and the performative, which he considers a very important property of literature. His motivations are clear. If, as Derrida claims, ‘every literary text plays and negotiates the suspension of referential naivety, of *thetic* referentiality [...], each text does so differently, singularly’ [AL 47], then reading should ‘perform’ this mechanism. The philosopher is thus able to minimize the constativity of his practices: the ‘effects of generality’ produced in and by them are *performed* and not stated. Such a ‘suspension of referentiality’ also gives rise to performativity: when the relation between the signifier and the referent is disrupted (not abolished but suspended), the text can produce all kinds of effects that are no longer related to the decoding of meaning. In relation to this, David Carroll asks,

Is Derrida’s position that we must let literature *perform* its deconstructive activities on its own and that the only role left for critical discourse is to mime literature and become literary in its turn? [PA 93]

The answer is ‘yes.’ For Derrida, it is undoubtedly the best and the most honest manner of writing about literature. And although it may sometimes imply a certain ‘deficiency’, it nevertheless helps explain the mysteries of literary performativity. However, the most important goal of Derrida’s performative practices is ‘critical:’ the ‘effects of generality’ produced in and through his practices evoked the failure or problems of interpretive decisions and arbitrary judgements about the essence of literature. Derrida’s practices (in their own way) provided an answer to the question of how to read ‘performatively’, but this answer was negative – Derrida ‘demonstrated’ the oppressive actions of literary scholars. Does it mean, however, that it is impossible to build a positive model of literary performativity on the basis of Derrida’s ideas? Walter Benn Michaels in *The Shape of the Signifier*, who is rather sceptical about the performative potential of the literary text and its reading, points to another aspect of Derrida’s practices, and discusses it in the rather unexpected context of Holocaust testimony. He quotes a book titled *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*⁵⁸² written by Shoshana Felman (whose methods share an affinity with deconstruction) and Dori Laub (a psychoanalyst). For Felman

582 New York–London 1992. Felman had already written much earlier about the performativity of literature, in her book *The Literary Speech Act. Don Juan with J. L. Austin or Seduction in two Languages*. Ithaca, New York 1983.

and Laub the performativity of language (and text) is related to the title notion of the 'crisis of witnessing'. Broadly speaking, they argue (as do many contemporary philosophers and scholars studying Holocaust narratives⁵⁸³) that literature should not simply inform about the Holocaust (e.g. by means of conventional historical descriptions), but rather try to arouse specific emotions in those who have not experienced it. We can evoke in the reader a substitute for that terrible experience, and thus produce the desired effects of fear and protest, only if we cease to present cold, hard facts. According to Felman and Laub, the best example of the performativity of literature is not so much 'the act of saying certain words' (as Austin implies), but the act of destroying them. The following excerpt from a poem by Paul Celan quoted in *Testimony* exemplifies their argument:

Your question – your answer.
 Your song, what does it know?
 Deepinsnow,
 Eepinnow,
 Ee – i – o.⁵⁸⁴

The final line of the poem, the line that apparently does not mean anything (it is an onomatopoeic 'reverberation'), proves to be the most important because the broken words (echoing the 'broken' word) render the traumatic 'testimony' more powerful. This testimony exists because it challenges intelligibility. In Celan's poem, this experience is also contrasted with knowledge, because trauma (as Jacques Lacan argues) cannot be comprehended – it can only be experienced. Indeed, as Benn Michaels observes, '[i]t is [...] at the moment when the words as words begin to 'break down' that they become performative, that they begin to enact rather than report' [SS 142]. He further argues that

583 Research into narratives of the Holocaust is currently one of the important trends in historical writing and, in particular, in its questioning of the possibility of presenting a full and faithful representation of historical facts, due to, as Cary Nelson writes, the impossibility of reliving them again. See e.g., C. Nelson, *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*. New York 1997. Benn Michaels in *The Shape of the Signifier* also dedicates space to this issue. Contemporary philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben are also involved in the dispute over the possibility of writing about the Holocaust without having experienced it. See e.g. G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, New York 2002, and *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford 1998.

584 Translated by John Felstiner in ed. S. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York–London 1994, p. 35.

it is at this moment that the readers of those words are 'ready to be solicited' not by the 'meaning' those words convey (since, as they break down, it is precisely their meaning that is put in question) but by what Felman calls the 'experience' of their author, Celan. [SS 142–143]

The observations of Felman and Laub and Benn Michales, however, raise further questions and doubts. Is the performativity of a literary text possible only at the price of the disintegration of its language? If so, then the performative effects of literature would be significantly reduced. In fact, such an approach would result in a reversal of traditional oppositions. Instead of studying performativity in intelligible texts, we would study texts (or fragments) that 'mean nothing' and only produce sensory stimuli. Such an approach does not provide a solution to the problem of literary performativity, but it can be a valuable inspiration for further investigation: the search for a non-dualistic approach to performativity, in which, as Erika Fischer-Lichte argues, the opposition between meaning and action is abolished. The notion of performativity formulated by Felman and Laub resembles to some extent the views of Derrida, who claimed that the performative function of the text manifests itself most clearly when its representative and communicative functions are suspended and the text becomes a 'pure' act of linguistic expression. Respectively, de Man observed that 'the speech act becomes performative only in the moment that it becomes illegible' [SS 143].⁵⁸⁵ Drawing on the findings of Felman and Laub, Benn Michaels argues that the Holocaust does not require 'representation' but 'a way of transmitting not the normalizing knowledge of the horror but the horror itself' [SS 141]. He then asks: how can texts transmit and not simply represent 'horror'? How, as Felman put it, can the act of *reading* literary texts be related to 'the act of *facing horror*'? If it could, reading would become a form of witnessing. It seems, however, that the experience of horror is one thing and reading about it is another; the person reading about horror does not experience it, but is presented with a depiction of this experience. Felman does not intend to deny this difference. On the contrary, she wants to emphasize it, thus making her contribution to the theory of the testimony. As Felman argues, 'the testimony cannot be simply relayed, repeated or

585 As in de Man's reading of Rousseau's *Confessions* in the chapter 'Excuses (*Confessions*)' in [AR 278–301], which is regarded as the quintessence of de Man's views on the performativity of reading (see e.g. [KZ 215–218]). As I have mentioned earlier, I have no room here to analyze the issue of performativity in de Man's works, but his contribution to performative thinking is also very interesting (though, in contrast to Derrida's work, his writing remains almost unknown to most researchers in performance studies) and is certainly deserving of a closer examination.

reported without thereby losing its function as a testimony.' In order not to lose its proper function, the testimony must be 'performative'; it must be an act of speech; it must be 'performed' rather than reported or represented. Therefore, the problem of the testimony concerns primarily the '*relation between language and events*'. Language that represents or reports is not a testimony, because it is not 'performative' or 'literary' enough. The testimony requires language that is itself an act and therefore can be said to enact rather than report events. The reader of the 'performative' text is not in the position of someone who reads about the 'horror' and understands it. Instead, they 'face horror' directly [SS 142].

As a result,

The essence of the performative is, as we have seen, its irreducibility to 'mere sense,' and it is precisely this irreducibility that makes it appropriate as a technology for [...] the 'transmission' [...] rather than the representation [SS 144]

The point of the performative, then, is that, itself an event, it 'transmits' rather than represents the events to which it testifies. This is what Felman means when she says that *Shoah* 'makes the testimony happen' [SS 145]

'Enacting an event,' as discussed by Benn Michaels, proves intriguing also in relation to Derrida's texts. Although their referentiality is not as 'radically suspended' as Paul de Man postulates,⁵⁸⁶ because, as we know, he still recognizes the links between the constative and the performative mode, it is significantly undermined. Indeed, Derrida is most interested in the textual moments of 'the exhaustion of meaning' [PO 14], as he calls it. Derrida in his readings wishes to 'testify to the event,' the 'event' of the literary text, and in particular, its unique 'idiom.' Therefore, he decides that the only legitimate manner of 'making the testimony happen' involves 'performing' the idiomatic language mechanisms of a given text. Although Derrida's reading practice is rather unique (because he consistently focuses on what most interests him), it also inspires further reflection on the performativity of literature and reading. Erika Fischer-Lichte rightly points out that

Prevalent aesthetic theories hardly address the performative turn in the arts – even if they can still be applied to it in some respects. However, they are unable to grasp its key aspect – the transformation from a work of art into an event. To understand, analyze, and elucidate this shift requires a whole new set of aesthetic criteria, suited to describe the specific characteristics of performance – an aesthetics of the performative. [EP 23]

Derrida is undoubtedly trying to transform theoretical discourse in many of his texts. He is constantly looking for new ways of reading, in order to abolish the

586 Who later retreated from some of his most radical opinions.

artificial divisions between the subject and object, semioticity and materiality. The philosopher renounces 'the work' (with all the theoretical consequences this category implies), and instead proposes to treat the literary text as an 'event' (and not as the finished product of the creative process that precedes it). Although many of Derrida's ideas may be controversial, his reading practices open the perspective for the study of performative aesthetics in literature. Indeed, naïve as it may seem, Derrida's claim that representing meaning ('reporting' on it) is not as effective as making the reader identify with the experience of literature and its reading invites further reflection. Unlike traditional literary criticism, the evocation of such literary and readerly experiences may actually encourage reading. Derrida's attempts to transform the language of writing about literature, so that 'reporting' gives way to 'acting' performatively, are also very important. Derrida's theatrical inspirations prove essential in this context. The lesson of the twentieth-century avant-garde theatre, which is almost synonymous with the contemporary understanding of performance, has taught Derrida that the 'theatralization' of the text, that is 'performatively' placing various issues on the 'scene of the text', is much more effective than representation. As such, the audience is able to 'face', understand, and 'experience' specific problems. It will come as no surprise that theatre works much more effectively than other methods of representation; however, it would be difficult to find a philosopher other than Derrida who would test this in practice.

Perhaps the practices of Derrida and contemporary writings on the nature of performativity will open up new perspectives for the study of literature and its reading. Above all, they will help us discover the potential of literature and reading as 'performative writing'. Indeed, as Peggy Phelan aptly observes,

I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance event again, as it plays itself out in an ongoing temporality [...] Performative writing is solicitous of affect even while it is nervous and tentative about the consequences of that solicitation. Alternately bold and coy, manipulative and unconscious, this writing points both to itself and to the 'scenes' that motivate it.⁵⁸⁷

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The reflections of Michales, Felman, and Laub on 'performative writing' as 'transmission' and 'experience' provide a transition to the final section of this book devoted to the problem of experience in the contemporary humanities. They

587 P. Phelan, *Mourning Sex*. London–New York 1997, cited in [PS 122]. It is also worth noting another book by this author: *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*. London–New York 1993.

also offer another interesting and creative perspective on literary performativity, in which literary texts performatively produce experiences. In this way, performance studies may prove inspirational for literary studies. As almost all contemporary performance scholars emphasize, due to its unique properties, performance is always a kind of experience and always produces experiences in the spectator.⁵⁸⁸ And although he disapproves of 'experience' as a philosophical term, Derrida is nevertheless very interested in the process of experiencing, its specificity, and its transformative capability. Indeed, as Erika Fischer-Lichte aptly observes,

understanding the artist's actions was less important than the experiences [...] In short, the transformation of the performance's participants was pivotal.

588 See e.g. Carlson [P 151–155] (the section titled 'Performance as Experience').

Part 3 Derrida and Experience

The experience, the passion of language and writing...

Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*

We are scientific because we lack subtlety.

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*

The Empirical Turn

I like to play with words but experience is what is most important.

Walter Benn Michaels

Walter Benn Michaels made the above statement during a recent visit to Poland to mark the release of the Polish translation of his book *The Shape of the Signifier*. While the comment was made casually and somewhat ironically in reference to a different and undoubtedly more serious topic, it continues to reverberate in my mind, because these words reflect the changes that have recently taken place in literary studies in the US and other countries. The turn towards experience, seen by literary scholars as both a badly needed and relatively unexplored field of research, is undoubtedly part of the broader, continuing poststructuralist transformation in the humanities. The empirical turn is essentially a deliberate and unapologetic renouncement of the scientific approach, objectivity, universality, and comprehensive systemic constructs, i.e. a moving away from everything that modern theory has instilled in literary studies. In its place, the humanities, and thus literary studies, have embraced anthropological and cultural perspectives, making literary theory 'human' once again.

Ryszard Nycz points to this change in an essay tellingly titled 'From Modern Theory to the Poetics of Experience' ['Od teorii nowoczesnej do poetyki doświadczenia']:

since the 1970s changes in literary studies have been mainly stimulated by a number of diverse tendencies which grew out of opposition to the doctrinal claims of modern theory. [...] We now refer to these tendencies as the anthropological and cultural turn. [KT2 31]

Indeed, after the long reign of 'strong' theories, after deconstruction, after the ethical and political turn, after repeated conceptual tumult and other 'turns' in modern literary studies, we are now experiencing a growing interest in previously neglected ('unscientific') topics such as 'feeling', 'corporeality', 'the senses', 'shame', 'revulsion', 'pleasure', 'sexuality', 'desire' and many others that have unexpectedly (especially for theory itself) found their way into the dictionary of literary theory. 'Experience' is another such topic. It is a term broad enough to include all the above-mentioned phenomena, but one which offers a completely

new perspective on literature and culture. This perspective has invigorated literary theory, because, as Nycz rightly points out, theory has displayed a ‘tendency to intellectualize its object’ for far too long [KT2 33], mainly because of its desire

to find for the scientific study of literature (and the humanities) the equivalent of the methodological dogma of the so-called closed system that has brought so much benefit to the natural sciences. [KT2 34]

As a result, however, ‘the ethical, sensual, affective, and experiential perspective’ was marginalized or suppressed [KT2 33]. But as scholars grew weary of dogmatic models and theoretical formulas that were distant from (literary and real-life) practices, a yearning for change arose, a desire to rediscover these marginalized, yet crucial aspects of literature. By both establishing its own autonomy and assuming the autonomy of art and literature, modern theory had distanced itself from everything that could threaten it, thereby walling itself off from history, culture, society, visuality, materiality, and, above all, from the body, senses, emotions, gender, and sexuality. These walls were first breached by poststructuralism, which attacked the monolith of ‘strong theory’, and in doing so, made a significant contribution to a revival in scholarly interest in the writing and reading of literature. The early poststructuralists’ successors restored the lost connection between literature and its external (social and political) contexts. Neopragmatism (for obvious reasons) strengthened the value of practice and broadened the horizons of philosophy and literary studies. This included Richard Rorty’s call for a return to ‘sentimentality’ and the emotional treatment of literature, and Stanley Fish’s notion of ‘affective stylistics’. In the now-famous ‘Against Theory’⁵⁸⁹ debate, in which Benn Michaels argued against ‘strong’ versions of theory, neopragmatist and deconstruction scholars initiated a turn away from interpretation as the validation of results, opening up room for a new perspective on literature (and reading), which now ceased to be conceived of as a ‘vessel of meaning’ and became instead a ‘vessel of experience’ or a practice that produces experience. Neopragmatism and deconstruction proposed seeing language as ‘the organ of propositional perception’, which, as the American neopragmatist philosopher Donald Davidson observed, was no longer a mental tool, but a tool of perception for ‘seeing sights and hearing sounds.’⁵⁹⁰ Post-psychoanalytic scholars, especially those interested in the theories of Freud, Lacan, Barthes, and

589 Sparked by the publication of S. Knapp and W. B. Michaels’ article ‘Against Theory’ in *Critical Inquiry* 1982, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 723–742.

590 Nycz also mentions this [KT2 44].

Kristeva, also made a significant 'empirical' contribution to literary studies. This was particularly true in terms of sexuality, which in Kristeva's theory is seen as a constant series of interventions by 'the semiotic' (the bodily and the sensual) in the 'symbolic' (the intelligible). The popularity of post-Lacanian concepts in the following phase of poststructuralism made it possible to introduce the 'trauma,' 'desire' and (sexual) 'pleasure' experienced during reading (as described by Barthes) into literary discourse on 'eventalization.' Feminism(s) (especially so-called 'corporeal feminism'), gender studies, and queer theory also played a significant role in opening up the 'scientific' study of literature to the problems of corporeality, sexuality, and gender.

All of the tendencies mentioned above, and many others, were joined in their resistance to the dogmatism of modern theory, and sought not only to make theory more 'sensitive' to diverse cultural practices, but also to present it with a fresh anthropological perspective. A new understanding of the various entities participating in cultural practices also played an important role in this process. Early postmodernism and poststructuralism alongside various cultural (ethical, political, feminist, gender, queer, post-psychoanalytical, performance and even somatic) trends questioned the modern Cartesian subject, advancing instead the notion of a historically-grounded, culturally-variable, desire-driven, and gendered 'humanized' entity, in which the mind, the senses, and the body were united. Performativity further strengthened such a notion: it placed emphasis on 'agency' as an important aspect of the subjective relationship with the world and defined art in terms of experience. As a consequence of these changes, the ethical and political turn, the performative turn, and numerous other turns, a new seminal turn loomed on the horizon. It can be called the 'turn towards experience' or simply 'the empirical turn.'

Ryszard Nycz thus describes its consequences:

it seems that we are thus, with no regrets, moving away from autonomous literature (art) towards culturally produced, experienced, and legitimized literature (art); 'nobody's' perspective is giving way to 'somebody's' personal perspective, a priori theory is being replaced by practical theory. [KT2 35]

Theory and literary are turning toward 'practice' (as Michel Foucault put it⁵⁹¹) and expanding into new territories. They are undergoing fundamental changes, which may revive them and re-establish the bond with experience that was severed by modern theory.

591 I am referring here to Foucault's famous 'oxymoron' 'theory is practice.'

Life after Theory

We are trying to reinvent invention itself, another invention, or rather an invention of the other that would come through the economy of the same.

Jacques Derrida, 'Psyche: Invention of the Other'

Attempting to re-establish a bond between literary studies/philosophy and 'the lifeworld'⁵⁹² might seem like a challenging task, but everything now indicates (fortunately) that there is no turning back from this path. This is not a question of recycling old, familiar existentialist catchphrases akin to 'existence precedes essence', although echoes of such slogans reverberate in this 'revival of life (in) theory' as well. Experience, as one of the key categories in humanities discourse, poses new challenges and requires a new language of description, one that would fundamentally change the concept of literature, no longer conceived of as a 'vessel of meaning', but, as Benn Michaels writes in *The Shape of the Signifier*, as an authentic 'transmission of experience.' Consequently, explaining and explicating the meaning of literature in literary commentary gives way to the practice of experiencing and creating new experiences. The empirical turn, or the 'turn of theory towards life', in the humanities is a testament to this radical shift in literary studies.

In the last chapter of my 2006 book *The Anti-Theory of Literature* [*Anty-Teoria Literatry*], entitled 'Life After Theory: Almost Late-Breaking News' ['Życie po teorii, czyli wieści prawie z ostatniej chwili'], I wrote about two important conferences that took place in 2001 and 2002, one at Duke University in the US, the other at Loughborough University in the UK. Both conferences were devoted to the (then) current state of theory and literary theory. The conference proceedings, somewhat eccentrically titled *life.after.theory*,⁵⁹³ included conversations with Jacques Derrida, Frank Kermode, Toril Moi, and Christopher Norris. According to the editors of *life.after.theory*, the book's equivocal title foretold the future of the humanities. On the one hand, it posed the question of what life was like now *after* Theory, i.e. after a long period of reassessing the foundations and assumptions

592 J. Habermas' term.

593 *life. after. theory*, ed. M. Payne and J. Schad, London-New York 2003.

of modern theory. On the other hand, it also provided a general answer to this question: after Theory comes life, i.e. the wide range of experiences recorded in literature and their (re-)discovery (and [re-]experiencing) in reading. Beyond the interpretive possibilities offered by the book's title, the most important message expressed by the book's authors and editors was a fundamental conviction they all shared: there could be no return to theory defined as a complex network of concepts, diagrams, models, and systems. The only acceptable *modus vivendi* of theory at the present time was not so much a 'theory of life' (such concepts had been employed in philosophy for quite some time) but a theory of 'real life'⁵⁹⁴ and real-life practices. In the preface to *life.after.theory*, John Shad asks 'what are we after?', then provides an answer: one chance for theory after theory is grounding it in the 'here and now.' Or, as Richard Rorty⁵⁹⁵ would say, 'reacting' to everything that is important in life and culture and actively participating in the changes taking place. Theory after theory also involved – clearly in the spirit of Derrida – abolishing all the binary oppositions established by modern theory (and the Metaphysics of Presence). These binary oppositions date back to the Kantian model of objectified knowledge, autonomous art, and universalist ethics. In literary studies, these three separate spheres translate into three separate 'worlds', namely the 'world' of the critic (researcher, theoretician, interpreter, and reader of literature), the 'world' of the text, and the world as such. The literary critic Frank R. Leavis long criticized the artificial nature of such a division, calling for the restoration of the strong bonds between 'criticism, text and the world' in the Anglo-American humanities. Alongside Derrida, Leavis was one of the spiritual patrons of the empirical turn announced by *life.after.theory*. According to the authors of the book, the meaning given to human existence implies the need for active participation in diverse cultural activities and practices, as well as exerting an influence on life through a variety of (literary) experiences. Published more than a decade ago, *life.after.theory* was one of the first testaments to a fundamental change taking place in theory, a renouncing of hermeticism and a move towards something much more basic, and even primordial. Ideas that for years had been rejected by theory as 'other' found themselves once again in the critical limelight. This change called for new ways of describing and reading literature.

594 This term occurs quite often in the book.

595 I refer here to the reform of philosophy proposed by Rorty (the idea of a 'reactive' philosophy), in which instead of creating representations of the world (acting as its 'mirror'), philosophy was to actively react to transformations taking place in the world and help people understand them. See R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton 1979.

The language of criticism needed to be able to express the intellectual, the sensual, and the affective in literature, permanently restoring to all those involved in its creation, analysis, and interpretation their human dimension, rather than seeing them merely as a category. According to Ryszard Nycz, this task could be accomplished by transforming literary theory into ‘the poetics of experience’, which would open up perspectives for ‘transdisciplinary research that can lead to a new configuration of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences’ [KT2 32].⁵⁹⁶ Such a poetics is the best ‘response to the need to restore the empirical dimension of literary studies and reading’ [KT2 43]. It can also create a new view of literature ‘as a form (repertoire of forms, perspectives, strategies) of articulating experience’ [KT2 44]. Both of these ‘impulses’ proved important because, as Nycz put it, ‘the triumphant return of experience as a significant, sometimes central, and indeed transdisciplinary category’ was being experienced not only in literature, but also in

the humanities and social sciences [...]: sociology (Giddens), psychology (Bruner), history (Ankersmit, La Capra), philosophy (Agamben), aesthetics (Shusterman), the history of ideas (Jay), cultural history (Berman), historical linguistics (Lakoff and Johnson), philosophical (Lacoue-Labarthe) and cultural (Caruth) interpretation of literature and testimonial narrative. It also plays an important role in anthropology and culture studies (C. Geertz, V. Turner) [KT2 43]

This truly spectacular career of ‘experience’ in such a wide variety of disciplines can easily be explained as a clear manifestation of scholars being ‘fed up’ with theories that established arbitrary divisions between art/literature/theory and reality. The empirical turn also constituted a reaction to certain phenomena of modernity and corresponding (late-)postmodernist concepts, such as Baudrillard’s theory of ‘simulacra and simulation’, in which the subject (the human being) is separated from the authenticity and immediacy of experience and the real world. In this sense, the empirical turn can be interpreted as an (almost futile, yet fascinating) attempt to restore the ‘lifeworld’ to the humanities. A similar trend toward ‘reclaiming reality’ (even if it is impossible to reclaim) can also be seen in the practices of many contemporary artists, who having grown just as weary as

⁵⁹⁶ It is worth noting that a transdisciplinary perspective is also present in performance studies, for which experience is one of the most important categories. Moreover, according to Jon McKenzie, who treats the changes taking place in the humanities and social sciences even more radically than Nycz, such a perspective may not only change the shape of disciplines, but even lead to a break with the traditional model of the ‘discipline’ itself.

theoreticians of the postmodern institution of autonomous art, attempt to bring art back to (real) life.⁵⁹⁷ The category of experience could thus become an important and perhaps even necessary step on the way to eliminating the opposition between literary studies/theory and 'lifeworlds.' At the same time, it could also restore to them all that had been left on the margins or outside of their 'comfort zone.' Experience, as Nycz rightly added, combines in itself

pre-cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge, including not only the sphere of ideas, understanding, and self-knowledge, but also the sphere of emotions, non-intellectual sensations, and sensory habits (primarily in regard to visuality and painterly representations), always focused on the specific, the peculiar, and the individual [KT2 43]

According to Nycz, the poetics of experience today is concerned with the problems of 'reinterpreting the category of directness,' 'linking the sensual and the bodily with the intellectual and the discursive' in order to discover a 'non-binary means of describing the relationship between language and reality' [KT 2 43]. The empirical turn in the humanities is not only a continuation, but also a practical embodiment of the processes initiated by early poststructuralism, and in particular, as Beda Allemann puts it, the idiographic method 'squandered' by the structuralists.⁵⁹⁸ At the same time, the empirical turn may finally abolish the logic of binary oppositions (and accomplish what Jacques Derrida has been fighting for). The understandable optimism of modern empiricists, however, has not silenced critics. If we consider all the tasks enumerated by Nycz, the magnitude of the undertaking becomes apparent. Not only has the question of literary experience been neglected in the humanities for too long, the very category of experience itself now proves to be rather problematic. While it has been present in philosophy and in the humanities almost since the dawn of time, the notion of experience resists definition, classification, and description. We still do not know how to use it in theoretical discourse and still retain its, as Derrida would say, 'eventicity.' It is therefore evident that experience, which has always challenged theory, remains an ambiguous concept. Especially since, as Michel Montaigne once put it, experience has so many shapes that 'we know not which to lay hold of.'⁵⁹⁹

597 See e.g. H. Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avante-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge 1996.

598 This, in turn, he considered to be one of the most important achievements of the anti-positivists. See B. Allemann, 'Strukturalismus in der Literaturwissenschaft?' in *Ansichten einer künftigen Germanistik*, ed. J. Kolbe. München 1969, pp. 143-152.

599 M. Montaigne, *The Complete Essays. Book III*. trans. D. M. Frame. Stanford 1965, p. 815.

Problems with Experience

Experience [...] involves a kind of surrender to or dependency on what it is not, a willingness to risk losing the safety of self-sufficiency and going on a perilous journey of discovery.

Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*

Hans Georg Gadamer stated discerningly in *Truth and Method* that ‘the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have.’⁶⁰⁰ Similarly, in the 1930s, Michael Oakeshott, the author of *Experience and Its Modes* wrote: ‘experience’, of all the words in the philosophic vocabulary is the most difficult to manage.’⁶⁰¹ These were not in any sense extraordinary insights – the greatest philosophers in history, from Ancient Greece to modern times, would likely agree with Francis Bacon, who (following Montaigne) viewed the traditional notion of experience with scepticism, calling it ‘blind and silly’ [SE 31]. Many scholars have noted the difficulties involved in defining experience as a philosophical category. Although the term ‘experience’ has been among the most important concepts in philosophy since ancient times, it has always been contentious, praised and scolded in equal measure, and today remains in need of a more rigorous definition. The nature of experience and its role in the process of learning and the creation of knowledge has also been the subject of much debate. Is its subject really the subject or perhaps the object of experience? What is the role of will in experience? What is the relationship between experience and impression (or experience and sensation)? Is experience unique or universal? Is experience subjective or objective? Is it (pre-)determined or contingent? The differences between positive and traumatic experiences and even the differences between experience and experiencing have been debated widely.

600 H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marsh, London 2004, p. 341.

601 Cited in: M. Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, Berkeley 2005, p. 9; hereinafter SE, followed by the page number. Jay scrupulously reconstructs the history of ‘experience’ throughout the philosophical tradition, so I will limit myself here to pointing out the most problematic issues.

Among the most complicated issues have been questions concerning the ‘immediacy’ and the ‘purity’ or ‘impurity’ of experience, i.e. its relation to language. Philosophers have asked: is ‘primal’ experience in the full meaning of the word (i.e. unmediated by language) even possible? Or, vice versa, is experience ‘always already’ determined by language? Or, to put it differently, does a completely natural experience exist or is it ‘always already’ culturally conditioned? Finally, does experience exist independently of knowledge or does knowledge (or pre-judgements) pre-determine its course? As Nietzsche puts it in an aphorism in *Daybreak*: ‘What then are our experiences? Much more that which we put into them than that which they already contain! Or must we go so far as to say: in themselves contain nothing? To experience is to invent?’⁶⁰² These enquiries are therefore variations on a fundamental question: can we defend the notion of the ‘purity’ of experience, or, as Nietzsche seems to suggest, is it only a projection of our expectations and beliefs? Although this dispute echoes the chicken and the egg dilemma, after years of debate, Jean Baudrillard resolved this question in one fell swoop, stating categorically that there is no such thing as the primality or authenticity of experience, because everything is a ‘simulacrum’, a mediated non-reality. We should therefore either stop talking about the authenticity of experience or reformulate the notion of experience, recognizing mediation as one of its inherent properties.⁶⁰³

Jean-François Lyotard, hailed by some cultural critics as ‘the Pope’ and ‘first cause’ of postmodernism, also spoke critically of experience. For Lyotard the term ‘experience’ was one of the anachronistic ‘modern figures’ we should abandon.⁶⁰⁴ His main accusation against experience concerned the necessity of tying it to the subject, and thus reinstating ‘subjective subjectivity’ as the main cognitive instance of philosophy. This risked squandering all that postmodern thought had achieved in its critique of the subject, or possibly a return to the obsolete models of Husserl’s phenomenology, or, worse yet (by far), to Hegel, who Lyotard viewed with extreme hostility and whose *The Phenomenology of Spirit* had proclaimed the ‘science of the experience of consciousness’, a concept of which Lyotard could hardly approve. According to him, attempts to reclaim experience by means of philosophical thought risked opening the door to a search

602 F. Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge 1997, p. 76.

603 See, for example, J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S. F. Glaser, Ann Arbor 1994.

604 See J-F. Lyotard, J. Monory, *The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory*, trans. R. Bowlby. London 1998, p. 85. Jay also discusses this [SE XX].

for the 'unity of experience', which he also perceived in the thought of Habermas, with whom he argued fiercely during the so-called postmodern debate on the heritage of the Enlightenment.⁶⁰⁵ For Lyotard, the return to subjectivity and the recognition of experience as something that could unify communicative and consensus-seeking socialized entities in (as Habermas puts it) the lifeworld⁶⁰⁶ constituted an attempt to overcome 'the differend' – which was for him the most important feature of postmodernism.⁶⁰⁷ It is quite clear that Lyotard did not take fully into account the individuality of experience, drawing attention instead to its communal, collective, and shared properties (as in 'common experience'). This he loathed perhaps even more than Hegel's notion of 'the whole.' His diagnosis, which emerged from his observations of modern and contemporary civilizational changes, was straightforward. In the words of Martin Jay:

experience in whatever guise is in a terminal crisis, undermined by capitalist techno-science, the mass life of the metropolis, and the loss of any sense of temporal dialectic culminating in retrospective meaning. [SE 362]

According to Baudrillard, postmodern art was also opposed to experience, because it 'referred' only to art itself (generalized intertextuality) and separated the autonomous world of artistic practices from the so-called real world. The same was true for the creative subject of these practices: in postmodern art the subject was not supposed to express itself nor the manner in which it experienced the world. The subject was only a 'performer of the ceremony,' *bricolage* as conceptualized by Lévi-Strauss, creating 'works' of art from materials found in the 'storehouse' of culture. Experience was dealt a final, mortal blow by the Holocaust, Jay claims, because its inexpressible experience led to

the ultimate withering of experience in modern life, for an event even worse than normal death, which is utterly impossible to comprehend through experiential narratives of dialectical sublation [SE 362]

Experience continued to face serious trouble in the face of postmodernity and poststructuralism. As Jay observes, both of these gave rise to tendencies which

challenge 'experience' (or even more so 'lived experience') as a simplistic ground of immediacy that fails to register the always already mediated nature of cultural relations and the instability of the subject who is supposedly the bearer of experiences. [SE 3]

605 See esp. J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 72–73.

606 J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

607 See also *Differend: Phrases in Dispute*.

Discussion about experience thus entered a dangerous new phase. As predicted by Adorno and Benjamin, experience was now at risk of disappearing altogether.⁶⁰⁸ This was not the first crisis ‘experienced’ by experience in the twentieth century. Dilthey had argued fervently on its behalf at the end of the nineteenth century, but a long period of hard times followed. The first ‘nail in the coffin’ came in the early twentieth century from phenomenology, for which experience was only seemingly a fundamental category (as Lyotard also emphasized); in reality, it was quickly transformed into meaning and, as a result, disappeared from the field of view of the phenomenological subject just as quickly as the empirical and sensible layers of the Husserlian phenomenon, which were hiding in the shadows of the majestic *eidōs*. The ‘second nail’ came from psychoanalysis, in which experience could only exist in a later meaningful narrative in accordance with Freud’s concept of a cumulative *Bildung*, or, as the psychoanalyst himself put it, as a ‘derivative of the dream’. This was followed by structuralism, in which everything was subjected to the laws of language, which proved disastrous for experience. The subject here was marginalized and thus experience was conceived of as a (formal) result of the operations of signs (semiotics). Concepts commonly associated with experience in philosophy, such as individuality, concreteness, and subjectivity, had no place in this system. One of the forefathers of structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure, himself expressed a strong aversion to considering the psychic experiences of the language user – they could only pose problems for the ‘science’ of his science. However, at the very heart of French poststructuralism, there seemed to appear faint signs that experience might not completely disappear from the humanities. This could be seen, for example, in the writings of Barthes and Foucault⁶⁰⁹ (inspired by Bataille and especially his concept of ‘inner experience’⁶¹⁰), where some types of experiences, such as madness, illness, homosexual experience (Foucault), or sexual pleasure (Barthes) could play a very useful critical role as ‘viruses in discourse.’⁶¹¹ For example, Foucault used experience to expose the repressive mechanisms of psychiatric, clinical, and sexological discourse. Barthes, in turn, ‘loosened’ modern theory,

608 The crisis of experience in the thought of these philosophers is discussed in detail by Jay in the chapter titled ‘Lamenting the Crisis of Experience: Benjamin and Adorno.’

609 Jay also writes extensively about his experience with Barthes, Foucault and Bataille. [SE 361-400].

610 G. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. L. A. Boldt, Albany 1988.

611 I have written about this in more detail in *Anty-Teorii literatury*, in the section titled ‘Wirusy w dyskursie’ [AT 119–228].

which was by definition insensitive to the sensuality of the text and reading.⁶¹² Yet, in their writings Foucault and Barthes did not really reflect on the nature of these experiences. Rather, they ‘used’ them as critical tools, although undoubtedly such an application could also contribute to the ‘emancipation’ of experience in humanities discourse. Foucault and Barthes (and, as I explain later, Derrida) did draw attention to an extremely important feature of experience, that is, its (as performance scholars put it) liminality. In defying binary oppositions, experience is ‘inherently’ ‘in-between’; it combines the individual and the common, the subjective and the objective, and the bodily/sensual with the rational, thus constituting a powerful critical category. Experience allowed Foucault and Barthes to undermine the arbitrary divisions prevalent in philosophy, literary theory, and literary criticism. As Jay rightly points out, thanks to Foucault and Barthes, experience ceased to be recognized as merely one element of a binary pair comprising a metaphysical opposition. This had a major influence on the contemporary understanding of experience as, for example, ‘the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior.’[SE 9–10] Jay’s well-researched and detailed, nearly 600-page *Songs of Experience* arrives at one major (and not very optimistic) conclusion: experience resists all oppositions and as such defies intellectual rigor. Thus, the most important property of experience seems to be its constant evasion of theoretical categorization.

However, my goal in providing this (necessarily) brief overview of the history of experience and sketching out the problems faced in defining it is quite different from what one might expect. Most discussion about experience has been conducted from an essentialist perspective, with philosophers attempting to answer a question that has clearly become *passé*: ‘What is experience?’ A different, equally outdated approach involved subjecting experience to theoretical ‘vivisection’, entangling it in a web of concepts and definitions now considered intellectually obsolete. The rejection of essentialist tendencies in the theory of experience is also a rational response to the radical transformations the humanities have undergone, and represent a shift towards pragmatism (and away from essentialism). Its focus is not on the essential properties of various (literary, cognitive, or theoretical) phenomena, but on the question: ‘How does literature/knowledge or theory *work*?’ In terms of the question of experience, it is worth referring to the contemporary American scholar Joan Wallach Scott, author of

612 R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*. I am referring to the following statement: ‘Simply, a day comes when we feel a certain need to loosen the theory a bit’, p. 64.

the article 'The Evidence of Experience.' According to Scott, we should no longer discuss unproductive theoretical problems and focus instead on the practical dimensions of experience: on what it does or what it can do with us, i.e. on its productivity.⁶¹³ Critical reflection on experience must therefore also undergo a transformation from *essentialist empiricism* (which recognizes 'experience' as only one of many philosophical categories) to the study of the *practices of experience*, conceived of and described in their 'total-psycho-bodily'⁶¹⁴ complexity. We should also remember about other properties of experience, such as eventness (eventicity), directness, mediation, interactivity, the flickering relation between the (experiencing) subject and the (experienced) object, the constant oscillation between the individual and the universal, as well as between the singular and the shared. Finally, we must consider the role of experience in literature and the 'effects' it performatively produces, leading to the 'changes' described by Erika Fischer-Lichte.

We can trace the beginnings of such a non-essentialist approach to the question of experience back to pragmatics (e.g. to Dewey who said that experience could find its place in philosophy only in the noncontemplative activities that were subsumed under the category of practice [SE 13]) or Barthes and Foucault. However, these beginnings are visible above all in the writings of Jacques Derrida, who, in my opinion, is one of the most important contemporary 'practical' philosophers of experience. He is not so much interested in *experience* (as a philosophical category), but in the process of *experiencing* that takes place in literature. This very significant difference can help explain not only the famously ambivalent attitude of Derrida towards the category of experience, but, as I argue, it can also prove inspirational for contemporary scholars of experience.

613 J. Wallach Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 1991, no. 4. See also [SE 6].

614 Danuta Danek's term, cited by Nycz [KT2 45].

Experience Regained

There is [...] an experience rather than an essence of literature (natural or ahistorical).

Jacques Derrida, *This Strange Institution Called Literature*

Derrida's ambivalent attitude towards experience becomes apparent when we compare his writings with what he says in his interviews. The philosopher uses the term 'experience' often, for instance, as a critical category when he talks about 'the experience of writing', 'the critical experience of literature', and 'the experience of aporia',⁶¹⁵ not to mention 'the experience of Being' taken from Heidegger. In order to express the specific properties of literature/poetry, Derrida most often uses phrases such as 'the experience of language' or 'the experience of writing'.⁶¹⁶ 'The experience of singularity' is a synonym for him for the uniqueness of the literary text [AL 67], and thus also for 'the idiom of the Other'. In order to express the unique nature of his reading practice, Derrida most often talks about 'the experience of reading and writing' or 'the experience of deconstruction.' In reference to his interventions outside the text, Derrida often talks about the ethical, political, social, or cultural 'experience' [PO 25] that is produced and transformed in the course of reading. At the same time, however, he often speaks openly against the category of 'experience',⁶¹⁷ in this way denying any links between his philosophy and empiricism. In one of his very early texts, Derrida even observes that his philosophy may (after all) be described as 'empirical wandering, if the value of empiricism did not itself acquire its entire meaning in its opposition to philosophical responsibility' [DF 7]. Later, in *Of Grammatology*, the philosopher recognizes the notion of 'experience' to be highly problematic and argues that

615 J. Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, New York 1989, p. 130; *Parages*, Paris 1986: *l'expérience de l'indécidable* [the experience of the undecidable], p. 15.

616 For example, in a conversation with Francois Ewald on the pages of *Magazine Littéraire* in 1990, and found in English in: J. Derrida, F. Ewald, 'A Certain 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking', *Educational Theory* 1995, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 273-291: 'What was important for me [...] is the act of writing or rather – because it may not exactly be an act – the experience of writing' (p. 278).

617 Ryszard Nycz also draws attention to this [KT 2 53].

it belongs to the history of metaphysics and we can only use it under erasure [*sous rature*]. 'Experience' has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not. [OG 60]

Derrida is also critical of the phenomenological notion of experience. In particular, he does not agree with Husserl when the German philosopher writes that all 'experience is the experience of meaning' [PO 30]. Nor does he approve of the hermeneutic approach or the Gadamerian 'experience of dialogue'.⁶¹⁸ In his discourse with Emmanuel Levinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida distances himself from the notion of 'experience' as an empirical category because, he claims, in such an understanding experience contains in itself the dream of a double presence: the experiencing subject and the thing experienced.⁶¹⁹ Of course, it is not unheard of that a philosopher (or a theoretician or an artist) declares one thing in an interview and something else in their writings. In fact, Derrida could end up being beaten at his own game, if, for example, we were to deconstruct his writings and confront his 'philosophical intentions' with how they are 'recorded' in his texts, which is what Derrida did in his reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings. We could do this if not for the fact that in Derrida's case this apparent contradiction can be easily explained. The philosopher is undoubtedly critical of the category of 'experience', but, let me emphasize again – only as a category and only in the metaphysical understanding of it, i.e. as subjected to the classical metaphysical opposition between empiricism and rationalism. Derrida then stresses that his thinking 'is beyond such contradictions'. He is also critical of the fact that in metaphysical empiricism 'experience' is subjected to 'appropriation' (like the concepts of 'being' or 'event'), which renders it a barren conceptual construct. Thus, everything that Derrida cherishes – dynamism, concreteness, uniqueness and processuality of experience – is 'petrified' by philosophical speculation. And while Derrida rejects the metaphysical category of 'experience' (and with it, empiricism), he consistently focuses on the process of experiencing, effectively utilizing its subversive potential to overturn metaphysical taxonomies. In one interview, Derrida actually admits that he likes:

the word experience whose origin evokes traversal, but a traversal with the body, it evokes a space that is not given in advance but that opens as one advances.⁶²⁰

618 Martin Jay also mentions this [SE 364].

619 Qtd. after [EI 197–198].

620 J. Derrida, 'There is No *One* Narcissism', in *Points...: Interviews 1974–1994*, Stanford 1995, p. 207.

The cautious use of the phrase ‘the word experience’ is very characteristic of Derrida. While the philosopher is not interested in the term or category of ‘experience,’ he is attracted to the process of ‘experiencing.’ Many commentators of Derrida’s later works emphasize that the philosopher reclaims experience once its metaphysical understanding is deconstructed. For example, Rei Terada rightly points out that at some point experience becomes a crucial concept for Derrida. It allows the philosopher to assert the internal ‘difference’ and affective instability of the subject, undermining the ‘punctual simplicity’ of the Cartesian subject,⁶²¹ whose theoretical sterility he has always resented. Indeed, as Martin Jay observes,

Or to put it another way, against the solipsistic notion of ‘auto-affectivity,’ which Derrida saw in Husserl’s reflexive notion of an integral subject, he favored what might be called ‘hetero-affectivity,’ in which emotion served to undermine the ideal of a completely self-sufficient subject. In this sense, experience is not the enemy or ideological inverse of textuality, with its dispersal of authorial power, but its correlate. The choice is not, *pace* Richard Rorty, between language and experience, for there is a potential compatibility between versions of both. [SE 366]

The tremendous deconstructive potential of experience allows Derrida to challenge the ‘classical’ subject because, as the philosopher observes in *Spurs*, experience resists the ‘appropriation of metaphysics’ [S 117–121]. What is more, experience can effectively combine life with thought/language and philosophy/literature with life (this aspect serves as the foundation for Derrida’s later work). Derrida’s interest in the subversive potential of experience can also be seen in ‘Violence and Metaphysics.’ Commenting on Levinas’s tendency towards empiricism, Derrida writes,

By radicalizing the theme of the infinite exteriority of the other, Levinas thereby assumes the aim which has more or less secretly animated all the philosophical gestures which have been called *empiricisms* in the history of philosophy. He does so with an audacity, a profundity, and a resoluteness never before attained. By taking this project to its end, he totally renews empiricism, and inverts it by revealing it to itself as metaphysics. [WD 190]

Derrida argues that Levinas’s empiricism in fact exceeds the limits of empiricism. Levinas ‘on two occasions, at least, speaks for “the radical empiricism confident in the instruction of exteriority”’ (in *Totality and Infinity*). At the same time, however, ‘the experience of the other (the infinite) is irreducible, and is therefore “the

621 R. Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the “Death of the Subject”*. Cambridge 2001. For more on this subject see also: Jay, SE 365–366. The phrase is taken from Derrida, who talks about ‘the punctual simplicity of the classical subject.’ [WD 285].

experience par excellence” [WD 152]. As Derrida concludes, Levinas speaks of an ‘empiricism which is in no way a positivism’ [WD 190]. Indeed, it is the careful reading of the writings of Levinas that allows Derrida to discover the ‘critical’ properties of experience. As the philosopher observes in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’:

But can one speak of an *experience* of the other or of difference? Has not the concept of experience always been determined by the metaphysics of presence? [...] But empiricism always has been determined by philosophy, from Plato to Husserl, as *nonphilosophy*: as the philosophical pretention to nonphilosophy, the inability to justify oneself. [...] But this incapacitation, when resolutely assumed, *contests* (emphasis mine, AB) the resolution and coherence of the logos (philosophy) at its root, instead of letting itself be questioned by the logos. Therefore, nothing can so profoundly *solicit* the Greek logos – philosophy – than this *irruption of the totally-other* (emphasis mine, AB); and nothing can to such an extent reawaken the logos to its origin as to its mortality, its other. [WD 190]

Lévinas speaks here a unique experience he discusses in *Time and the Other*: the experience of death. This is an experience that determines the horizon of both logos and philosophy. However, death, as Derrida describes it, means that ‘the experience [...] is irreducible’ [WD 190], thus limiting empiricism. For this reason Derrida talks about the ‘audacity’ of Levinas, who often ‘reaches’ for empiricism, but in a way that has never been done before. His actions could even be described as deconstruction. Levinas turns the irreducibility of experience against metaphysics and (metaphysical) empiricism or, as Derrida would say, ‘reverses’ the resident hierarchy. This is a valuable suggestion for Derrida, and perhaps the point at which he once again becomes aware of the subversive power of experience (freed from empirical constraints) and claims it for his own. Derrida often speaks of this subversive, transgressive potential of experience, which so clearly fascinated him. For example, in *Psyche* he observes that:

As its name indicates, an experience traverses: voyage, trajectory, translation, transference. Not in view of a final presentation, a presenting [*mise en presence*] of the thing itself, nor in order to complete an odyssey of consciousness, the phenomenology of mind as an architectural process. [PI2 96].

Elsewhere he argues that:

Experience can be understood in different ways in philosophy and in literature. Experience obviously supposes a meeting, reception, perception, but in perhaps a stricter sense, it indicates the movement of traversing. To experience is to advance by navigating, to walk by traversing. And by traversing consequently a limit or a border.⁶²²

622 J. Derrida, ‘Passages – from Traumatism to Promise’, in *Points....: Interviews 1974–1994*, Stanford 1995, p. 373.

Then, in *Che cos'è la poesia?* Derrida proclaims the superiority of experience over theory, urging us to 'set fire to the library of poetics' [CCP 233]. In an interview with Francis Ewald, the philosopher emphasizes that experience is where different phenomena 'intersect', subsequently observing that experience is: 'at once and the same time *mediatized* (culture, reading, interpretation, work, generalities, rules, and concepts) and *singular* [...] (untranslatable 'affect,' language, family name, and so on).'⁶²³ Derrida considers the in-betweenness of experience to be its most fascinating property. David Wood aptly points out that Derrida should be regarded as a 'radical phenomenologist' who 'always mobilizes the openness of experience against the closure of conceptual reason.' In fact, the development of Derrida's views, as Wood further observes, very eloquently testifies to the fact that his philosophy is first and foremost 'experience *regained*.'⁶²⁴

It can therefore be said that by rejecting the empirical and metaphysical concept of experience, Derrida consciously focuses on its processual character and utilizes what that the philosophical tradition has rejected. Or perhaps the philosopher is able to regain 'experience' through experience itself – a trace of this alleged tautology can be found in his reading of Blanchot's writings. In one interview Derrida observes that

At first [...] I thought I had introjected, interiorized, assimilated Blanchot's contribution and had brought it to bear in my work [...]. In a certain way, I thought I had read Blanchot. And then, rather recently, a few years ago, I read what I had never managed to read in a way which was at bottom – how shall I say? – an experience.⁶²⁵

Naturally, we cannot assert definitively that this experience has changed Derrida's views on experience. Certainly, just like the lesson learned from Levinas, it has left a mark on his philosophy. Especially since in the later fragment of the interview quoted above Derrida admits that reading Blanchot made him realize that some texts (in this case, Blanchot's texts) open a completely new space for reading that is 'far less easy to dominate and to assimilate'. The reading of such texts cannot be governed by any pre-determined method, nor can it take the form of a logical deduction or 'theoretical/critical' assumptions. Such a reading must be a unique experience, an 'unexpected loss of direction' or wandering, during which we face the risk that we may never discover the message or the hidden meaning

623 J. Derrida, F. Ewald, 'A Certain 'Madness...'; p. 290.

624 D. Wood, *Thinking after Heidegger*, p. 26.

625 J. Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation. Texts and discussions with Jacques Derrida*, ed. Christie McDonald, New York 1985, p. 78.

of the text. Derrida's personal experience, in fact, has precedents in the history of philosophy. One such precedent is the moment described by Wittgenstein in the preface to *Philosophical Investigations* – his thoughts go astray and changes from a positivist logician Wittgenstein into a painter of 'sketches of landscapes'.⁶²⁶ Like Derrida's experience, this is also a breakthrough moment for Wittgenstein, allowing him to radically change his attitude towards philosophy and thinking in general. What is most important here, however, is that in both cases the breakthrough is made possible not through theoretical or intellectual speculation, but through experience. In *life.after.theory* (published in 2002), Derrida states openly that experience is crucial to his discourse (on a par with 'event'), although earlier on he did not fully realize the degree of this affinity. In an answer to John Shad's question 'What is life after theory?' Derrida responds in short: 'after theory, there is the text.' However, aware that some of his phrases (especially the concept of 'text') tend to be misinterpreted, Derrida quickly adds that by 'text' he means (and has always meant) the need to constantly establish and maintain a relationship between the text and the world. He stresses that he has always emphasized the need to break out of the closed circle of language and from the hermetic 'cocoon' of the text, reduced to the internal 'play of signifiers'. We have to be open to everything that, just like 'the happening of experience' – 'arrives', what late in this philosophical journey Derrida termed the '*arrivant*'.

In an interview given in Poland in 1997 Derrida observes that:

[...] it is a paradox that I have often been wrongly accused of being a prisoner of language or of reducing everything to language, whereas I have always done the opposite: I began my journey by trying to liberate *what I call the trace or the experience of writing* (emphasis mine, AB) from language, from verbal language, from the language of words. [...] This has nothing to do [...] with language games: I have been unfairly criticized as a result of this misunderstanding [...] which simply results from ignorance [OS]

Derrida is interested in experience for a number of reasons that we will discover in the following pages of this section. Let us start here with a brief mention of two important reasons. First, Derrida is interested in the transgressive function of experience, as it allows him to challenge metaphysical binary oppositions (as well as metaphysical theory, literary theory, and hermeneutics). Second, Derrida is less interested in 'experience' *per se* than in 'experiencing' (its dynamics, processuality, specificity, uniqueness, singularity, 'eventicity', etc.), which is identical with his reading practices. Finally, Derrida treats 'experiencing' as a 'testing

626 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. .M. Anscombe, et al., Malden-Oxford 2009.

ground' on which he analyzes the very nature of experience. David Wood refers to this procedure as 'experiencing experience.' But why do literature and reading stimulate experience? And why do reading and writing allow Derrida to reflect on the nature of experience? According to the Wood,

Experience of Being (emphasis mine, AB), nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It's the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world. [AL 67]

We can feel the influence of Heidegger in the above passage. Although Derrida has his (deconstructive) reservations about Heidegger, he also owes a lot to him. Indeed, in *Being and Time* Heidegger sets himself the task of what he calls a 'destruction' of the philosophical tradition (Derrida arrives at 'deconstruction' after combining 'destruction' with 'dismantlement' [*Abbau*]) and postulates that 'this hardened tradition must be loosened up' in order to 'arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of being' before language, i.e. before the living, experiencing, and experienced 'being' had been captured by metaphysics and turned into the theoretical category of 'existence.' Heidegger thus acknowledges the duality of experience and the duality of the experiencing subject. He observes that 'to undergo an experience with something [...] means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us', but also that to 'undergo an experience with something means that this something, which we reach along the way in order to attain it, itself pertains to us, meets and makes its appeal to us, in that it transforms us into itself.'⁶²⁷ Indeed, as Nycz aptly points out, recalling Heidegger's words:

what we experience in order to identify it (to know, understand, acquire, represent) takes control: it draws us towards it, overwhelms and transforms us, comes over us and strikes us [KT2 45]

All this proves inspirational for Derrida in his own reflections on experience. Although the notions of 'the experience of being' and 'being as experiencing' that precede (and challenge) metaphysics may seem elusive, they are nevertheless capable of 'arresting' the experiencing subject. In Derrida's practices, as Nycz observes, experience 'expressed (articulated, put down in writing) in literature' is 'activated in reading', eventually becoming 'hybrid' in nature. Experience is

627 M. Heidegger, 'The Nature of Language', *On the Way to Language*, San Francisco 1982, pp. 57 and 73.

physical, sensual, social, cultural, conceptual, linguistic, co-tropistic (as a kind of a paradoxical bilateral 'passive activity' of the thing experienced and the experiencing subject) and transformational (for both the thing and the subject) [KT2 45].

Derrida is fascinated by its elusive character – by the fact that experience defies metaphysical hierarchies. Indeed, according to the philosopher, experience and 'writing' share similar properties. For example, in 'Writing and Telecommunication' Derrida writes that '[he] will extend this law even to all 'experience' in general, if it is granted that there is no experience of pure essence, but only chains of differential marks' [WT 318]. In an interview, he further observes that:

Since the beginning of my work, I have tried to interpret the concept of writing. For theoretical and strategical reasons which I would not like to discuss right now, I have found it necessary to generalize the concept of writing, the concept of traces, and extend it to experience as a whole. Though we are speaking right now, we are also leaving a trace or writing. [OS].

Similarly to Levinas, Derrida is fascinated by the fact that experience is the 'other' of metaphysics – it is 'the infinite chain of signifiers in constant movement, deferral.' Heidegger discovered this a long time ago, combining experience with 'the other' and 'being.' Indeed, as he observes: 'an experience of being as that which is other than all other beings.'⁶²⁸ Perhaps this is why Derrida's reading practices ultimately become an attempt to actively participate (through writing and reading) in the 'experience of being' recorded in literature. First, however, with the help of 'experience' (as a kind of 'critical' tool), Derrida has to question the Metaphysics of Presence. He first 'uses' experience in such a deconstructive manner in *Of Grammatology* in his reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although he may not admit it himself, this reading constituted a serious challenge. Indeed, the challenge presented by 'experience' to theoretical systems has, as Derrida could say, 'left a trace' in *Confessions*.

628 M. Heidegger, 'Postscript to "What Is Metaphysics"', trans. W. McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, ed. W. McNeill, Cambridge 1998, p. 233.

The Confession in *Confessions*

Rousseau describes what he does not wish to say.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

It does not make much sense to give a detailed account of Derrida's deconstruction of Rousseau's metaphysical system,⁶²⁹ but it is worth focusing on the consequences his reading of *Confessions* has for the notion of 'experience'. And in my opinion, there is quite a number of such consequences. Derrida's deconstructive reading of Rousseau's writings in *Of Grammatology* is based on a very simple idea that makes his positive stance towards the subversive possibilities of experience immediately clear. Derrida reconstructs here Rousseau's philosophical system and then compares it to *Confessions*, i.e. the story of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's own experiences. We could even say that Rousseau's experience leads to the deconstruction of his own system, undermining his binary oppositions. However, this only becomes clear if we first briefly summarize Rousseau's philosophical views.

According to Derrida, Rousseau's philosophical system is 'essentially metaphysical'; and its fundamental ('founding') hierarchical opposition is between nature and culture, in which nature is the privileged term. This privilege further extends to a series of partial oppositions, such as: pure-impure, primary-secondary, true-false, original-copy (substitute), whole-supplement, presence-absence,⁶³⁰ completeness-lack, reality-fiction, real-unreal, and, Derrida's favourite, speech-writing. As befits a true metaphysician, Rousseau privileges the 'first' term in the oppositional pair, while disregarding the 'second' term. However, we discover the most interesting aspect when we follow in Derrida's footsteps and compare Rousseau's philosophical system with *Confessions*, which is not only not a philosophical treatise (although it has been interpreted as such) but also a subjective account of Rousseau's private (and often intimate) experiences. Indeed, this is what Rousseau declares on the first page of his work, emphasizing (as Derrida would say) the singularity and uniqueness of his experiences.

629 For more on this topic, see Derrida's reading of Rousseau's writings in *Of Grammatology*.

630 According to Rousseau's conception, both 'nature' and 'presence' ('always natural' [OG 145]) were self-sufficient and complete.

Rousseau states this in short: 'I am different.'⁶³¹ *Confessions* and the specific way in which it is written are used by Derrida to demonstrate how Rousseau's harmoniously constructed metaphysical system is repeatedly forced to surrender to his experiences. In effect – and in spite of the author's (as a metaphysical philosopher) intensions – *Confessions* becomes an 'account' of the failures of Rousseau's theoretical concepts in the face of his life. Derrida does not hesitate to say that 'Rousseau describes what he does not wish to say' [OG 229]. The capitulation of this philosophical system has its roots in the very genesis of *Confessions*, i.e. in the aforementioned opposition between writing and speech. For example, in *Essay on the Origin of Languages* Rousseau (a diligent student of Plato) criticizes writing, which is perfectly understandable in the context of his views privileging speech. Writing (as an artificial and cultural construct) is secondary to natural speech: it is only a 'superfluous' addition (since what is natural, Rousseau argues, should be considered complete and self-sufficient). 'Languages,' Rousseau writes, 'are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech. [...] Thus the art of writing is nothing but a mediated representation of thought.'⁶³² Of course, for Rousseau, speech conveys truth and writing conceals it, or even, as the philosopher at one point categorically states, 'leads us astray'. However, in *Confessions*, it turns out that writing is the vessel of truth, because thanks to the intimacy and privacy of writing we can finally present ourselves as we really are, while speaking in the 'direct presence' of others and exposed to their looks makes this more difficult. Thus, Rousseau abruptly declares:

The role I have chosen of writing and remaining in the background is precisely the one that suits me. If I had been present, people would not have known my value; they would not even have suspected it. [C 116]

It turns out, therefore, that unlike speaking or socializing, writing can be much more effective in 'regaining' one's presence and displaying one's 'genuine' self. The fact that 'socializing' also turns out to be less effective than 'writing' is another proof that 'direct' (and natural) 'presence' surrenders to this 'artificial' (and therefore unnatural) medium of communication that is writing. Derrida immediately notices this overt contradiction between Rousseau's theory of language and his experience as a writer [OG 142–143]:

631 J. J. Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen, London 1953, p. 17. Hereinafter C, followed by the page number.

632 J. J. Rousseau; cited in OG 144,

On the side of experience, a recourse to literature⁶³³ as reappropriation of presence, that is to say, as we shall see, of Nature; on the side of theory, an indictment against the negativity of the letter, in which must be read the degeneracy of culture and the disruption of the community. [OG 144]

The same fate awaits Rousseau's other metaphysical 'axioms.' A careful reading of *Confessions* demonstrates that throughout Rousseau's life, metaphysical principles are continually forced to give ground and surrender to his experiences. At the beginning of his account, for example, Rousseau strongly condemns fantasizing about women, which he considers to be an 'unnatural' and harmful substitute for reality [C 90]. However, when he later takes pleasure and consolation himself in fantasies, soothing his 'lacks,' he changes his mind once again [C 101–102], stating that fantasies are much better than reality because they help us exercise full control over our sex lives. Paris disappoints him extremely, because the city as it looks in reality falls short of the imagined 'edifice' [C 154–155]. His imaginary Paris turns out to have been much better, more beautiful and more interesting. The contrast between reality and fantasy (fiction), between direct presence and presence mediated by imagination, suddenly collapses in the face of experience, although Rousseau does not seem to notice this; or, perhaps trying to protect the interests of metaphysics (like Plato, Aristotle or Husserl), he simply quietly accepts it. The book continues in a similar fashion. For example, in the immediate (and 'natural') 'presence' of his mistress (Mme de Warens), Rousseau at first feels absolute happiness and pleasure. However, when Mme de Warens leaves, after a relatively short period of grief, Rousseau unexpectedly concludes that her 'absence' is much better, and even more beneficial. It allows him to fantasize about her and touch the things she possesses, which, as the author of *Confessions* honestly admits, brings him more lasting happiness than her presence [C 107–108]. At this point, Rousseau becomes a fetishist. He values 'substitutes' for his mistress more than the 'original.' Another example is the 'dangerous supplement' (masturbation) discussed by Derrida. Young Rousseau strongly condemns masturbation at the beginning of *Confessions*. When he catches a man he meets during one of his journeys engaged in this, as he describes it, 'foul and obscene behavior' [C 71–73], he criticizes him harshly. He does not see the point of masturbation and suspects that it is not 'natural.' However, when he is abandoned by his mistress, and begins to masturbate, experiencing 'safe' and shameless pleasure, Rousseau changes his mind and argues that masturbation is much better than 'natural' sexual contact. He even questions the value of nature and 'set[s]

633 Derrida's use of the word 'literature' here refers to *Confessions*.

about destroying the sturdy constitution which Nature [...] restored to me'. Although masturbation deceives nature, Rousseau confesses that:

Soon I was reassured, however, and learned that dangerous means of cheating nature, which leads in young men of my temperament to various kinds of excesses, that eventually imperil their health, their strength, and sometimes their lives. This vice, which shame and timidity find so convenient, has a particular attraction for lively imaginations. It allows them to dispose, so to speak, of the whole female sex at their will, and to make any beauty who tempts them serve their pleasure without the need of first obtaining her consent. Seduced by this fatal advantage, I set about destroying the sturdy constitution which Nature had restored to me [...] What might have been my undoing was in fact my salvation, at least for a time. [C 108–109]

On the one hand, as Derrida observes, '[t]he [dangerous] supplement is what neither Nature nor Reason can tolerate' [OG 148]. On the other hand, Rousseau discovers at this point that a seemingly complete and self-sufficient nature has its shortcomings. And, as Derrida states, 'the dangerous supplement is properly seductive; it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it toward its loss or fall [...] It thus destroys Nature' [OG 151]. Rousseau ultimately reverses the established hierarchies in his text and, as Derrida points out, 'nothing seems more natural than this destruction of nature'. He further adds: 'it is myself who exerts myself to separate myself from the force that nature has entrusted to me' [OG 151]. It turns out, therefore, that the self-sufficiency of nature may be maintained only when its 'lacks' are systematically supplemented. John Lechte thus comments on this surprising turn of events:

However, in keeping with the logic of identity, if nature requires a supplement it cannot also be self-sufficient (identical with itself); for self-sufficiency and lack are

death' [OG 155]. Rousseau in turn ingeniously observes:

if ever in all my life I had once tasted the delights of love to the full, I do not think that my frail existence could have endured them; I should have died on the spot. [C 210]

Rousseau ultimately denies himself an intimate and direct relation with his beloved and, as Derrida describes it, becomes engaged in a sequence of supplements which act as substitutes for the 'original' experience. Experience in *Confessions* ultimately becomes an infinite propagation of substitutes. Derrida thus concludes that:

Through this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of

originary perception. Immediacy is derived. That all begins through the intermediary is what is indeed 'inconceivable [to reason]'. [OG 157]

Jonathan Culler, in turn, observes that:

The more these texts want to tell us of the importance of the presence of the thing itself, the more they show the necessity of intermediaries. These signs or supplements are in fact responsible for the sense that there is something there (like Maman⁶³⁴) to grasp. What we learn from these texts is that the idea of the original is created by the copies, and that the original is always deferred – never to be grasped. The conclusion is that our common-sense notion of reality as something present, and of the original as something that was once present, proves untenable: *experience is always mediated by signs* (emphasis mine, AB) and the 'original' is produced as an effect of signs, of opposites; one or other can be the basis of an identity, but not both if contradiction is to be avoided.⁶³⁵

The paradox that Rousseau creates through his experiences becomes evident, because, as Derrida points out, in the end it turns out that '[p]leasure itself, without symbol or suppletory, that which would accord us (to) pure presence itself [...] would be only another name for supplements.'⁶³⁶

In a dispute between direct and mediated experience, Rousseau, rather unexpectedly, opts for mediation, thus undermining (against himself) another metaphysical opposition. The meaning of Derrida's 'deconstructive' activities is thus clearly visible. *Confessions* has demolished the binary nature of the philosophical system, while personal experience has destroyed all kinds of pre-judgements and prejudices, and consequently, the theoretical views of Rousseau. And this is probably the most important lesson Derrida's reading of Rousseau gives us (despite Rousseau's objections). However, as Derrida rightly points out, Rousseau 'describes what he does not wish to say'. Indeed, he actually describes a resounding triumph of experience over theoretical speculation. Like a 'virus' with which the reckless user infects an entire system, experience destroys a seemingly precise model. The fact that Derrida uses 'experience' for this purpose is a very clear indication of his preferences. What is more important, Derrida demonstrates the superiority of experience over theory 'by example', so to speak. He does not formulate his opinion as a thesis, but simply exemplifies how experience 'works' and how it verifies and modifies arbitrary judgements and assumptions. Such a strategy, in which experience is used as a 'critical' tool allowing the philosopher

634 This was a nickname, meaning 'mama', used by Rousseau to refer to his former mistress Françoise-Louise de Warens.

635 J. Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Post-Humanism*, London-New York 2008, p. 131.

636 J. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 12.

to abolish the conceptual constructions of metaphysics (as well as hermeneutics and literary studies), is characteristic for the 'early' Derrida. He subsequently uses experience to deconstruct other phenomena. For example, he undermines logocentrism by means of 'the experience of writing' and challenges metaphysical hermeneutics with the help of the 'critical experience of literature' (the linguistic 'experience' of modern literature). Finally, using the 'experience of aporia', Derrida tests the limits of metaphysics and the judgements of hermeneutics. Logocentrism, metaphysics, and hermeneutics are subjected to endurance tests, which could be described as 'epistemic traumas'.

*Epistemic Trauma*⁶³⁷

*the current upheavals in the forms of communication
[...] that massively and systematically reduce the role of
speech [...]*

Jacques Derrida, *Positions*

*Aporia – an essential experience in which the most serious
things happen.*

Jacques Derrida [OS]

It is very telling that it was in the initial stage of Derrida's philosophical project, that is, in the period in which he criticized empiricism, that he recognized the powerful force of experience. At this stage, however, he was not interested in the subjective aspect of experience, because even if he referred to Rousseau's personal experiences in his reading of *Confessions*, he used them in a critical manner, demonstrating how empiricism can either validate or disprove a theory. Derrida was primarily interested in experience in terms of its experimental qualities, its use in 'testing'. Just as something is tested in the natural sciences by experimenting on its properties, experience similarly allows us to test different phenomena. The philosopher placed more emphasis on the objective aspect of experience than on its subjective aspect: he was not interested in experiencing something, but rather in being experienced, or going through some experience, as a means of defining the limits of theory. In this sense, Derrida used a type of experience we can call 'borderline experience' to test the 'strength' of theoretical doctrines. However, these 'critical experiences', as he described them, were not invented or arranged by him. The 'experience of writing', the 'experience of (modern) literature', and the 'experience of aporia' – the three types of experience that interested him the most – simply 'happened' in the history of metaphysics, literary studies, and hermeneutics. He only needed to extract from

637 I have borrowed the term 'epistemic trauma' from T. Vargish and D. E. Mook, who used it to describe the situation of a reader confronted with a very difficult literary work. See their book *Inside Modernism. Relativity Theory, Cubism, Narrative*, New Haven 1999.

them their critical potential and conclusions. The fact that he referred to these experiences as ‘critical’ points to at least two different meanings of this term, as ‘critical’ means both ‘to criticize something’ and to be ‘in a state of crisis’. This second meaning clearly signals both the empirical and ‘practical’ nature of Derrida’s undertaking. Deconstruction practices likewise had such an empirical character. In the most general sense, they were a way of forcing philosophical systems into a situation of crisis in which their oppositional constructions became loosened and strained.

In fact, Derrida’s project had a clearly empirical character from the very beginning, although early on the philosopher did not reflect on the nature of experience itself (though he did so later). Instead, he seemed to feel almost intuitively that theories could be successfully challenged by confronting them with experience. This confrontation between theory and experience, however, was not supposed to lead to such an obvious conclusion as the one resulting from his reading of *Confessions*, i.e. that regardless of how strong our theoretical positions are, experience always verifies their coherence, as Rousseau learned from his own experience. The three ‘critical experiences’ of interest to Derrida did not only play a ‘critical’ role, but also offered a new perspective on a non-dualistic understanding of the nature of language, literature, and interpretation. The conventions of the ‘experience of writing’ offered a non-dualistic vision of language in which the sensory/conceptual and the material/ideal were unified. The ‘experience of literature’ redefined literature, combining form/content, the sensory/intelligible, and the non-communicative/communicative. The ‘experience of aporia’ offered a new vision of interpretation (reading) beyond the categories of truth/falsity or correctness/incorrectness.

‘The Experience of Writing’

If one of the most important tasks of the poetics of experience was ‘seeking a non-dualistic way of describing how language refers to reality’ [KT2 43], it can be said that Jacques Derrida’s writings contributed significantly to this quest. Derrida was one of the first philosophers to criticize the traditional Saussurean dualistic theory of language, confronting it with the ‘experience of writing’. For Derrida this ‘experience of writing’ was meant not so much to (critically) ‘experience’ the Metaphysics of Presence, but rather to undermine a dualistic vision of language, whose centuries-old hegemony was safeguarded by metaphysics. In the logocentric metaphysical tradition, at least since Plato, ‘speech’ had been a privileged term (the Greek word *Logos* meant both ‘reason’ and ‘speech’). According to Derrida, because of this, a dualistic understanding of language became

dominant. The privileged status granted to speech ('logocentrism') meant that the significance of the sensory and material aspects of language, treated merely as a medium for meaning, was diminished. In his interview with Julia Kristeva, Derrida pointed to a phenomenon he described as the 'reduction of writing' for the sake of metaphysics, from the perspective of which the material and the sensory constitute a threat. Interestingly enough, for Derrida this 'reduction' could be described in experiential terms as an 'ethical or axiological *experience*' [PO 24-25], with consequences in terms of ethics and values. Derrida's analysis of how the binary opposition between speech and writing functioned in the Western philosophical tradition was aimed not only at questioning this opposition/hierarchy, but at undermining an idea of language – to use the most influential concepts of Saussure's theory of language – based on the opposition of the signifier and the signified (with a clear preference for the latter). This opposition led to a sharp division into the sensory and the conceptual, as well between the material and the ideal. Finally, a dualistic model of language created a barrier between the 'inside' of the language system and its 'outside', i.e. its reference to reality (this was especially evident in Saussure's theory, in which 'language' was conceived of as a closed system, isolated from world, history, culture, the subject, etc.). This dualistic notion of language was described by Derrida as the 'logic of speech'. It determined the properties of language because in keeping with the fundamental concepts of metaphysics it privileged *logos*. By subjecting the metaphysical hegemony of speech to the 'experience of writing', Derrida intended to question the dualistic theory of language (on all the levels discussed above). Secondly, by analyzing language in the context of the 'logic of writing' (which questioned binary oppositions), Derrida offered a non-dualistic vision of language. Derrida's two goals were clearly visible even in his early texts, e.g. in *Voice and Phenomenon*, *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and in some essays in *Dissemination* and *Margins of Philosophy*. They criticized a dualistic vision of language and offered instead a non-dualistic understanding, which embraced the material and the figurative [PO 25] and not just the ideal. Derrida also demonstrated here that if we remove 'writing' from philosophical systems, we eliminate from them the notions of randomness, materiality, sensuality, and, consequently, experience. Indeed, if the metaphysical philosophy of language banishes language, this results in strict divisions into the rational and the empirical (and the latter, of course, is treated with disdain). Derrida discovered this mechanism during his studies on Husserl and described it in detail in *Voice and Phenomenon*. In his interview with Kristeva, he emphasized the nonchalance with which Husserl in *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 'put aside' the sensibility of the expression, signalling only (on the

margins of his notes) that there was a ‘certain difficulty’ in this case, because in the written sign the ideal could not be separated from the material and the sensory. Indeed, Husserl somewhat contemptuously described the sensory aspects of language, for example, observing:

Let us start with the familiar distinction between the sensory, so to speak, bodily side of the expression and its non-sensory, ‘spiritual’ side. We need not enter into a more detailed discussion of the former; similarly, we do not need to go into the manner of the unification of the two sides.⁶³⁸

Derrida saw a tendency in the Western intellectual tradition to conceal the sensory and the material in language, which were incorporated into the intelligible and the ideal, and he pointed out the consequences of this disposition for philosophy, hermeneutics, and modern literary theory. All of these disciplines were subordinated to the ‘dualizing’ metaphor of ‘seeing through language’⁶³⁹ derived from its ‘bodily’ side. A further consequence of privileging speech (at the expense of writing) was the aforementioned duality of the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the language system, i.e. its conceptual construction and empirical ‘operation’. Such an understanding of language, in turn, at the highest level translated into

the idea of the world [...] that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and nonideality, universal and nonuniversal, transcendental and empirical, etc. [OG 8]

The eviction of writing, or as Derrida described it, ‘the ruse of a being accidentally incarnated’ [OG 15], i.e., the eradication of writing from metaphysics, was thus motivated by the same ideology which triggered the eradication of the sensory, the bodily, and the emotional. By exposing the ideological basis of logocentrism, Derrida simultaneously criticized the tradition in which experience was subordinated to the hegemony of reason. Nietzsche was a natural and valuable ally in this undertaking. As Derrida emphasized, Nietzsche was the only one ‘radicalizing’ ‘all the ‘empiricist’ or nonphilosophical motifs that have constantly tormented philosophy throughout the history of the West’ [OG 19], and thus paving the way for experience. By criticizing a dualistic model of language rooted in the metaphysical tradition and consequently by applying the ‘logic of

638 E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book*, trans. F. Kersten, Dordrecht 1983, p. 245.

639 See D. Davidson, ‘Seeing Through Language’, in *Truth, Language, and History*, Oxford 2005, pp. 127–142.

writing' (which combined the ideal, the empirical, and the sensual) to language [OG 7–8] Derrida undoubtedly initiated the movement towards a non-dualistic understanding of language. Consequently, by applying this logic to the language of literature, he offered a similar perspective on literary theory and on reading. In this case, however, he used not only the 'experience of writing' but also the unique experience of language produced by modern literature. Interestingly enough, it was experience that inspired Derrida to use the 'critical experience of literature' for this purpose.

'The Critical Experience of Literature'

The significance of this experience for Derrida's philosophy and practices was aptly summarized by David Carroll who observed that 'literature is a privileged entryway into writing' [PA 83]. The literary practices of Mallarmé and others became a 'testing field' which allowed Derrida to 'demonstrate' the properties of writing and the unique properties of literary language. Like Carroll, Derrida observed that:

certain texts classed as 'literary' have seemed to me to operate breaches or infractions at the most advanced points. Artaud, Cataille, Mallarmé, Sollers. Why? At least for the reason that induces us to suspect the denomination 'literature'. [PO 69]

These 'breaches' made him aware of the existence of a kind of 'economy' of literature, i.e. a special way in which certain literary texts 'operate' that would prove much more effective in questioning metaphysics (and hermeneutics) than philosophy [AL 43]. First of all, because 'the force of [these texts] event', as Derrida observed, 'depends on the fact that a thinking about their own possibility (both general and singular) is put to work in them in a *singular* work. [...] Their questioning is also linked to the act of a literary performativity and a critical performativity' [AL 41–42]. But even more importantly, this 'critical experience of literature' also 'happened' to metaphysics and metaphysical hermeneutics – they collided with a particular kind of literary practice that skirted the very boundaries of communicativeness. This 'liminal experience of language' triggered, as Derrida put it, 'upheavals in the forms of communication' [PO 13]. This 'epistemic trauma' shook the metaphysical foundations of language. Derrida talked about his fascination with this experience in one interview:

My first desire was no doubt to go in the direction of the literary event, there where it crosses and even exceeds philosophy. Certain 'operations', as Mallarmé would say, certain literary or poetic simulacra sometimes allow us to think what the philosophical theory of writing misapprehends, what it sometimes violently prohibits. [AN 79]

‘Mallarmè’ became, so to speak, an ‘icon’ of this experience – a symbol for the practices of poetic language⁶⁴⁰ which undermined the language of metaphysics and literary studies rooted in metaphysics. The works of Mallarmè and other modern writers listed by Derrida ‘have in common’, as the philosopher observed, ‘that they are inscribed in a critical experience of literature’ [AL 41]. This ‘opaque speech’ was able to organize

a structure of resistance to the philosophical conceptuality that allegedly dominated or comprehended them, whether directly, or whether through categories derived from this philosophical fund, the categories of esthetics, rhetoric, or traditional criticism. [PO 69]

The use of the ‘experience’ of literary language in order to undermine traditional literary definitions (and interpretations) also had a pragmatic (‘economic’) value.⁶⁴¹ ‘[P]rivileged [literary] ‘examples’ [PO 5] clearly opposed ontological (and hermeneutical) categories [TT 200–201]. According to Derrida, this endowed them with ‘operational’ effectiveness and, at the same time, practical value in testing literary boundaries and hermeneutical theories. This ‘structure of resistance’ of literature against interpretation, Derrida added, was easier to identify in a certain type of literature, but it was always present in every literary text, even if only to a minimal extent. Literature which opposed the traditional understanding of ‘literariness’ was also able to undermine the universally accepted categories of meaning, content, form, signifier/signified, metaphor/metonymy, truth, representation, and the opposition between the sensory and the intelligible. It thus raised questions about the limits of interpretation. According to Derrida, these limits were determined by the ‘irreducibility of *écriture*’ and the refusal ‘to be reduced to meaning’ manifested by the text. This ‘critical’ and at the same time ‘borderline’ experience of literary language turned out to be the ‘borderline’ for traditionally defined interpretation. According to Derrida, this was meant to make hermeneutics verify its established model of interpretation. The practices of the ‘literature of silence’, as the philosopher argued, did not ‘give rise to a hermeneutic deciphering, to the decoding of a meaning or truth.’⁶⁴² In fact, this experience proved to be most instructive for Derrida himself. It had a decisive influence on his own notion of reading and writing about literature. Already in *Of Grammatology*, as he explained in *Positions*, a ‘place is made, in that essay,

640 See the chapter titled ‘Twierdza Mallarmè’ in *Dekonstrukcji i interpretacji*.

641 To some extent, this is like how the poetry of the futurists became a ‘privileged example’ for the Russian formalists.

642 J. Derrida, section titled ‘Signatures’, in ‘Signature Event Context’, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 1982, p. 329.

by all rights, for such a positive inquiry into the current upheavals in the forms of communication’ [PO 13]. This ‘positive inquiry’ offered a new perspective for the future, demonstrating that the key to understand of literariness is the notion of writing. ‘Literary writing’, as Derrida referred to it, determined the form and practice of reading as an ‘(active) movement of the (production)’ or ‘the very movement of signification’ [OG 70].

‘The Experience of Aporia’

‘The experience of writing’ and ‘the experience of literature’ were for Derrida critical formulas which exposed the weaknesses of metaphysical systems and theories of language and literary language rooted in metaphysics. It is in this sense that they could be described as experiences of ‘epistemic trauma’ – they revealed the weaknesses and artificiality of the conceptual structures found in well-established and widely-accepted theoretical models. This was particularly evident in the case of experience. Derrida uses the ancient concept of *aporia* (‘an absence of path’), found in the writings of the ancient Greek sceptics and empiricists, as a reference point to discuss the German linguist Karl Abel and his analysis of the antithetical meanings of primal words, Freud and his notion of the undecidable structure of the dream, and Gödel and his theory of undecidable propositions,⁶⁴³ calling it the ‘experience of undecidability’ [*l’expérience de l’indécidable*].⁶⁴⁴ Like Vargish and Mook, who in their book *Inside Modernism: Relativity Theory, Cubism, Narrative* described the traumatic experiences of readers forced to confront the incomprehensibility of a literary text and the failure of interpretation, Derrida was also very interested in those moments in literary and philosophical texts that resisted interpretation. Such interpretation was usually rendered impossible as a result of a concept that could not be precisely placed on either side of the opposition between true/false, good/bad, interior/exterior, etc. Thus, as Derrida explained, arguments ‘for’ and ‘against’ had exactly the same value. These, as the philosopher put it, ‘undecidables’

set to work, *within* the text of the history of philosophy, as well as *within* the so-called literary text [...] that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition [...] and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics [PO 42–43].

643 I discuss this problem in more detail in the section ‘Pora aporii’ in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*.

644 J. Derrida, *Parages*. Paris 1986, p. 15.

These 'undecidables' 'disorganized' philosophical oppositions and left the reader in an interpretive impasse. Perhaps this was because such words, Derrida added, exposed the limits of metaphysical discourse better than others, abolishing the differences between positive and negative, good and bad, true and false [DC 17–18]. By subjecting metaphysics and hermeneutics to the experience of aporia and 'using' this experience in his 'critical work' [PO 42–43], Derrida once more tested their endurance. This was because, as he said,

the experience of the aporia, such as de Man deciphers it, gives or promises the thinking of the path, provokes the thinking of the very possibility of what still remains unthinkable or unthought, indeed, impossible.⁶⁴⁵

It should be emphasized that these undecidable notions were not pre-determined, but appeared during the course of reading – discovering them in the text became in the full sense of the word an 'experience' for the reader. Derrida thus defined undecidables as moments in reading during which the reader is no longer able to make any decisions and is simply 'placed' in a situation of 'indecision'. This experience, as the philosopher added, opened a space which is not pre-determined but which emerges during the course of reading. The inner aporia of the text questioned its coherence, systematic binary structure, and logical order, while the reader suffered from interpretive paralysis. This experience led to a severe interpretative crisis. Derrida seemed to be particularly interested in such a phenomenon because resistance offered by undecidables 'describes a margin where the control over meaning or code is without recourse, poses the limit to the relevance of the hermeneutic or systematic question' [O 99]. Undecidables discovered in the text did not succumb to dialectics, neither through their abolishment [*Aufhebung*] nor internalization [*Erinnerung*] (found in the writings of Hegel); nor could they be assigned to one element in an oppositional pair. Derrida's favourite undecidables, such the 'hymen' (Mallarmè), the 'pharmakon' (Plato), the 'supplement' (Rousseau), and the 'parergon' (Kant), balanced between opposites (desire and satisfaction, remedy and poison, completeness and lack, inside and outside), challenging the cognitive process and shocking the reader. They were, as Derrida described it (clearly using the rhetoric of shock), like 'effervescent crucibles' [PO 40]. This traumatic experience, however, was not supposed to discourage the reader. On the contrary, according to Derrida, undecidables were meant to motivate the reader to further investigation. Indeed, the philosopher saw the confrontation with the undecidable as

645 J. Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. C. Lindsay, et al., New York 1989, p. 132.

both an experience and an indispensable condition of its creation. In this sense, the aporia was a rewarding experience, somewhat resembling the psychological phenomenon of ‘positive disintegration’ that is the starting point for action. In one interview, Derrida described how the trauma of interpretative impasse may lead to further actions:

I am facing a difficulty. I am in a sense being forced to listen to two conflicting orders. I am being told that I must do one thing and do the opposite at the same time. And I cannot decide. I am paralyzed in this aporia by two opposing orders. I have tried to demonstrate using numerous examples that such a situation is not dire. On the contrary, it allows me to make a decision. [...] For something to happen, in order to make a decision [...] I must first not know what to do, I must face the extreme. [...] For me, aporia is not evil, nor is it simply a contradiction, a logical difficulty. It is a condition of experience [OS]

Derrida used numerous empirical phrases in his description of the experience of aporia. Undecidables in the text caused, for example, ‘surprise’ and ‘confusion’ [D 261] and the feeling of ‘paralysis.’ For obvious reasons, the reader could not opt for one element in the pair of oppositions, but needed to be ‘creative’ and look for a completely different way out. Therefore, Derrida argued, by suspending the act of interpretation (stopping interpretative decisions) the experience of aporia presented the reader with the possibility of a truly creative and innovative reading. ‘The experience of aporia’ allowed the reader to invent something completely new. This concept is also a testament to the empiricist nature of Derrida’s philosophy. Indeed, the semantic fields of the Greek word ‘experience’ (*empiria*) and its Latin counterpart (*experientia*) include the word ‘experiment’, while the semantic field of the word ‘experiment’ (derived from the Latin word *expereri*) includes the word ‘risk.’ As Montaigne points out in his *Essays* (and especially in ‘Of Experience’), the experience of reading, like any experience, entails risk, but it also frees up what has become ingrained and ossified, thereby making room for something new and unpredictable to be introduced. Martin Jay in *Songs of Experience* draws attention to the fact that art, including literature and theatre, does not sell ready-made experiences, the kind found in today’s ‘supermarkets of sensations’, but instead activate and revitalize our ways of experiencing the world [PD 573]. Derrida likewise called for this kind of ‘activation’, finding a potential source for it in reading and in the linguistic experiences offered by modern literature. An important feature of Derrida’s critical practices was his tendency to refer to certain types of experiences (but experiences nevertheless). These references indicate what aspects of experience were valued most by him. Initially, Derrida was drawn to ‘in-betweenness’ in experience and its ability to destabilize metaphysical oppositions. The philosopher never missed an

opportunity to discuss a situation in which experience proved problematic for metaphysics. Plato, for example, almost ‘violently’, as Derrida put it, attempted to avoid the experience of undecidability and ‘erase’ the contradictions inherent in some of his concepts. For example, the Egyptian parable of Thamus and Theuth told by Socrates in *Phaedrus* demonstrates that the value of ‘writing’ (as a ‘remedy’ or ‘poison’) is ambiguous. Plato went to considerable effort to ‘erase’ this ambiguity (again ‘through’ Socrates). He discredited writing as ‘poison’ in order to free himself from this interpretive impasse.⁶⁴⁶ Derrida’s draws a clear conclusion from this: metaphysics either banishes experience or subordinates it to theory. But in either case, experience still retains its ‘critical’ potential. Derrida’s deconstructive practices were also experiential – the philosopher often spoke about ‘the experience of deconstruction.’⁶⁴⁷ Indeed, deconstruction was like an endurance test, one which (conducted with the help of the text) transferred the ‘effects’ of ‘the experience of deconstruction’ onto philosophical systems that had previously banished experience. The entire critical process was thus essentially experimental, with Derrida playing the role of the ‘animator’ of the experimental process initiated by reading. Irene Harvey emphasized the unique nature of Derrida’s practices, writing about the ‘exemplarity’⁶⁴⁸ of deconstruction. In the course of reading, Harvey explained, the text became an *example*, i.e. a space in which the assumptions of its own conceptual model were experimentally questioned. In this sense, Derrida’s early work is not so much a philosophy of experience as a philosophy of ‘experiencing’ systems or disciplines. Ryszard Nycz aptly commented on the ‘endurance tests’ carried out by Derrida, pointing out that the philosopher did not mean to ‘reject disciplined knowledge but test or question it (put it to the test)’ [KT2 58].

Derrida, however, did not intend to stop there, because, he argued, his early efforts would ultimately serve as a form of a ‘positive inquiry’ [PO 13]. From ‘experiencing’ philosophy he moved on to the ‘philosophy of experiencing’, the future perspectives of which became visible when he began to undermine metaphysical systems by means of ‘critical experiences’. If we take a closer look at his readings of Plato’s texts in *Dissemination*, i.e. fragments of *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Minor*, *Epistles*, *Republic*, *Laws*, *Protagoras*, and *Sophist*,⁶⁴⁹ we

646 I discuss this reading by Derrida’s in detail in [DI 386–393].

647 See e.g. J. Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p. 116.

648 See I. Harvey, *Derrida and the Issues of Exemplarity*, p. 193; see also I. Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of ‘Differance’*. Bloomington 1986.

649 I discuss this reading of Derrida’s in detail in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*. Here I will focus only on those issues related to experience.

can see that at many points they become narratives about experiences, about what 'happened' to Derrida while reading these texts. And as could be expected of Derrida, they offer no explanations or conclusions. Rather, they offer reflections, riddled with doubt and lacking definite judgements. For example, when Derrida focuses on the *pharmakon*, he immediately observes that the word has many different connotations and enters into various semantic relationships. This 'observation', however, also marked the end of his argument in this regard, because, as Derrida informs the reader, it would be very difficult to determine how these links were formed. Some of them, Derrida wrote, were 'declared' 'clarified', or 'played upon "voluntarily"' by Plato. Others, Plato could 'not see'; he could 'leave them in the shadow or break them up'. So, are these links formed 'In spite of him? thanks to him? in *his* text? *outside* his text? but then where? between his text and the language? for what reader? at what moment?' [PF 96]. Of course, Derrida does not provide an answer, and instead simply notes that:

To answer such questions in principle and in general will seem impossible; and that will give us the suspicion that there is some malformation in the question itself. In each of its concepts, in each of the oppositions it thus accredits. One can always choose to believe that if Plato did not put certain possibilities of passage into practice, or even interrupted them, it is because he perceived them but left them in the impracticable. [PF 96]

It is thus impossible to determine what Plato did consciously and what he did unconsciously, and consequently, as Derrida observes, '[t]his reason alone should already suffice to prevent us from reconstituting the entire chain of significations of the *pharmakon*.' [PF 96]. Initially, Derrida's reading of this excerpt of Plato's writing did not offer any conclusions; the only thing that 'happens' is a condition of helplessness the reader experiences in their encounter with a text in which '[n]o absolute privilege allows us absolutely to master its textual system.' [PF 96]. What can be done in such a situation? We can only open ourselves to further surprises offered by the (seemingly understandable and comprehensible) text of Plato. At one point, Derrida even experiments with reading Plato's texts in a traditional manner. But these exercises in what Derrida calls 'the recognized models of commentary' or 'the genealogical or structural reconstitution of a system' [PF 104] do not turn out well. Derrida is thus forced to accept his failure and confess that in Plato's text '[e]very model of classical reading is exceeded there at some point' [PF 104]. This short statement demonstrates how much such a reading experience differs from what we refer to as a traditional model of interpretation. Derrida here does not attempt to interpret Plato's text, but to describe what he experienced during the reading of it. He does not even try to hide his

ignorance and confusion in the face of growing doubt. And thus, his reading of Plato essentially records the experience of struggling with Plato.

Derrida's early deconstruction practices testify to his interest in the experimental nature of literature and reading. Over time, Derrida became more and more interested in experience, observing that

I am most interested in the ways in which my writing moves closer to this or that place or provides a different way of *experiencing* (emphasis mine, AB) [...] what an event, an occurrence is. [...] Deconstruction is the experience of the event, of the *arrivant*. [OS]

First, however, Derrida had to come to terms with the most important aspect of experience (at least for him) – its unrepeatability. Naturally, he did so in his own way, that is, experimentally. Derrida's unique means of exploring the nature of experience was summed up well by David Wood, who observed that Derrida's writing is a specific form of 'experiencing experience.'⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁵⁰ See D. Wood, *Thinking After Heidegger*, p. 26.

Shibboleth, or ‘Only One Time’

I will speak therefore [...] of what comes down to marking itself as the one-and-only time: what one sometimes [parfois] calls a date.

Jacques Derrida, ‘Shibboleth: For Paul Celan’

‘One time’ is the enigma of that which has no meaning, no presence, no legibility.

Jacques Derrida, ‘The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation’

Derrida could not help but notice that in the history of Western philosophy reflection on experience was marked by a peculiar paradox. For if experience is part of the philosophical system, it is at the price of robbing it of its most fundamental properties (as Derrida perceives them), such as eventness (eventicity), uniqueness and complexity, i.e. the unity of the body, the mind, and the senses. The paradox inherent to metaphysical reflection on experience is thus as follows: the language of metaphysics has assimilated experience, subjecting it to its categorizations, but as a result experience, it has ceased to be experience. Instead, it has become a barren theoretical notion, deprived of everything that philosophers conceive of as unthinkable. Indeed, the Metaphysics of Presence treats experience like any other ‘other’ – it either excludes it or absorbs it. However, experience, by its very nature, is a borderline phenomenon – it marks the limits of metaphysical speculation. And Derrida cannot help but appreciate this unique property of experience. The ‘eventicity’ of experience highlights the limits of metaphysics, and the fact that at a certain point Derrida stops talking about event and starts discussing, almost always concurrently, event and experience, characterizing both phenomena as singular,⁶⁵¹ is certainly significant. Naturally, it would be difficult to determine exactly when this connection was established, but it can certainly be considered an obvious sign of, as David Wood observes, Derrida’s ‘regaining experience’. Although the philosopher’s road to explicit affirmation of experience is long and winding, it is definitely characterized by careful, ‘micrological’ attention to those properties of experience

651 As in *life.after.theory*.

which have been 'hidden from view' by metaphysics. Undoubtedly, the writings of Derrida offer an insightful reflection on the very nature of experience – the philosopher dissects experience and examines it critically. However, considering the assumptions he adopts, the task he undertakes is not all easy. Indeed, how can we reflect on the nature of experience, if we cannot use a simple sentence like 'experience *is...*' because we would immediately fall into the trap of ontological qualifications (which is something Derrida carefully avoids)?

Derrida, of course, finds a way. He does not want to attack metaphysics 'directly' and thus invents the practice of 'deconstruction', which forces metaphysical systems to expose the fragility of their oppositional constructions in the course of reading texts they 'produced'. Similarly, Derrida comes up with a trick which allows him to avoid having to answer the question 'What is experience?', by instead demonstrating the unique properties of experience, and thus evading theoretical qualifications. It comes as no surprise that reading is a crucial part of this process – instead of defining experience, Derrida practically demonstrates the 'happening' of experience in reading. Derrida thus introduces experience to an 'experimental scene' on which its eventicity is clearly visible. David Wood refers to this strategy of 'examining' experience as 'the experience of experience', emphasizing that Derrida's practices offer an almost direct and 'instant' insight into the most essential properties of the phenomenon. This is particularly evident in Derrida's essay 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan', largely devoted to the 'singularity' and therefore the unrepeatability and eventicity, of experience as found in 'the enigma of the date'. Derrida indicates that the essay is indeed devoted to experience with a short but a very telling sentence which reads: 'what takes place in this experience of the date, experience itself?' [SD 9]. Such a confrontation with 'the experience of the date' allows us to get a closer look at the 'experience itself' in order to capture its elusive and rebellious nature. David Wood's intentionally tautological phrase the 'experience of experience' thus points to a very important feature of Derrida's philosophy as essentially 'practical' – it means that experience can only be discovered through experience or, as Kierkegaard observes, 'repeated' in a different experience. The 'transmission' (as Benn Michaels puts it) of such experience no longer appeals to the mind (or does so only to a very limited extent) but rather to the senses – perception and experience – thanks to which the recipient of this transmission can identify with experience emotionally (and not only intellectually). Just like 'bearing witness' to the event entails 'performing' its eventicity, so too the nature of experience requires a 'totally different' practice. Indeed, to draw on Shoshana Felman, we can say that Derrida is perfectly aware that the 'representation' of experience is doomed to failure, and therefore he needs to 'face' experience directly. Only then can 'testimony' really

'take place'. Consequently, in his of reading Celan, Derrida provokes and elicits the experience of singularity, emphasizing that experience really 'takes place only once'.

In the essay 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan,' Derrida comments extensively on Celan's writing practice. However, as could be expected, the philosopher does not even attempt to explain the semantic complexities of Celan's poetry. While he reads the poems of Celan very carefully, Derrida mostly focuses on what could be described as the experience of 'one time' and the singularity of experience. Derrida's essay on Celan is considered one of his most hermetic texts. However, despite claims to the contrary, the philosopher does not mean to further complicate the complexities of Celan's poetry using his idiosyncratic language, although his reading does manage to annoy even such brilliant and renowned Celan scholars Hans-Georg Gadamer, who criticizes Derrida in no uncertain terms.⁶⁵² This is hardly surprising, since for Gadamer interpretation is, to put it (somewhat) ironically, a 'diving' competition. Indeed, as Gadamer observes, the scholar is meant to bring a 'treasure' hidden in the text to the surface and not (in keeping with this 'marine' metaphor) float on the opaque surface of the sea, which is something Derrida clearly prefers. Indeed, Derrida does not focus on the works of Celan *per se*, although he reads them carefully, and he does not intend to explain or interpret the poems, much to Gadamer's disdain. Derrida formulates the goal of his reading at the very beginning of his essay thus: 'I will listen to what Paul Celan says about it [dates]' [SD 2] in order to face the 'ciphered singularity' of the date [SD 33]. Derrida's reading is based on a fairly simple assumption that the 'date' (or the act of 'dating') may act as a micro-formula of singularity. For what are these few small black marks if not a testimony of a singular event that, as Derrida observes, 'took place on that date'? The date thus marks a concrete past event that took place in the 'here and now', the presence of which, whereas 'the presence of a "here and now" attests [...] his or her own presence at the act of inscription' [SD 16]. It is 'marked' [*marque*] by the very act of dating. This is what happens in Celan's poems – each poem has its own individual date. Each date, as Derrida observes, thus 'concerns *today* every poem of *today*' and also implies 'the newness of each poetic work of our time' [SD 6]. Derrida's reading of Celan is definitely not a 'traditional' interpretation. Rather, it becomes a reflection, which concerns more general issues. The act of

652 See H. G. Gadamer, 'Are the Poets Falling Silent?', *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. D. Misgeld and G. Hicholson, trans. L. Schmidt and M. Reuss, Albany 1992, pp. 73–82.

dating inscribed in the poems marks them with 'newness', allowing Derrida to reflect on the nature of the 'date'. And the 'date' for Derrida represents the singularity of event and experience (writing) that took place only once on this date and not on any other. Let us repeat: 'What takes place in this experience of the date, experience itself?', Derrida asks. [SD 9] And how does the date mark what constitutes the active (preserved in time) present? Derrida eventually concludes that the act of 'dating' brings with itself another paradox: dating is marked by the past present which, in the very gesture of affixing the present with a 'seal', and thus recording the singularity of experience, takes it into the future. In 'Shibboleth' we encounter an entire series of 'singular' experiences that are one by one 'triggered' by Celan's poems, like a series of concentric rings produced by a pebble breaking the surface of water. The date of a poem points to a personal experience of the poet and thus marks the one and only moment in time when a given poem was written (Derrida refers to this date as 'external'). At the same time, the creative process that precedes a poem is also marked as 'one-time'. On the other hand, the date is also a testament to the singular event of Celan's language that took place on that day. Therefore, for Derrida the 'date' (like the 'signature' in *Signesponge/Signsponge*⁶⁵³) carries within itself the singularity of the poetic experience (Derrida refers to this date as 'internal').⁶⁵⁴ As a result, the 'date' becomes a synonym for poetic expression as well as for any 'speech act' that always takes place 'only once'. Derrida thus observes: 'Whether one will or not, whether or not one knows it, acknowledges it, or dissembles it, an utterance is always dated' [SD 13]. According to Derrida, the act of 'dating' (or 'the inscription of a date' [SCH 16]) no longer simply involves writing the date under a poem (or any other text) but constitutes a metaphorical way of expressing the singularity of the event of the literary idiom (and the event of speech in general), thus becoming a 'figure of singularity'.

Derrida understands very well that whatever 'takes place only once' offers strong resistance to thought [SD 1]. Thought, which always strives to put everything in line, in a logical or causal order, considers a 'one-time only' event a dangerous loophole or a breach – such an event is unthinkable. Indeed, it is impossible to understand 'what is once?', and not only because it would be a

653 '... dating comes down to signing' [SD 13], 'a date functions like a proper name' [SD 16].

654 '*Speaking at its date*, what a discourse declares about the date in general' [SD 13], 'a non-conventional, non-calendrical form of dating, one that would merge entirely, without remainder, with the general organization of the poetic text. [SD 16].

thoroughly metaphysical operation, but because it is inconceivable to reason. And thus, we may only answer the question 'what is once?' if we place this event in the context of experience, using our emotions and not reason. Derrida implies that we may only 'turn' this question 'around' ('we will have to turn, as around a ring', he says in 'Shibboleth' [SD 2]), if we multiply successive experiences of singularity, which only refer to other such experiences. According to Derrida, we do so in order to 'let ourselves be approached by the resistance the *once* may offer to thought. And this is a question of offering, and of what such resistance *gives* one to think' [SD 1].⁶⁵⁵ Derrida refers here to Paul Ricoeur's famous observation that 'the symbol provides food for thought', albeit he interprets it anew. For Ricoeur, 'offering' of a symbol triggers the process of discovering its hidden meaning. Derrida, however, emphasizes that 'offering' provides resistance to thought – it constitutes an 'epistemic trauma' of sorts – and thus in a unique and 'energetic' way stimulates reflection. Therefore, as Derrida explains, we cannot simply answer the question 'what does *only one time* mean?' because then we would have to 'cross' the border marked by these words, just like 'the crossing of ordinary translation takes place every day without the least uncertainty' [SD 2]. This, in turn, would entail the inevitable 'effacement' of experience conveyed by these words. The fact that, as the philosopher observes, 'the enigma of the date [...] seems to resist every question, every form of philosophical questioning, every objectivation, every theoretico-hermeneutic thematization' [SD 5] suggests above all that its mystery cannot be unravelled, discovered, explained, or understood. It can only be 'experienced' as a force of 'resistance' which stunts thought. However, it is the failure of thought that allows experience to enter the 'stage' or, as Derrida would say, it is the breakdown of thought that opens 'the passage' for experience. Derrida's conclusion is thus clear: the unthinkable may only 'be experienced'. The practical application of this finding in his essay on Celan is thus: in order to experience what 'only one time' is we need to recall (and maybe even trigger) an experience that is the most similar to this experience (as it may not be identical), i.e. an experience that allows us to identify with the situation of 'singularity'. And this, I would argue, is one of the keys to the mysterious 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan'. In order for this experience to become reality, Derrida goes beyond his reflections on the paradoxical nature of the date. While the act of dating inscribed in the name of the day, month, and year carries within itself the singularity of experience, despite the fact that *the date always already* testifies to this, it has rather limited possibilities for creating experience 'only

655 All italicized words in this citation and in those that follow are those of Derrida.

one time'. In order to stimulate the imagination, trigger emotions, and excite the senses and the body, Derrida seeks to discover in the works of Celan other more intense experiences of 'singularity'. Not governed by rational thought and metaphysical speculation, such experiences are meant to trigger overwhelming sensations. The only reservation is, as Derrida admits, that we never come face to face with the original experience but only with its 'appearance' (*'simulacrum'*) [SD 1], as this is the only way to get close to it. This probably explains the (perverse for many readers) logic behind three 'themes' singled out by Derrida in the works of Celan, namely 'date', *'shibboleth'*, and 'circumcision'. This is indeed a rather bizarre combination.

In Derrida's reading of Celan 'only one time' becomes a sequence of experiments that repeat similar experiences. And this sequence is triggered when the philosopher repeats after the poet: 'Only one time: circumcision takes place only once.' [SD 1]

The form of this sentence (it is separated from the rest of the text on the page) gives the impression that Derrida utters it out loud, trying to experience (and at the same time experimentally test) the singularity of the event inscribed in it. It is as if the philosopher tried to identify with it emotionally, as if he were 'thrown' into the middle of this experience, which is, as he observes, 'at the same time, [...] the first and last time,' thus embracing 'archaeology and eschatology' [SD 2]. It is obvious that circumcision takes place only once but Derrida does not wish to rely on such a simple, almost trivial, association. By introducing circumcision to the 'scene of experience' (after Celan) Derrida presents us with the ritual mutilation of the body. Thus, he forms an association between two singularities, the singularity of the date and the singularity of circumcision, and at the same time forms an unexpected association between the everyday gesture of dating and a violent bodily experience. By activating the body, Derrida appeals to the most primal experiences, thus intensifying the experience of 'dating'. To put it simply, the philosopher makes the experience of 'dating' more powerful by associating it with a drastic 'real-life' situation. Such a situation is more extreme, and thus more moving, than signing the date under a poem. But this process of intensifying a 'one time' experience is only gradually gaining momentum. Circumcision is neither a mere wound nor simply an orthodox tradition. It is also a way of marking, and as such, in certain circumstances, it can become life-threatening. And at this moment the title *shibboleth* enters the 'stage' of experience. However, what is the association between *shibboleth* and the mystery of 'one time'? The answer to this question can be found in the Bible. The word '*shibboleth*' has been in use for a long time in many languages from the Phoenician, Judeo-Aramaic, and Syrian language families. Its semantic field is very diverse – *shibboleth* could

mean a 'river' or a 'stream', but also an 'ear of corn' or an 'olive branch'. But it is the pragmatic and not semantic value of the word that has proved so significant in its long history. An important reference can be found in the Bible.⁶⁵⁶ When the Ephraimites were defeated by the army of the Gileadites led by Jephthah, it was not the meaning but the pronunciation of *shibboleth* that became a kind of a test that could mean life or death for the defeated army. To identify and kill the Ephraimites, the Gileadites ordered each survivor to say the word – the Ephraimites could not pronounce it correctly. Specifically, they could not articulate the initial 'shi'. By saying '*sibboleth*' (instead of '*shibboleth*'), the Ephraimites signed their death warrant. The Gileadites ordered the captured Ephraimites to say the word '*shibboleth*' and immediately identified the enemy by pronunciation. And as the Bible reads, 'there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.' In a sense, therefore, *shibboleth* in Biblical times played the same role as circumcision during the Holocaust. The humiliating controls that the Jews were subjected to (which, as we know, were meant to distinguish them from non-Jews) could mean (and usually did) a death sentence. This is why Derrida observes that *shibboleth* has 'the value of circumcision' [SD 61]. And what is more, it could be pronounced incorrectly 'only once'.

All three themes identified by Derrida in the poems of Celan, namely 'date', 'circumcision', and '*shibboleth*' thus evoke seemingly different yet in fact very similar experiences. Their intensity increases, reaching a tragic climax in *shibboleth*. And although dating a poem is shockingly juxtaposed with such frightening experiences as death as a result of the incorrect pronunciation of a word, or death as a result of being 'marked' by circumcision, Derrida's idea is clear. By recalling this kind of experience, he tries to create the 'effect' of a strong emotional experience – a situation in which 'only once' may also mean 'for the last time'. This experience of identifying with an extreme situation may also act as a feedback loop, creating the experience of a 'one-time' poetic event which allows the reader to empathize, to use such an outdated term, with its singularity. Thus, instead of trying to define 'what experience is', Derrida resorts to a method that can be described as multiplication – an intentional 'repetition' of experiences. Using themes from the works of Celan, the philosopher creates a series of 'metonymic' performances which help him demonstrate their unique properties. However, this also means that experience can be 'repeated' only in the course of another similar (although not identical) experience. If we recall at this moment some well-known philosophical concepts, according to which language organizes

656 *Judges* 12:1-7.

experience by incorporating it into the cognitive process, then it becomes clear that Derrida openly opposes this way of thinking. Although he is constantly 'moving' through Celan's poems, he does not try to impose on them a language that would help explain the singularity of experiences inscribed in these texts. He just wants to let us know that we cannot experience something that took place in the past. We may only 'repeat' experiences in a 'self-remarked' movement, as he puts it in *Signesponge/Signsponge* [SP 6]. Indeed, in an interview with Derek Attridge, Derrida reflects on his early philosophy and confesses that he dreams of writing that would

put into play or to keep the singularity of the date (what does not return, what is not repeated, promised experience of memory as promise, experience of ruin or asjes); and at the same time, through the same gesture, to question, analyze, transform this strange contradiction [AL 42].

'The experience of experience' – the experience of 'date,' 'circumcision,' and '*shibboleth*' in 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan' – paves the way for a discussion of one of the most fundamental questions ever addressed by Derrida. Namely: how can experience be repeated if it 'takes place' 'only once'?

The Repetition of Experience

An obsessive desire to save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens...

Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*

I would like to begin by returning to Soren Kierkegaard's *Repetition* in order to recall a desire very similar to the one referred to above, a desire that consumed the hero of the story, Constantin Constantius:

I had been preoccupied for some time, at least when I had the opportunity, with the problem of whether repetition was possible [...] it suddenly occurred to me: you can go to Berlin, since you were there once before, you could in this way learn whether repetition was possible and what it meant. I had come to a standstill in my attempts to resolve this problem at home. [R 3]

Then, in an effort to resolve this terrible problem, Constantin attempts to discover experimentally if it is possible to repeat what has already happened in the past in exactly the same form. He fails miserably, discovering that it is impossible because 'the only thing that repeated itself was that no repetition was possible' [R 38]. Constantin tries to discover the secret of repetition through direct experience – by re-experiencing what he has already experienced. Therefore, the theme of *Repetition* could be summed up in the following question: is it possible to repeat an experience, and if so, how? Fortunately, Constantin quickly recovers from his disappointment – Kierkegaard informs us that he failed because he wanted to use repetition to preserve 'the same in the same'. However, as Kierkegaard argues, repetition is not a medium of similarity, but a 'medium of difference'.⁶⁵⁷ Ultimately, he comes to the following conclusion:

The dialectic of repetition is easy, because what is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated; but precisely this, that it has been, makes repetition something new. When the Greeks said that all knowing was recollecting, they were also saying that all of existence, everything that is, has been. When one says that life is repetition, one also says that that which has existed now comes to be again. [R 19]

657 See also [TM 234–235].

At this point, Kierkegaard arrives at a new critical understanding of what philosophy is, and his thinking here is very close to that of Derrida. He states that the Greeks ‘taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that life is a repetition’ [R 3]. Recollection thus ‘confirms a certain loss’⁶⁵⁸ and distracts us from real life, while repetition enlivens life. As Samuel Weber observes, much like Kierkegaard and then Nietzsche before him:

The interest of philosophy has [...] moved from ‘knowledge’ to ‘life’ and in so doing has shifted its emphasis from ‘recollection’ to ‘repetition.’ Not that the latter simply does away with the former. Rather, it *redirects* it from the past toward the future [TM 204].

Kierkegaard, in turn, emphasized that:

Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, because what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards. [R 3]

Derrida is just as determined (and maybe even more so) as the hero of *Repetition* to find an answer to the question “can experience be repeated?”. But Derrida poses his own, more elaborate version of this question: “can the experience of the idiom of the Other inscribed in her text be repeated in the reading of this text?” At one point, Derrida shifts his priority to finding the answer to another, even more complicated question: how to preserve the experience of the idiom of Other ‘taking place’ in the reading of this text? Can the double experience of the writer and the reader (who writes about the writer’s experience) be preserved or ‘archived’ through language, given that, as Derrida claims, ‘[t]he discursive forms we have available to us, the resources in terms of objectivizing archivation, are so much poorer than what happens’ [AL 35]? How to ensure that the experiences of the writer and the reader are brought together in the text but still remain unique experiences? How to ensure that they remain singular individual events in their own right? Can they be ‘repeated’ if experience resists simplification and verbalization? Especially given the fact that there is always ‘something’, as Derrida observes, ‘irreducible in poetic or literary experience’ [AL 50]? Derrida gives serious thought to this problem, referring to it as ‘the impossible task of the reader’, ‘the impossible task of the translator’, and at other times as ‘the paradox of the experience of reading.’ As he explains in *Psychè*, the experience of language and the experience of writing *always already* (mainly due to the prefix *ex-* in the Latin word ‘*experientia*’) involve a risk of ‘being susceptible to repetition’ and of losing autonomy. Paradoxically, however, this risk is unavoidable.

658 Weber’s term [TM 204].

Adamantly opposed to binary oppositions, Derrida is quick to notice that philosophy has always treated language as a means of ordering (or even conditioning) experience, thereby subordinating its 'eventness' to understanding. However, what interests Derrida most is the process of experience as an event, which vanishes when it reaches its end. This paradoxical situation arises from the singularity, uniqueness, individuality, eventicity, and affective nature of experience (it engages the senses, the body, feelings and emotions), and thus resists verbalization and mediation. This will pose a challenge for Derrida, but it will also become the driving force behind his often seemingly peculiar actions. He discusses the difficulties he encounters in pursuing this desire, which he describes as 'the adolescent dream of keeping a trace' with Attridge, observing:

that what happens – in other words, the unique event whose trace one would like to keep alive – is also the very desire that what does not happen should happen, and is thus a 'story' in which the event already crosses within itself the archive of the 'real' and the archive of 'fiction.' [...] So there was a movement of nostalgic [...] lyricism to reserve, [...] to render both *accessible and inaccessible*. And deep down this is still my most naive desire. I don't dream of either a literary work, or a philosophical work, but that everything that occurs, happens to me or fails to, should be as it were sealed (placed in reserve, hidden so as to be kept, and this in its very signature, really like a signature, in the very form of the seal, with all the paradoxes that traverse the structure of a seal) [AL 35].

The stakes here are high. Derrida describes them metaphorically, referring to the paradoxical structure of 'the seal'. Derrida wants to answer the question of how 'to seal' in the text (keep in mind and store in one's own language) the unique experience of the Other's idiom so that it does not lose its experiential and eventual character. This philosophical dilemma and, at the same time, concrete and difficult task that Derrida has set for himself relates to one of the most fundamental questions concerning the nature of the reading experience. All of the many twentieth-century theoretical trends based on the concept of 'reading' and which sought to do away with 'interpretation' needed to ask themselves this question, but failed to do so. Instead, they simply removed this dilemma from their critical horizon.

Yet, the very fact that so many twentieth-century literary theories took 'reading' (and not 'interpretation') as their focus highlights the experiential nature of reading. After all, 'interpretation' is primarily an intellectual activity, while the very concept of 'reading', as Roland Barthes argues, is a unique and deeply individual experience of an ordinary, and not necessarily sophisticated, reader with literature. Historically speaking, the category of 'reading' first appeared nearly simultaneously in phenomenology, both as practiced by

Ingarden and his followers from the Constance School of Reception Aesthetics and as found in semiotics and the theory of literature. According to Derrida, phenomenology, due to its grounding in metaphysics, effectively eliminated the empirical character of reading. This led to yet another strange paradox. On the one hand, 'reading' replaced 'interpretation' in literary discourse in order to keep hermeneutics and its tendencies toward orthodoxy in check. On the other hand, reading immediately fell victim to theoretical new conceptualizations, transforming it back into 'interpretation'. In phenomenology, the empirical and the sensory in reading can only act as 'transit points' on the way to capturing 'the essential natures or essences of the objects' (as Edmund Husserl would describe it) or discovering the 'noetic content of intentional acts' (as Ingarden would say). This principle made Jean Paul Sartre, another enthusiast of the phenomenological theory of literature, formulate the paradoxical or perhaps even 'oxymoronic' thesis that reading is essentially 'directed creation' and that the writer provides a series of clues ('landmarks') that the reader has to put together.⁶⁵⁹ Semiotics, in turn, viewed reading from within a theory of the model reader, in which experience was not even allowed to 'spread its wings' because it was immediately constrained and regulated by numerous normativizing conventions and 'rules for decoding'. Having been reappropriated by theory, 'reading' was now just a dressed-up term for 'interpretation'.⁶⁶⁰ This signalled the stealth return of veiled form of orthodoxy that had very little to do with real-life experience. Barthes⁶⁶¹ was perhaps the only philosopher who attempted to restore to reading its intimate character, tying it to the individual, to the bodily and sensual experiences of the reader. This notwithstanding, the fact that modern literary studies so easily transformed 'interpretation' into 'reading' and then back into 'interpretation' is perfectly understandable considering its scholarly interests. Reading could not be defined empirically in modern literary, since doing so would first require an acknowledgement of the concrete, singular, unpredictable, subjective, sensual, bodily, and affective nature of this experience. Modern theory was simply unwilling to do so.

Roland Barthes pointed out that one of the important paradoxes of 'reading' as a theoretical category was that:

659 J. P. Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. B. Frechtman, Oxon–New York 2001, pp. 32–33.

660 I describe this problem in detail in the chapter 'Teoria i lektura: niebezpieczne związki' in [AT].

661 In *The Pleasure of the Text*.

nobody knows anything about the sense which reading attributes to the work, nor anything about the signified, perhaps because this sense, being desire, is established beyond the code of language. Only reading loves the work, entertains with it a relationship of desire. To read is to desire the work, to want to be the work, to refuse to echo the work using any discourse other than that of the work.⁶⁶²

Barthes aptly expresses here the basic problem posed by the experience of reading: due to its intimate character, reading (if we define it as a form of experience) is unknowable, singular, and to a large extent non-linguistic. A cognitive view of something may be similar or even identical, but when it comes to experience (of the text), the matter is not so simple. Reading is an intimate experience of the reader – it is conditioned by their individual potential and predispositions, as well as by all those properties that modern theory has tried so hard to push away: subjective experiences, images, emotions, and, last but not least, the (wretched) body and physical senses. This brief history of ‘reading’ in modern literary theory demonstrates that attempts to impose upon this experience some pre-conceived form of theoretical discipline or methodology are doomed to failure. Indeed, the experience of reading does fit well with modern theory and *vice versa*.

This short history of reading and the problems associated with it paves the way for an understanding of analogous problems faced by Derrida, who was very much concerned with the question of how to ‘record’ the experience of reading without sacrificing its singularity. The philosopher is much more consistent in his use of the term ‘reading’ (which in his writings at a certain moment replaces ‘interpretation’ – a concept rooted in metaphysics) than all modern theories combined. In Derrida’s understanding, ‘reading’ is not so much an interpretative representation of the Other’s text but the *experience* of reading in the full sense of the word. Reading for Derrida is an experience subordinated to, as he puts it, ‘an imperative’: ‘to give space for singular events’ by avoiding ‘theoretical knowledge’ or ‘constative statements’ [AL 55]. Naturally, this is not an easy task, as Ryszard Nycz observes:

regardless of the temptation and the need to turn to non-linguistic fields – to images, emotions, corporality, action, so-called first-hand feeling or experience [...] – we still return to the sphere of linguistic understanding. [KT2 44]

Nycz aptly summarizes concerns which Derrida also shares. For Derrida a return to ‘the sphere of linguistic understanding’ poses a risk of silencing the ‘eventicity’ and immediacy of experience. So how can a unique experience of

662 R. Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, London–New York 2007, p. 40.

literary language be repeated in one's own writing? Is this at all feasible, since, as Nietzsche observes, it involves reading 'a text as a text without interposing an interpretation'? Nietzsche has no delusions in this regard, observing that this way of reading is 'the last-developed form of "inner experience" – perhaps one that is hardly possible'.⁶⁶³ Derrida often refers to this attempt to record the linguistic experiences of the Other in his own language as 'impossible', writing about 'the impossible task of the reader' or 'the impossible task of the translator'.⁶⁶⁴

Another paradox thus presents itself: in *Signèponge/Signsponge*, Derrida reflects on how we can restore the memory of what was (at one time) experienced [SP 14]. He finds inspiration in Francis Ponge, who in *Reasons for Living Happily* writes: 'These returns of joy, these refreshments in remembrance of sensory objects, these are exactly what I call reasons for living.' The chance 'to refresh things' is very tempting for Derrida but he immediately faces a dilemma: how to do this in language? How to describe something and not lose it in description? Inspired by Francis Ponge, Derrida writes:

retain, for a moment, that freshness and its return in refreshment; he holds it very dear, the thing and the word, which we ought to follow by beginning to draw out his forename on that monumental pedestal, around which there is much for us to do, as if we were somewhat archeological tourists. [SP 14]

Derrida knows very well that in order to save the immediacy of experience the mind must 'return to things'. He further observes that

those reasons are just or valuable only when the mind returns to things in a manner acceptable to things: when things are not injured, and when they are described, so to speak, from their own, proper point of view. [SP 14]

The paradoxical nature of the reading experience is thus expressed in yet another way. As Ponge would say, how can we 'refresh a thing' and at the same time 'leave it intact'? And how can a thing be described 'from its own, proper point of view?' For Derrida this would read: how can we 'repeat' the Other's text and at the same time leave it intact? Derrida's reflection on the nature of reading is thus

663 F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann, R.J. Hollingdale, New York 1968, pp. 266–267.

664 In using the word 'translation', Derrida most often meant both translation as an activity (translation from one language into another) and the practice of interpretation – translation of the meaning of a text. Although he devoted separate discussions to both types of translation, they were quite similar: both practices highlighted the paradox of individuality and dissemination, or of uniqueness and repetition in language. See e.g. *The Ears of the Other*.

inherently paradoxical: the text is 'repeated' in reading but not 'from its own, proper point of view', while the intimacy of reading is challenged by the need to repeat this experience. Derrida finds translation (literally, as in translation from one language to another) to be equally problematic. The event of 'the untranslatable' which takes place between the original text and the translated text renders this process not only paradoxical but also at times futile.⁶⁶⁵ The deconstruction of translation, as Michał P. Markowski observes, is 'an elaborate response to the call of untranslatability (idiomaticity, singularity, eventness)' [EI 306]. According to the philosopher, translation, like reading, could not be a simple 'transitive' transcription, transferring meaning from one language to another. In translation, we come face to face with the otherness of a foreign language and we have to 'repeat' this experience in a language that we know. We must therefore refrain from translating in a 'safe' manner, i.e. without the 'risk of transferring from one language to another' [EI 318].

In *Glas*, published in 1974, Derrida tests the limits of translation by introducing the reader to the question of the 'untranslatability of the proper name' (which the philosopher considers to be a fundamental issue in translation). *Glas*, described by Derrida as 'untranslatable',⁶⁶⁶ 'produces' another traumatic experience, namely the limits of translation. Christopher Norris describes it as 'creating 'the maximum resistance to any straightforward, self-assured passage of meaning from one language to another.'⁶⁶⁷ The only way to translate from a foreign language into one's mother tongue is to 'repeat' the experience of the foreign language and its idiom. The experience of the translator turns out to be as complicated as the experience of the reader because, as Derrida puts it, when 'a fold'⁶⁶⁸ of ambiguity appears, and it becomes impossible to control a word with potentially two different and mutually contradictory meanings (which may remind us of the experience of aporia), translation immediately feels 'threatened'. Thus, translation could be described as a conflict between 'perfect translatability'

665 *Ears of the Other*, p. 148. In 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', he even writes that 'the question of deconstruction is also through and through *the* question of translation' [PI2 1].

666 *Glas*. Paris 1974. The term cited here is Derrida's, see 'Proverb: "He that would pun..."', *GLAS-sary*, ed. J. P. Leavey, Lincoln 1986, p. 17. This book is one of the best references on this text. Cf. also D. Carrol, *Paraesthetics*, pp. 93–94, G. C. Spivak, 'Glas-piece: A compte-rendu', *Diacritics*, Sept. 1977. See also. G. Hartman, *Monsieur Texte*.

667 F. Norris, 'Thinking the Unthought', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1987, Dec. 18–24, p. 1407.

668 Derrida also speaks about this in *Spurs*, e.g. 'no fold, no reserve' [S 129], or 'some hidden truth within its folds' [S 133].

and its impossibility. The same is true for reading. For Derrida, the answer to the question 'How to repeat the experience of someone else's language in translation and in reading?' is as difficult as answering the question 'How can a proper name be translated?';⁶⁶⁹ and reading is as 'impossible' as 'the impossible task of the translator (Benjamin)'.⁶⁷⁰ However, 'in the end', as Derrida observes in one interview, 'we are all mediators, translators'⁶⁷¹ and just as each text demands translation, and at the same time rejects it, so too does each text demand reading but at the same time reject it.⁶⁷² What makes reading, as well as other events of 'the untranslatable', such as the 'signature' [WD 174–175], 'proper name', or 'date', possible at the same time makes it impossible. Therefore, in the practices of Derrida, experiences connected with translating the 'proper name', affixing a 'signature' or writing the 'date' allow the reader to 'experience' the drama of reading by means of, as he puts it, 'nonsynonymous substitutions' [DF 12]. Desire (for 'appropriation') clashes with inhibition (irreducible and undefinable otherness). The institutional (the repeatable, the shared, the common) clashes with the non-institutional (everything that goes beyond institutional discourse). However, the paradoxical nature of these experiences, when the reader of the translator comes face to face with the Other and her text, is the driving force of the deconstruction of metaphysics, hermeneutics, and translation.⁶⁷³ Derrida makes use of this in practice, as well, as he looks for new ways to record in writing the process of reading in an effort to 'preserve' the original 'experience' of literary language. For him both literature and reading are 'suspending' and 'suspended references' (because, as he claims, they never come into contact with the object to which they refer but are at the same time conditioned by this reference).⁶⁷⁴ Neither literature nor reading are able to come into contact with its 'object': its ultimate sense or truth. The experience of reading is thus a constant re-enactment of this, in a sense, heroic effort. For Derrida, a repetition of the Other's experience in the language of a commentator or translator is impossible. That is why Derrida ultimately describes reading as a deeply dramatic experience, as a 'drama that activates and constructs every signature' [SP 20]. At the same time, however,

669 J. Derrida, 'Living On. Border Lines,' *Deconstruction and Criticism*, trans. J. Hulbert, ed. H. Bloom, New York 1979, p. 143.

670 He refers to this in 'Letter to a Japanese Friend'.

671 J. Derrida, 'An Interview with Derrida,' *Derrida and Différance*, ed. D. Wood and R. Bernasconi, Evanston 1988, p. 71

672 J. Derrida, 'Living On. Border Lines,' pp. 100–103.

673 For more on the experience of translation, see e.g. *The Ears of the Other*.

674 For more on the 'dependence' and irreducibility of literature, see e.g. [AL 48].

Derrida makes it clear that the reader has no choice but to 'become engaged' in this experience, exposing themselves to all the paradoxes and contradictions that experience brings with itself. Derrida thus concludes: do not ask what experience is. Simply participate in it.

In 'Shibboleth' the experiences of 'dating,' 'circumcision,' and 'shibboleth' are synonymous with the experience of reading – they are all experiences of the singular literary idiom which must be 'repeated.' Using the metaphor of the 'date,' which expresses the singular 'event' of literature, Derrida asks:

how can such an *other* date, irreplaceable and singular, the date of the other, the date for the other, be deciphered, transcribed, or translated? How can I appropriate it for myself? Or, better, how can I transcribe myself into it? And how can the memory of such a date still dispose of a to-come [*avenir*]? What dates to come [*à venir*] do we prepare in such a transcription? [SD 7]

Derrida answers in the words of Celan: 'But the poem speaks! It is mindful of its dates, but it speaks [AL 381]⁶⁷⁵ 'The *but*, Derrida notes, 'seems to carry the poem's utterance beyond its date [...] without ever compromising the absolute singularity, the inalienable property, of that which convokes it' [SD 7–8]. As a result,

the date, by its mere occurrence, by the inscription of a sign 'as a memorandum,' will have broken the silence of pure singularity. But to speak of it one must also efface it, make it readable, audible, intelligible *beyond the pure singularity* of which it speaks. [SD 9]

We may thus paraphrase Derrida's question – 'what takes place in this experience of the date?' [SD 9] – so that it reads 'what takes place in this experience of literature?' And the answer is: 'What takes place is perhaps what Celan calls, a little further on, *Geheimnis der Begegnung*, the secret of encounter' [SD 9]. It is obvious that it is an 'encounter' between the two individual and singular idioms of the writer and the reader – the reader 'repeats' the idiom of the writer in their text and signs it with their own 'date' (a recognizable sign of their individuality). But this is never, Derrida adds, clearly using Kierkegaard's language,

the absolute return of precisely what cannot come again: a birth or a circumcision takes place only once, nothing could be more self-evident. But rather the spectral revenance of that which, as a unique event in the world, will never come again. A date is a specter. But this revenance of impossible return is marked *in* the date; it seals or specifies itself in the anniversary ring guaranteed by the code. For example, by the calendar. The anniversary

675 Translator's note: The passage from Celan's poem cited here taken from the version of the Derrida's essay in *Acts of Literature* because in *Sovereignities in Question* this poem is quoted in the original German without an English translation

ring inscribes the possibility of repetition [...] The first inscription of a date signifies this possibility: that which cannot come back will come back... [SD 18]

Thus, the 'date' is a 'future anterior' because, as Derrida observes, 'it gives the time one assigns to anniversaries to come' [SD 25]. Consequently (and perhaps obviously), we can conclude that the very nature of the date implies that an anniversary can be celebrated ('anniversary turn of the date' [SD 12]). As such, 'the experience of the date' *always already* opens up the possibility of repeating a singular event. However, Derrida poses further questions. How can the 'dated' (the singular experience of the poetic idiom) return as an 'anniversary'? The answer is quite surprising: in a 'spectral' way. According to Derrida, the individuality of the 'event' marked by the date includes the possibility of its 'spectral' return. In this sense, Derrida explains, '[t]he date itself resembles a shibboleth. It gives ciphered access to this collocation, to this secret configuration of places for memory' [SD 24]. The (imperfect) repetition of the date opens the door for, as Derrida poetically puts it (after Celan), the 'spectral errancy of words'. In one of Celan's pomes he also finds a beautiful passage about 'incinerated words'—such words may come back but only as afterimages. For they are only 'phantoms', which, as the poet writes, come back

like unsepulchered words,
roaming
in the orbit of attained
goals and stelae and cradles.

Derrida ultimately describes reading as the 'spectral errancy of words', adding that

This revenance does not befall words by accident, following a death that would come to some or spare others. *All* words, from their first emergence, partake of revenance. They will always have been phantoms, and this law governs *the relationship in them between body and soul* (emphasis mine, AB.). [SD 53]

At this point, another experience comes into view, one known very well, in part, because we have occasion to 'experience death and mourning'. The 'spectral revenance' of the written word in reading, as Derrida observes,

comes to us from our relation to this revenance of the mark, then of language, then of the word, then of the name. What is called poetry or literature, art itself (let us make no distinction for the moment) – in other words, a certain *experience of language* (emphasis mine – AB.) [...] is perhaps only an intense familiarity with the ineluctable originality of the specter. One can, naturally, translate it into the ineluctable loss of the origin. Mourning, the experience of mourning, the passage through its limit, too, so that it would be hard to see here a law governing a theme or a genre. It is *experience, and as such* (emphasis mine – AB.), for poetry, for literature, for art itself. [SD 53]

The experience of poetry ultimately turns out to be, as Derrida puts it in the words of Celan, 'the experience of ashes' ('writing is in its turn the beginning of death, however young one is when he undertakes it', Barthes writes in his introduction to *La Vie de Rancé*⁶⁷⁶). However, reading is as much the experience of mourning as the experience of 'the passage through its limit', for example, when we mark the writing of the Other (and therefore her, as well) with 'spectral revenance'. This idea can be also expressed using the 'shibboleth' metaphor. The difference in the pronunciation of the word 'shibboleth' – a small and seemingly insignificant 'phonemic difference' – becomes crucial (just like 'a truth of being that *passes* through the *experience* of Nothing' [SD 62]). The difference is in itself meaningless but

it becomes what one must know how to recognize and above all to mark if one is to make the *step*, to step across the border of a place or the threshold of a poem, to see oneself granted the right of asylum or the legitimate habitation of a language. So as no longer to be outside the law. And to inhabit a language, one must already have a *shibboleth* at one's disposal: not only understand the meaning of the word, not only *know* this meaning or *know* how a word *should be* pronounced [...], but *be able* to say it as one ought, as one must be able to say it. [SD 26]

Derrida describes the consecutive stages of the experience of reading using other metaphors, such as 'to cross the threshold of a poem', 'to inhabit' a language or 'to have shibboleth at one's disposal' (which becomes at this point 'the cipher of the poem' [SD 27]). Indeed, in the experience of reading it is 'doing' that matters and not 'knowing' or 'understanding'. According to Derrida, 'it is not enough to know the difference; one must be capable of it, must be able to do it, or know how to do it' [SD 26]. And he subsequently adds that

We spoke of the *doing* that does not reduce to *knowing*, and of the *being able to do the difference* that comes down to *marking*. That is what *goes on* (emphasis mine – AB.) and what comes about here. [SD 29]

It is at this point that Derrida finally reveals his intentions, emphasizing the connection between reading and performativity. Reading in Derrida's understanding is 'doing the difference', attempting to do what the literary text does, and thus, as he observes, discovering 'that other order of truth which one would associate with poetic *performativity*' [SD 47]. This 'doing', let me emphasize once again, does not involve translating the idiom of the text. Neither does it involve discovering what is hidden in the text or ordering the meanings of the text in a

676 Cited in: P. Lombardo, *The Three Paradoxes of Roland Barthes*, Athens, Ga. 1989, p. 130.

coherent sequence – it is merely a process of ‘marking’ (‘pointing to the idiom’). According to Derrida, a single experience of reading is a (differentiating) repetition of another single experience of language. It is a repetition of another ‘date’ using one’s own ‘date’. Undoubtedly, this creates a certain risk of ‘passage’ (similar to the risk of ‘shibboleth’) because we never know whether we can successfully ‘do’ what is necessary in the Biblical parable to save one’s life, and in the case of reading – save literature. Especially because, as Derrida states (again in his idiosyncratic language), ‘[n]o dialectic of sense-certainty can reassure us about an archive’s safekeeping.’ [SD 40]. And what is ‘crossing the threshold of the poem’? Of course, it is also an experience:

This pass is a passion before becoming a calculated risk, prior to any strategy, prior to any poetics of ciphering intended [destinée], as in Joyce, to keep the professors busy for generations. [SD 27]

Derrida’s intentions are clear – the presence of ‘cipher’ (or ‘ciphered singularity’) is definitely experienced and not understood. In ‘Shibboleth’, the experience of reading turns out to be the exciting (even passionate) and spontaneous experience of the ‘cipher’. It comes as no surprise that this experience is very similar to the experience of literature. Because ‘ciphering’, Derrida adds, ‘is a passion, not an action, of the poet’ [SD 54]. This experience is indeed very passionate because the more ‘cipher’ is ‘ciphered’, ‘[i]t moves, fascinates and seduces us all the more’ [SD 27]. And, as Derrida further states, it is the ‘heart’s mouth’ that ‘sanctifies’ the individuality encrypted in the date [SD 22]. In order to discover the ‘ciphered’ mystery of poetry we need to reject ‘any concept, any knowledge, even a history or tradition, be it of a religious kind’ – because the ‘ciphered singularity’ of the ‘date’ is ‘irreducible’ [SD 33]. However, the experience of ‘shibboleth’, as we know from the Bible, is a singular experience. In life, controlled by violence, aggression, and war, as Derrida seems to imply, repetition is absolutely impossible, since circumcision or a failure to pronounce ‘shibboleth’ correctly may mean death. The world of writing and reading is different – here the singularity of the idiom becomes a ‘promised experience of memory as promise’ [AL. 42]. The act of dating, a synonym for the ‘event’ of poetic language, opens this event to repetition, for the possibility of celebrating, as Derrida metaphorically puts it, an ‘anniversary.’ Repetition is therefore absolutely necessary for the date to ‘commemorate’, although, the risk always exists that it can ‘efface’ the original act of dating (the past ‘today’ of a poem) or, as Paul Celan would say, reduce it to ‘Ash, ash. [SD 47]. Just as the mispronunciation of *shibboleth* could mean death, so too the failure to ‘do the difference’ could mean the death of poetry. At this point, we finally discover the main goal of these multiplied experiences, metonymic

substitutions, and metaphorical language, to which Markowski aptly refers as 'a poetic staging of the act of dating' [EI 300]. Derrida does all (and only) this to create an emotional experience of this risk.

Thus, in 'Shibboleth' Derrida primarily 'creates' the experience of the dangers and duties of reading. Naturally, it could be said that Derrida exaggerates or that he abuses the concept by juxtaposing the threat of real death with the 'death' of literature (in the process of interpretation). However, the philosopher does so to demonstrate how important the 'question of literature'⁶⁷⁷ is to him and how much depends on a seemingly ordinary act of reading. 'To read' means for Derrida 'to reject' (with no regrets) the safety (and illusion) of interpretation. Indeed, 'to read' means to give in to the experience or, as Derrida poetically puts it in *Spurs*, to constantly 'expose' oneself, 'roofless and unprotected by a lightning rod' [S 135]. It means opening oneself to the unpredictable, to 'the *arrivant*' without any 'self-securing' theory. It means embracing the drama, 'being' in the middle of a paradox, in the middle of a conflict between the 'seal' and the 'signature', between the 'repetitive' and 'the singular', between desire and necessity, in 'a dual of singularities'. To read means to participate, as Derrida puts it, in 'two equal singularities' the encounter of the literary text with the text of reading [AL 69]. And such a complex and paradoxical understanding of reading leads Derrida to a specific understanding of 'ethics' – to 'ethical experience' – which, as we already know, ends in his discussion with Levinas.

If, therefore, commemoration, and thus the 'repetition' of one experience in the experience of reading, is already inscribed in a poetic date, then, as Derrida argues, the difference between 'commemorated date' and 'commemorating date' is also blurred: the two 'tend to rejoin and conjoin in a secret anniversary' [SD 44]. Indeed, it is in this contamination of both 'dates', Derrida observes, that the false opposition between 'the empirical' and 'the essential' is abolished. As Derrida argues,

for a poetic date, for a blessed date, the difference between the empirical and the essential, between the contingent exteriority and necessary intimacy, no longer has any place. This non-place, this utopia, is the taking place or the event of the poem as a blessing [...]. [SD 44]

And consequently, as Derrida adds, 'a limit is blurred, that of the philosophical as such', that is, the limits of philosophy (metaphysics), with their distinction between the empirical and the essential, are blurred. Literature plays a very important role in blurring the difference between empiricism and reality. Thanks

⁶⁷⁷ He very often used this term.

to literature, as Derrida observes, 'philosophical experience' finds itself in the 'experience of language' and philosophy finds itself in the 'vicinity of poetics'. As Derrida further explains,

Philosophy finds itself, *finds itself again* in the vicinity of poetics, indeed, of literature. It finds itself again there, for the indecision of this limit is perhaps what is most thought provoking. It finds itself again there, it does not necessarily lose itself there, as some believe, those who, in their tranquil credulity, believe they know where this limit runs and timorously keep within it, ingenuously, albeit without innocence, stripped of what one must call the *philosophical experience*: a certain questioning traversal of limits, uncertainty as to the border of the philosophical field – and above all the *experience of language*, always just as poetic, or literary, as it is philosophical. [SD 44]

If, as Derrida postulates, the experience of literature were to be embraced by philosophical discourse, then the artificial limitations of philosophy could be questioned or even exceeded. Consequently, philosophy could be transformed from a discipline and a doctrine into an authentic 'philosophical experience'. These two distinct experiences of language, the experience of literature and the experience of philosophy, come face to face in *Glas*. Derrida uses a 'theatrical' strategy in order to visualize their respective properties. Even the layout of the book is a form of confrontation – Derrida divides the pages in half, with one half devoted to Genet and the other to Hegel. As David Carroll observes, in *Glas* 'both Hegel and Genet are cited, paraphrased and mimed.' Two 'textual performances' are taking place at the same time. However, their tone is determined by literature. The 'miming' of Genet, as Carroll points out, is done 'in the spirit' of Genet, but the 'miming of Hegel is also done in the spirit of Genet', because it is 'aimed at understanding the absolute spirit of Hegel' [PA 93]. At any moment in this 'encounter' between two idioms, it is 'Genet's texts that have the last and deciding word.' Thus, it could be said that 'literary experience' challenges the Hegelian ontology and demystifies the philosophical myth of a 'pure language of ideas'. However, if this is the case, then, as David Carroll asks,

how can Hegel be taken seriously after being brought down by Genet? How can philosophy in general be taken seriously any longer if it can be undermined by such a 'low' form of literature? [PS 93].

However, Derrida, as Carroll explains, does not try to announce

the victory of literature over philosophy, writing over theory [...]. It is, rather an *experiment* (emphasis mine – AB.) in playing one type of text off against a radically different type, one kind of discursive style, logic, and 'reasoning' off against a form of discourse that [...] does not obey the rules and logic determined by dialectical thought [...]. [PS 94]

Carroll aptly summarizes Derrida's intentions, capturing the essence of the reading practice found in 'Shibboleth'. The conclusion is as follows: experience may be 'repeated' only through another experience.

The notion of the experience of reading (and translation) as being torn between impossibility and necessity, as well as desire and necessity, is undoubtedly one of Derrida's 'grand questions'. He addresses it in almost every text, although his experiments are different every time. At the same time, however, Derrida in all his texts investigates the nature of experience – its, as he puts it, 'archeology' [SD 5]. In 'Shibboleth', he examines the phenomenon of an experience that takes place 'only once'. In *Signéponge/Signsponge*, he analyzes a different aspect of experience – one that is also inherently connected with reading. We learn here that whenever we decide to repeat the idiom of the Other (in reading), we inevitably 'take possession of' her language. And in doing so we also 'take possession of' the Other.

Signèponge: When the Other Becomes Mine

*the characteristics of the object selected for explanation
will be preferably those neglected until now.*

Francis Ponge, *My Creative Method*

In *Signèponge/Signsponge*, a book devoted to the works of Francis Ponge, Derrida takes aim at another interesting aspect of experience: the reader reappropriating the text (and the writer) being read. This is a situation, according to Derrida, when both the text of another and the Other (the undisputable owner of the text) become the reader's 'possessions' during the process of reading. What I find particularly interesting here is that Derrida once again doesn't merely state his opinions but (theatrically) 'performs' them, almost ostentatiously turning his statements into a performance that takes place with the participation of an imaginary audience. Throughout this 'performance', Derrida continually addresses the spectators and continually reminds them that they are indeed 'spectators' and not, for instance, 'listeners' hearing a lecture. He asks: 'What is it, therefore, which I will have mimed' and 'parodied' [SP 6], thus, indicating he has adopted the conventions of a 'performance' and that his 'actions' take place 'on stage', and not behind a pulpit in a lecture hall. The theme of his performance is stated explicitly: 'Francis Ponge will be my thing'. Despite what one might be inclined to think, Derrida's use of the word 'thing' in relation to Ponge is not meant to be offensive. Derrida is referring here to Ponge's 'materialistic' philosophy, which had influenced Derrida's philosophy greatly, perhaps even more than his poetry. In *My Creative Method*, Ponge observes that:

in any case ideas are not my forte. I have always been disappointed by them. The most well-founded opinions, the most harmonious (best constructed) philosophic systems have always seemed to me utterly precarious, caused in me a certain queasiness, an uneasiness, an unpleasant feeling of instability. [...] What is more, the validity of ideas most often seems to me in inverse proportion to the fervor with which they were expounded.⁶⁷⁸

678 F. Ponge, section titled 'My Creative Method' in 'from Methods', *The Voice of Things*, trans. B. Archer. New York 1972, p. 81.

He further adds:

What am I talking about? Well, if I have made myself clear, about creating literary objects which are most likely I won't say to last, but steadily oppose (*object-ify*, affirm themselves as objects) the spirit of each generation; which will remain interesting to it (since each generation will always be interested in external objects); which will remain at its disposal, at the disposal of its desire and taste for the concrete, for opposable (mute) evidence, or for the representative (or presentative).⁶⁷⁹

It is easy to notice the affinities between the philosophy of Ponge and that of Derrida. Both Ponge and Derrida even admire the same poets, including Mallarmè, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and Nietzsche, and try to follow in their footsteps. For example, in one of his manifestos, Ponge states:

LET US IMMEDIATELY ABOLISH VALUES, in every work (and in every method), AT THE VERY MOMENT WE DISCOVER, ELABORATE, ELUCIDATE, REFINED THEM. This, in poetry for example, is the lesson learned from Mallarmè.⁶⁸⁰

And Ponge's claim that the writer 'must work starting from the *discovery* made by Rimbaud and Lautréamont (of the need for a new rhetoric)⁶⁸¹ could even be considered a Derridean 'Commandment'. Ponge also states that 'there is no possibility of separating the creative self from the critical self'⁶⁸² and that a poet should never put forth a thought, only an object, that is, even a thought should *pose* (emphasis mine – A.B.) as an object,⁶⁸³ could be seen as a condensed form of Derrida's writing strategy. However, in *Signèponge/Signsponge* Derrida refers tellingly to yet another of Ponge's literary manifestos, *Le Parti Pris des Choses* (often translated into English as *The Voice of Things*, *The Way Things Are*, or *The Nature of Things*), in which Ponge enthusiastically expresses his admiration for things – the poet's beloved literary topic. For example, in *Proèmes*, Ponge argues

from many perspectives, it is unbearable to think that the words, reason and reality of man have for centuries turned upon such a humble carousel. To grasp this one need merely to direct one's attention to any sort of object, it soon turns out that no one has ever examined it carefully.⁶⁸⁴

679 Ibid., p. 87.

680 F. Ponge, section titled 'The Silent World Is Our Only Homeland' in 'from Methods,' *The Voice of Things*, p. 109.

681 'My Creative Method', p. 107.

682 F. Ponge, 'Francis Ponge: *Proematy*', trans. A. Kozak, et al., *Literatura na Świecie* 2006 no. 9–10, p. 32. (All translations into English from this collection are mine – T. A.)

683 Ibid., p. 32.

684 Ibid., p. 40.

This ‘cataloguer of the diversity of things’, as Italo Calvino once referred to Ponge,⁶⁸⁵ in his poems and short prose pieces focuses on perfectly ordinary things. In Ponge’s writing, Calvino writes, a box, moss, a pebble, or a door, a thing that ordinarily seems ‘indifferent and almost amorphous [...] reveals an unexpected richness.’⁶⁸⁶ Ponge is fascinated by the materiality of things – by shapes, textures, colours, and the ability to preserve ‘all traces.’⁶⁸⁷ ‘Plant expression is written, once and for all’, Ponge declares,⁶⁸⁸ later commenting that a plant’s ‘text’ cannot be ‘corrected’ – it can only be constantly ‘reread’ anew. However, it should be read ‘perceptually’ because too much emphasis on the word, he explains, leads to ‘the faults of a style.’⁶⁸⁹ Ponge concentrates heavily on ‘marginalized’ things, things that are overlooked by others, and tries to discover their ‘silent’ qualities. In *La Seine* [The Seine] he explicitly states that things remind him of ‘the written word.’⁶⁹⁰ We can see clearly here how Ponge could be so influential for Derrida, whose fascination with the material, with what exists in time, and what is exposed to looks and descriptions can be traced back to Ponge. Derrida also believes that we should pay attention to things, which in descriptions of them are subject to the law of ‘repetition.’ And if there is something that Ponge is afraid of, as Calvino observes, it is ‘repetition.’ Derrida might perhaps add that the being of a thing subjected to repetition, is in fact very similar to the being of literature: traces inscribed in it persist (thanks to the materiality of ‘writing’), but this is also why the literary text is constantly subjected to practices through which its singularity comes conflicts with the practices of ‘archiving.’ Ponge likewise finds this question fascinating. He expresses it in his own way:

But these objects of scant value, lost without order in a solitude broken by dune grass, seaweed, old corks and other debris of human provisions – imperturbable amid the greatest upheavals of the atmosphere – are mute spectators of these forces that run blindly after anything and for no reason until exhausted.⁶⁹¹

685 I. Calvino, ‘Francis Ponge’, *Why Read the Classics?* trans. M. McLaughlin, Boston 2014, p. 234.

686 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

687 F. Ponge, section titled ‘The Pebble’ in ‘Taking the Side of Things’, *The Voice of Things*, p. 76.

688 F. Ponge, section titled ‘Fauna and Flora’ in ‘Taking the Side of Things’, *The Voice of Things*, p. 66.

689 ‘The Pebble’, p. 76.

690 F. Ponge, *La Seine*, Lausanne 1950.

691 ‘The Pebble’, p. 75.

Ponge carefully examines which words best correspond to a given thing, in order to ensure its unique qualities are not lost in description. He also repeatedly emphasizes that things should be treated with respect and consideration. Ponge is fully aware that things come into contact with the perceiving subject through language, but at the same time he argues that words are not able to fully express the qualities of things. Indeed, as Calvino observes,

in Ponge language, that indispensable medium linking subject and object, is constantly compared with what objects express outside language, and that in this comparison it is reassessed and redefined – and often revalued.⁶⁹²

His concept of the ‘re-valuation of language’ is also something that is very close to Derrida. This refers to a form of description that brings together sensory experience, visual perception, and intellectual exploration. Ponge ‘explores’ the ‘micrology’ of things in his literary practices and conceives of ‘writing’ in a similar way: his ‘description of a piece of soap, for example, or a dried fig’ often develop into an entire book.⁶⁹³ Ponge and Derrida are both interested in subtle and often overlooked qualities in things. The interests and creative approach of both are thus ‘non-Western’ – the poet and the philosopher resemble Buddhist monks contemplating a Zen garden.

The meaning of ‘Francis Ponge will be my thing,’ repeated in Derrida’s text numerous times, thus becomes clear. For one, as a sign of respect for Ponge, Derrida identifies the writer with what is most valuable to him – a thing. However, this statement should be read not only in the context of Ponge and his philosophy, but also in the context of Derrida’s textual ‘performance’. By repeating this sentence several times, Derrida points to at least two experiences. On the one hand, he identifies himself with the poetic experience of Ponge, who in his descriptions of things identifies himself with the experience of their ‘being’. On the other hand, Derrida creates in his reading the experience of a singular ‘thing’ – of Ponge and his texts. The fact that Ponge himself is the subject of Derrida’s performance is actually in keeping with the poet’s philosophy. As Calvino adds,

Ponge [...] is ‘anthropomorphic’ in the sense that he wants to identify with things, as if man came out of himself to experience what it is like to be a thing. This involves a struggle with language, constantly pulling it and folding it back like a sheet which in some places too short, in others too long, since language always tends to say too little or too much.⁶⁹⁴

692 I. Calvino, ‘Francis Ponge’, p. 234.

693 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

694 *Ibid.*

This 'struggle' is very important for Derrida, and sets the general direction of his 'textual performance'. The performance itself takes place on two levels – on the level of Ponge's relation to the things he writes about, and on the level of Ponge's texts (and Ponge himself) as 'things' described by Derrida. On each level, the fundamental question is the same: 'what remains of the thing in writing?' This question, first posed by Ponge, is repeated by Derrida in relation to the poet (and his text) as a 'thing'. In both cases, we face the same dilemma: how can a thing be written and not lose its singularity? By bringing together this paradox of writing and reading, Derrida performs his experience 'in the spirit of Ponge' (as Carroll would say). Derrida uses the language and the works of Ponge to 'repeat' the experience of writing inscribed in his texts. Derrida states at one point, 'I am pretending to mime [Ponge's] *The rage of expression* so as to subject myself to the law of his text' [SP 10], emphasizing that his 'performance' defies mimetology because no words can 'mim[e] [their] subject matter and let the thing speak (and the thing here is Francis Ponge)' [SP4]. Derrida uses a variety of means to establish a direct connection with his 'audience', in an effort to bring both the audience and himself closer to the experience of the 'appropriation of the Other's text'. According to Derrida, this situation demands a high degree of responsibility. And in this sense, Ponge's book of poetry brings together (at least) three important themes: experience, performativity, and ethics.

Derrida begins his 'textual performance' in *Signèponge/Signsponge* by making 'a call' to the person whose presence he will need to continuously bear in mind. This is how Derrida attempts to 'empathetically' identify with the writer named Francis Ponge:

Francis Ponge – from here I call him, for greeting and praise, for renown, I should say, [...] But then he is already called, Francis Ponge. He will not have waited for me to be called himself. As for renown or renaming, that is his thing. I could have started just as I did: by playing around with the fact that the entire name of Francis Ponge (no deduction drawn from it yet by me) can, in accord with the overture *made* (emphasis mine, AB) him a moment ago, very well form the whole of an interpellation, apostrophe, or greeting addressed to him. Not only in his presence but to his presence, the very same, here and now, that opens up my call with an indisputable reference, one which my language will never have a chance to close on, and one which it will never have a risk to run with. [...] here is Francis Ponge, it is him that I name as a third person while pointing my finger. [SP 2]

The last sentence of this very theatrical prologue demonstrates that Derrida arranges his performance in such a way as to 'make' Ponge 'present', introducing him to the 'stage' as 'a third person' – together with the 'performer' (Derrida) and the audience [SP 6]. We should always keep this in mind, Derrida seems to

imply, because in the process of reading, the poet and his text become our ‘thing’. Derrida, of course, would not be himself if he did not point to another paradox. In *Signèponge/Signsponge* it is as follows: in writing we objectify a thing (that is essentially autonomous) and thus we objectify something that exists independently of us – something that does not have to ‘wait for us’ in order to exist. However, we need to ‘archive’ things because only then can a thing persist in time and draw attention to itself. Ponge also writes about this paradox, arguing that the writer should rescue things from their ‘mundane’ existence and make the reader truly notice them.⁶⁹⁵ Reading should do the same, although Derrida playfully points out that Francis Ponge does not have to ‘wait for him’, because ‘he is already called’ – his texts speak for themselves and no intermediaries are needed. So why is Ponge called? The philosopher answers: ‘for renown’. He thus ‘plays’ with the connotations of ‘greeting’ and ‘praise’. ‘Renown’ may also refer to reminding (giving the voice back) and thus ‘repeating’ Ponge’s text in reading. By means of this invocation, Derrida signals that when we own something that belongs to Ponge – his text – we should always keep him in mind. This notwithstanding, we should not conceive of the writer as ‘the sender of a message’ ciphered in the text, but as a concrete person – as an individual who, even if is no longer alive, still owns his texts. Derrida thus places his reading practice in an openly anthropological context – for him the writer is ‘present’ on the ‘stage’ of his textual performance as a man and not as a theoretical notion (contrary to modern ‘objective’ theories of reading). Derrida’s prologue also constitutes an introduction to the experience of reading – it describes a situation that takes place before reading commences; the philosopher even refers to it at one point as ‘object’ (*objeu*) [SP 12]. For if reading is an experience (and experience, as we already know, is an ‘encounter’ with the Other), it should be preceded by calling the Other ‘by name’. Indeed, Derrida demonstrates that in the experience of reading we ‘encroach on’ the Other’s personal experience of writing – thus a

695 Here one again, we can see the affinities between Ponge’s (and Derrida’s) thoughts and the views of the Russian formalists, especially Viktor Schkovsky’s thesis about the need to free ourselves from ‘automatic perception’. See V. Schkovsky, ‘Art as Device’, trans. A. Berlina, *Poetics Today* 2015, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 151–174. The Formalists (especially Schkovsky) also tried to find a bridge between the understanding of things and their perception. Of course, one can also see clear links with Brecht’s ‘alienation effect’. A thorough examination of Derrida’s concepts and the theories of the Russian formalists would be a very promising endeavour, but one clearly beyond the scope of the present book.

unique intimate bond is created between the reader and the writer.⁶⁹⁶ It is only the writer who can guide us through this experience:

he will have taught us all the ways to do that, all the operations by which one can make of one's signature a text, of one's text a thing, and, of the thing, one's signature. [SP 20]

These words may recall those of Sartre and his postulate that the reader is guided by the writer throughout the reading process. They also refer to modern theories which claim that the reader follows 'the instructions of the writer' ciphered in the text. Derrida to a degree agrees with such claims. For example, in his interview with Attridge he emphasizes that in the process of reading, one should 'giv[e] oneself up to the most idiomatic aspects of the work, 'taking account of [...] what is shared' [AL 68], such as the genre, the mode, or the literary convention. Indeed, we should pay attention to both the 'idiomatic' and the 'institutional' qualities of the text. Having said that, 'giving oneself up' to the idiom of the text should be considered a priority. Once Derrida establishes this, he begins his performance anew, noting that 'this is all very ambiguous'. The philosopher rhetorically asks 'Will I remove the ambiguity by starting some other way?' and indeed hopes that this new beginning will provide some answers. However, he certainly does not wish to 'remove the ambiguity found in Ponge's texts. He has a different goal – he tries to evoke an experience that would act a counterpoint to the sentence 'Francis Ponge will be my thing.' And thus, he observes, 'Francis Ponge will have been self-remarked.' The juxtaposition of these two sentences represents a conflict between reading as an intermediary in representing 'things' and the possibility of representing them without such an intermediary (Nietzsche would say 'without the intermediary of interpretation'). The reader has to remember that a 'thing' (the text) is able to 'draw attention' to itself, and that the presence of the reader or the interpreter is not required. Derrida further observes that:

Francis Ponge will have been self-remarked.

I just pronounced a sentence. It can be repeated, by me or by you if you cited it some day. Nothing will keep you from putting it into quotation marks, which it promptly hastens to furnish you. You can put it out to dry – it's still very fresh – with the kind of clothespins that are used now and then by photographers to develop a print. Why clothespins, you will ask. We don't know as yet; they also form, like quotation marks, a part of the negative that is being developed. [SP 2, 4]

696 In many places, especially *Sade. Fourier. Loyola* and *The Pleasure of the Text*, it can be seen that Roland Barthes shared similar thoughts about reading, who strived to 'humanise' the reading process and in various ways also tried to evoke an impression of intimacy (even erotic) with the author of the text being read.

Derrida then asks ‘What is it, therefore, which I will have mimed, parodied, and barely displaced?’ [SP 6] and answers, quoting Ponge’s *The Notebook of the Pine Forest*:

‘Pine forest, take off from death, from the non-remark, from non-consciousness! [...] Rise up, pine forest, rise up in speech. No one knows you. – Furnish your formula. – It is not for nothing that you have been remarked by F. Ponge [...]’ Here the forename contracts to the initial letter, but this will not authorize us to omit it as a barely memorable piece of evidence. [SP 6]

Derrida then observes:

I am no longer merely miming the thing named Francis Ponge from the moment that, this time, I announce that ‘Francis Ponge will have been self-remarked.’ [...] In my attack, the one who is remarked is also the remarker: reflective and resolute. Francis Ponge will have been *self-remarked*. [SP 6]

And further adds:

No doubt the signer is still called himself in those pine forests which he indefatigably describes as a ‘fabrication of dead wood’ and which he wants to see erected ‘in speech.’ The thing itself already remarks itself, is perceived under the form of a monumental, colossal signature, his very *colossos*, the double of the dead man in erection, a rigid cadaver, still standing, stable [...]. [SP 6]

The ‘signature,’ one of Derrida’s key concepts, refers to the irresolvable conflict of ‘ownership’ and appropriation, singularity and repetition. The ‘signature’ is also a symbol of resistance against arbitrary categorizations, random generalizations, attempts to ‘control’ the text and ‘monumental, colossal’ theoretical models. The signature, which, as Derrida remarks, ‘is not inconsistent with that death or omission of the author of which [...] too much of a case has been made’ [SP 22], invalidates due to its paradoxical nature virtually all existing methodologies, especially those founded on the opposition between ‘interior’ and ‘exterior,’ including biographical, psychological, formalistic, structuralist, and phenomenological theories. Indeed, the signature ‘goes beyond.’ It is paradoxical or even, as Derrida observes, ‘dramatic.’

The drama that activates and constructs every signature is this insistent, unwearying, potentially infinite repetition of something that remains, every time, irreplaceable. [SP 20]

This not the first time Derrida emphasizes the ‘drama’ of reading. This time the drama is inscribed in the conflict between the singularity of the ‘signature’ and the fact that it is ‘repeated in reading.’ The paradox of the signature, a unique trace of ‘idiomaticity’ subjected to repetition, indicates first of all that the

question of the signer ('never hiding any of his work from you; his body in the process of writing, his relation to the material of the language, to the dictionary that he manipulates,' etc.) should be considered differently 'every time' (because it does not allow 'mastery'), although it does not mean that it is not affected by 'law and typologies'. The play with the words 'thing' and 'signature' constitutes a proper introduction to the main theme of Derrida's 'performance' – namely the conflict between the written (marked) 'presence of the poet' and the temptation of the reader to appropriate both the poet and their text. That is why Derrida repeats 'Francis Ponge will be my thing' and 'Francis Ponge will have been self-remarked' throughout his 'performance'. When juxtaposed, these two sentences dramatize the process of reading, at the same time designating the two main protagonists: the writer (who 'draws attention' to himself) and the reader (who 'appropriates the writer'). However, this does not mean that the writer is independent of the reader. Literary texts need to be read – otherwise they become exhibits in a museum of literature. Reading animates and preserves literary texts. It further implies that the reader and reading (as a process) have a great ethical responsibility. When it comes to the late Ponge, Derrida observes, the reader is obliged to remember about the deceased poet – a 'spectrum' which, although it exists only in its signature, is 'still standing'. Regardless of whether the signer is still alive or not, the 'signature' always testifies to the fact that he owns the text. Repeating 'Francis Ponge will be my thing' and 'Francis Ponge will have been self-remarked' is essentially 'performative'. We can even imagine that Derrida utters the sentences each time in a different tone of voice to create a new context for each situation. This 'tone' means, of course, not only the character of sound, but also something that can be described as the 'manner of performance'. Indeed, as Derrida observes, 'Much would depend on the tone I want understood. A tone is decisive' [SP 2]. Thus, the manner in which the text and the writer are presented depends on the tone chosen by the reader who 'repeats' them. We could even say that this is the first 'turning point' in the drama. The reader is given the opportunity to 'appropriate' the thing because it is his 'tone' that 'is decisive'. This moment determines the dramatic structure of Derrida's 'performance' – the reader's desire to appropriate the text of the Other clashes with claims for autonomy because, as the philosopher observes, Francis Ponge is a 'sovereign subject' [SP 8] and 'remains an other'. The second 'turning point' in Derrida's performance is the conflict between 'repetition' and the 'thing [...] whose law demands the impossible' [SP 14]. By saying 'Francis Ponge will be my thing' and 'Francis Ponge will have been self-remarked' Derrida 'performs' (performatively creates) the experience of this conflict. He refers to the first part of his 'performance' as 'an opportunity to test out the law of the thing' and its

‘insatiable demand’ [SP 12]. This experience may also be described as ‘a situation of radical heteronomy in regard to the thing’ [SP 12]. It is experienced by everyone who ‘appropriates’ the text of the Other. The process of ‘writing things’ is thus questioned once again. Derrida agrees with Ponge when he says that words are not able to ‘repeat things’. However, they are indispensable if we want to preserve them. The only solution in such a situation is to reassess or, as Ponge would say, ‘redefine’, our language so that it is the language that adapts to the thing and not *vice versa*. Derrida observes that words should be used in their indicative and not imitative functions. Things should not be reproduced (imitated); however, they can represent some emotional states. This applies to both ‘material’ things (all these pebbles, shells, plants, corks, etc. found in Ponge’s poetry) and to the text (as a ‘thing’). Thus, instead of explaining the meaning of Ponge’s works, the philosopher focuses on the relationship between the reader and the text. For example, he emphasizes that the reader should not ‘attack’ or ‘approach’ the text ‘frontally’. On the contrary, the ‘thing’ ‘possessed’ in reading

obliges me to reconsider *mimesis* through and through, as an open-ended question, but also as a miniscule vanishing point at the already sunlit abyssal depths of the mimosa. *Mimo-*: said of plants which contract when touched. Mimic plants. Etym.: from *mimus*, because these plants, when contracting, seem to represent the grimaces of a mime. *Mimosa*. [SP 4, 6]

‘Calling for the presence’ of something as delicate, ‘mimic, and sensitive to touch as the Other and her text requires sensitivity and mindfulness, although, as Derrida admits, not ‘without a scratch’ and ‘some scene of signature’ [SP 4]. By reading, as Derrida further observes, we inevitably ‘attack’. And by ‘attacking’ Derrida means attacking by means of language. When we give ‘a name to a sentence’ [SP 4], we represent ‘the thing’ through language, for example, when we reconstruct someone’s text in a commentary. However, Derrida also adds that ‘an attack’ designates ‘in French’ ‘the first piece’ – it is thus ‘the first piece of a text, of a theatrical scene or an act, the intrusive intervention of a preliminary speech act’ [SP 4]. This basically means that reading is always a form of ‘attack on the thing’ motivated by the desire to ‘force’ one’s way into the text. This innate tendency to attack with ‘a preliminary speech act’ is both a necessity and an act of violence. The ‘mimic’ text of the Other that ‘contracts when touched’ defies our desire to ‘appropriate it in reading’ [SP 12,14]. This, in turn, leads to the ‘moments of depressed impotence’ we ‘have just seen’, as Derrida writes, during his ‘performance’ [SP 16]. However, there is also ‘the dance of an erection’ [SP 16] when at least for a moment we feel that we have managed to reconcile the absolute sovereignty of ‘things’ with our desire to own them. Indeed,

the experience that Derrida attempts to create in *Signèponge/Signsponge* has its beginning in ‘an order’ dictated by ‘a thing’ [SP18]. This order means that we are obliged to respect the singularity of things every time we try to ‘archive’ them.

Even such a brief summary of Derrida’s text demonstrates how his reading of Ponge differs from a ‘traditional’ interpretation. I am not sure if we can even call it a ‘reading’ – Derrida rather ‘performs’ some of the experiences that take place in reading. However, if, as Derrida observes, reading is so paradoxical, so problematic, and so oppressive for the text, perhaps we should stop reading altogether? Of course not. Derrida presents various experiences of reading to demonstrate that we can obey ‘an order’ dictated by ‘a thing’. But only ‘through the power of an infinitely singular writing’ [SP 16]. That is by ‘countersigning’ the text ‘signed’ by the Other. Unfortunately, Derrida does not explain how this should be done. Instead, he quotes Ponge:

But how, you will say, with the impatience of common sense, can a thing dictate an order? [...] Francis Ponge gives the answer. Quite simply (if you listen well) through the fact that he *knows and hears himself* in writing – the thing. [SP 18]

Derrida avoids answering in front of his audience. And this is another ‘turning point’ in his ‘performance’. ‘The show goes on’. In fact, it begins anew with another monologue by Derrida:

What I am risking here ought to be an event. [...] Therefore, I ought to submit to the law of his name [...]. To the work that is done *in his name*. To that which works in the name – as we say in the body – of Francis Ponge. [...] What I am risking here ought to be an event. It is on the condition of not seeking to dominate his work, or not seeking to enunciate the whole of it, its general law or matrix, not even in a virtual sense, and on the condition of trying to say something very limited, modest, effaced, and singular before the Ponge thing, and letting it breathe *without me*, I say again without me, merely prompting you to go and see for yourselves, that, renouncing any mastery or appropriation, I will have a chance and run the risk of an event. [...] I therefore warn you that I will treat only a piece, a small piece of his corpus; I will pose, or draw out, a very light, aerolithic, and spongy stone⁶⁹⁷ from the monument, perhaps a pumice stone, simply in order to ask how a name properly signed can become one piece among others, a stone of so little weight within a colossal corpus.

With the which, however, it mingles without remainder, here comprising itself, and himself, through and through. [SP 18–20]

697 Derrida choice of the ‘pebble’ motif was not accidental. Stones, and especially ‘pebbles’, were objects of great fascination for Ponge.

This is another twist. ('The twist here lies in the fact that an infinite debt is cancelled by itself' [SP 48]). Or an unfulfilled promise that an answer will eventually be given. Derrida clearly 'plays' here with the 'horizon of expectations' of the reader (i.e. their interpretative or reading habits). However, this does not lead to unravelling the mysteries of the text. Derrida's text thus becomes a variation on the subject of the signature, around which he monotonously 'turns' similarly to the Mallarméan 'ballerina' (only slightly deviating from her course). Derrida ultimately declares with disarming honesty:

Not to detain you too long, I leave it for each to clear up as best he can this singular complication of the event, *multiplied by the presence* (emphasis mine, AB), as they say, *here and now* (emphasis mine, AB), among those who are still listening to me and regarding me, of the signer in person. Absolutely impersonal. [SP 22]

While the above quotation may be disappointing for the reader, something is taking place here – Derrida is explaining the motivations behind his 'performance'.

If we assume that Derrida intends to induce in the audience the experience of a peculiar 'event of the signature of the Other' that is 'repeated' in reading, then variations on this theme 'performed' by the philosopher are supposed to convey the drama experienced in such a situation. Because, as Derrida observes, the 'experience of the singularity' of the signature can be conveyed only by the 'multiplication of (the Other's) presence' in the 'here and now' for those who 'listen' and 'see' and thus take part in this experience, as performed by the philosopher. Derrida is well aware that the experimental confrontation with the 'law of things' arranged in *Signèponge/Signsponge* does not resemble a traditional interpretation. As the philosopher (contemptuously) observes, the singularity of the literary idiom,

will have foiled those excessively loose or crude machines which are as much those of biographical or psychological criticism (or literature), [...] as those of formalist or structuralist criticism (or literature), which encloses itself too quickly within what it takes to be the inside of the text, leaving the signature on the outside and sheltered from its being put on stage, into play, or into the abyss. [SP 22]

Indeed, all these traditional methods seem inadequate to Derrida – hermeneutics has after all effaced everything that he cherishes in literature. In this sense, while the philosopher disappoints readers who expect from him an 'interpretation', he still offers a very insightful analysis of the reading experience. Derrida undoubtedly highlights many important aspects of reading, thus creating not so much a theory of reading as a philosophy of it. The philosopher 'performs' the experience of reading, because the 'event' of the literary idiom is attainable only in the experience of its singularity. Rooted in metaphysics, traditional methods

of interpretation either keep the idiom ‘sheltered from its being put on stage’ or ‘constantly reappropriate it’ [SP 22]. They do the same with the ‘event’ – metaphysics either effaces it or ‘appropriates it’. Thus, according to Derrida, the ‘event’ and ‘the experience of literature’ defy metaphysics and hermeneutics. That is why the philosopher conceives of a different reading practice, arguing that when the reader comes face to face with the otherness of a ‘thing’ (‘text’), they can only ‘perform’ a version of this experience on the ‘stage’ of the text in a series of differentiating (never identical) repetitions. Derrida’s theatrical fascinations are clearly visible here – after all, it is on stage that we may come closer to the Other and to the ‘immediacy’ of experience. Derrida tries to create such an experience in his ‘textual performance’, which is governed by a “logic” of *mimesthai* [AL 57]. This ‘mimic’ (and not mimetic) repetition is ‘at once identification and disidentification, *experience* of the double (emphasis mine, AB), thought about iterability’ [AL 57]. Ponge employs a similar strategy in his poems – he is Derrida’s best teacher. The philosopher observes that

The structure of the placement in abyss, such as he practices it, seems to me *to repeat this scene* (emphasis mine, AB.) every time: every time, but every time in a necessarily idiomatic fashion, the ‘differential quality’ affecting the very form of the signature, this latter remaining *the other’s*. From this comes [...] its dissipation without return, the signature no longer being tied to a single proper name, but to the atheological and modern multiplicity of a new *signatura rerum*. [SP 50]

As could be expected, literature is the best example for reading. The reader simply needs to follow it.

In his Ponge-themed ‘textual performance’, Derrida also refers to an event that took place at a conference on Nietzsche held at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1972 (he also describes this event in *Spurs*). At one point he says:

consigning, in today’s event, an allusion to something else which had already taken place at Cerisy. Three years ago, debating with Nietzsche’s styles, I had here pronounced: ‘Woman will be my subject.’ [SP 10]

This memory may act as an introduction to the final aspect of experience discussed by Derrida. Like Barthes, Derrida discovers that it is the erotic experience that is both the most inaccessible and ‘other’ to the mind. And as such, it has the greatest power to challenge all ‘theoretical fictions’. The time has finally come to unravel the mysteries of this ‘forbidden’ experience.

Woman Will Not be Pinned Down

Women 'put on something' even when they take off everything.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Derrida began his lecture at Cerisy-la-Salle in July 1972⁶⁹⁸ with the following words:

The title for this lecture was to have been *the question of style*.
However – it is woman who will be my subject. [S 35–36]

A 'woman' appears quite unexpectedly at the beginning of the talk. However, this is not as unexpectedly as one might think, at least when it comes to the writings of Nietzsche. Indeed, the theme of 'woman' frequently appears in the works of the German philosopher. What interests Derrida most, however, is the following observation: 'The value of dissimulation [...] is not at all extraneous to the relations between art and woman' [S 47]. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche also writes about artistic pretences, dreams, and fantasies:

[...] the spirit and power of the dream overcome us, and with our eyes open, coldly contemptuous of a danger, we climb up on the most hazardous paths to scale the roofs and spires of fantasy without any sense of dizziness, as if we had been born to climb, we somnambulists of the day! We artists! We ignore what is natural. We are moonstruck and God-struck. We wander. Still as death, unwearied. on heights that we do not see as heights but as plains, as our safety.⁶⁹⁹

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, in turn, Nietzsche asks the reader to suppose that 'truth' is a 'woman,' observing that the quest of dogmatic philosophers to discover the truth (as well as their relationship with women) leaves, to say the least, much to be desired:

698 Four years later, an expanded transcript of this speech appeared in print in a four-language edition (French, German, English, and Italian), *Éperons. Spuren. Spurs. Sproni* (Venezia 1976), and two years later a French edition was issued, *Les styles de Nietzsche*.

699 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann, New York 1974, p. 123.

Suppose that truth is a woman – and why not? Aren't there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women? That the grotesque seriousness of their approach towards the truth and the clumsy advances they have made so far are unsuitable ways of pressing their suit with a woman?⁷⁰⁰

Woman – truth – the desire to possess (both a woman and truth) – dissimulation – and finally art. This is the scenario Derrida follows in his text. And he begins *in medias res* with a discussion of feminine 'modesty,' which is a metaphor for concealing the truth. Indeed, Derrida argues that: 'Nietzsche revives that barely allegorical figure (of woman) in his own interest. For him, truth is like a woman. It resembles the veiled movement of feminine modesty' [S 51]. Inspired by Nietzsche, Derrida in his 'performance' identifies 'truth' with 'woman,' triggering a series of associations that are meant to produce an experience of the unavailability of both. Nietzsche in fact observes that the more the truth is covered up (like a modest woman), the more it is desired by 'dogmatic philosophers' (metaphysics). Philosophers desperately hope to possess both 'woman' and 'truth,' even though, as Nietzsche argues, they act with 'clumsy importunity.' The more the truth is covered up, the more it is desired – like a woman who hides behind a veil. As Nietzsche emphasizes, a woman (and consequently truth) is associated with 'dissimulation.' Of what exactly? At this point, Nietzsche seems to be somewhat confused. For example, when in *Beyond Good and Evil* he describes a woman who is 'dressing' in order to 'dominate' a man, he observes that: 'Nothing is so utterly foreign, unfavorable, hostile for women from the very start than truth, – their great art is in lying, their highest concern is appearance and beauty.'⁷⁰¹

'Women 'put on something,' Nietzsche adds, 'even when they take off everything.'⁷⁰² This seemingly contradictory statement ('Woman deploys the process of the operation in the interval of this apparent contradiction' [S 67], Derrida adds) makes sense in connection with the Nietzschean notion of truth. If 'truth' is a woman who lies, this means that truth itself is just a dissimulation of truth – its concern is 'beauty and appearances.' For Nietzsche, who does not believe in truth in itself, it is the only possible way in which truth can exist. Women's 'great art' is creating appearances and the goal of art is to create appearances as well. 'Playing' with the associations between 'the

700 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. J. Norman, Cambridge 2002, p. 3.

701 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

702 *The Gay Science*, p. 317.

art of lying' and 'the lies of art,' Derrida sums this up, saying that for Nietzsche '[i]t is impossible to dissociate the questions of art, style and truth from the question of the woman' [S 71]. Thus, we can say that art (which also apparently is a woman) pretends to be truth by means of style. And the themes of 'dissimulation' and 'play' (as a variant of dissimulation) are among the most important themes of Derrida's performance. Derrida agrees with Nietzsche that truth in itself, a transparent reflection of it, does not exist – just as woman 'herself' does not exist. Everything exists as long as it is a 'dissimulation.' By associating the (covered up) truth with a (veiled) woman and the desire felt for both, Nietzsche, as Derrida points out, opens 'truth's abyss as non-truth, appropriation as appropriation/a-propritation, the declaration become parodying dissimulation' [S 121]. Naturally, the implications of 'propritation' are the most important – they concern both the question of truth in philosophy and the 'functioning' of metaphysics, which always, as Derrida points out, 'proprieties' its objects. The main theme of Derrida's 'performance' thus becomes clear: it is an attempt to 'perform' the experience of desire for truth and woman. In *Signesponge/Signsponge* the dramatic nature of Derrida's 'performance' lies in the conflict between the absolute sovereignty of the Other and the temptation to appropriate her text, while in *Spurs* the desire for 'appropriation/a-propritation' (of truth and a woman) clashes with the unavailability of both. In his careful reading of Nietzsche, Derrida employs a strategy similar to the one he will use much later in *Shibboleth*. Indeed, *Spurs* is not a lecture on what truth is or how deceitful it is to imagine that we may ever be able to attain it. Instead, Derrida attempts to create an intense experience of unattainable truth by 'repeating' it in a real-life experience of the unattainable woman. The experience of unattainable of truth, in all its intensity, is created by activating emotions, senses, and the body. Derrida does not formulate any judgements on the nature of truth. Instead, the philosopher 'performs' the experience of unattainable truth, observing that his 'performance' is a 'presentation of truth' [S 87] – it is not meant to answer the question 'What is truth?' but 'How does truth become truth?'⁷⁰³ And truth becomes truth on the textual 'stage' by means of parody ('dissimulation') and appearances, which as Nietzsche observes, is inherent to truth. For Derrida this 'presentation of truth' is 'a discrete parody'

703 This can, of course, also be applied to Heidegger's 'truth of being,' which Derrida mentions in his text [S 111]. Derrida devoted extensive space to the issue of 'becoming truth,' or rather the performative production of it, in his book *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington, I. McLeod, Chicago 1987.

[S 95] and thus ‘a strategy of writing’ [S 95]. Indeed, the entire ‘performance’ takes place in ‘writing’ because, as the philosopher argues, writing has the ability to ‘produce’ (Nietzsche refers to it as a ‘form of style’) – it is a ‘mimic’ (and not mimetic) ‘repetition.’ Derrida seems to be most interested in a situation where, as Nietzsche puts it, a man realizes that ‘a woman will not be pinned down.’ Playing with erotic associations, Nietzsche describes this experience thus: ‘Certainly she has not let herself be won – and today every kind of dogmatism stands sad and discouraged. *If it continues to stand at all!*’/‘What is certain is that she has spurned them – leaving dogmatism of all types standing sad and discouraged. It is even left standing!’ [S] Regardless of Nietzsche’s ironic take on, as Derrida would put it, ‘phallogocentrism,’ the above quotation conveys an important message. Derrida emphasizes it by repeating it twice:

Woman (truth) will not be pinned down.

In truth woman, truth will not be pinned down. [S 55]

And he further adds:

That which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth – *feminine*. This should not, however, be hastily mistaken for a woman’s femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other of those essentializing fetishes which might still tantalize the dogmatic philosopher, the impotent artist or the inexperienced seducer. [S 55]

Like Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, Derrida ultimately concludes that ‘[w]oman, inasmuch as truth, is scepticism and veiling dissimulation’ [S 57] that resists appropriation. It is at this point that the connection between Derrida’s readings of Nietzsche and Ponge becomes clear. Both are based upon ‘a process of *propriation* (appropriation, expropriation, taking, taking possession [...])’ [S 109]. This is an experience that the metaphysical tradition knows very well. However, Derrida uses it against metaphysics in order to deconstruct it. The philosopher describes this strategy as follows:

Metaphysical questions and the question of metaphysics have only to be *inscribed in* (emphasis mine – AB) the more powerful question of propriation for their space to be reorganized. [S119]

In *Signesponge/Signsponge* the reader wants to ‘appropriate’ the text of the Other, while in *Spurs* a man wishes to ‘take possession’ of a woman. This chain of ‘metonymic substitutions’ ultimately leads to the realization that ‘truth’ is what ‘cannot be pinned down’ (even when we use violence). Indeed, the ‘truer’ truth is, the more it resists appropriation – the more it ‘covers’ itself up. Similarly to a text which ‘is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance’ [DIS 63]. Thus, a woman as well as both truth and a text all take ‘[p]leasure

in dissimulation,' as Nietzsche puts it (and as Derrida repeats after him) – they 'will not be pinned down.' '[T]he question of the woman,' 'woman' (who is truth and who appears to be truth), posed by Nietzsche allows Derrida to do what seems to be of greatest interest to him, that is, to question hermeneutics ('onto-hermeneutics') and its mission to discover the truth of a text (its true meaning). 'The question of the woman,' as Derrida observes,

suspends the decidable opposition of true and non-true [...]. The hermeneutic project which postulates a true sense of the text is disqualified under this regime. Reading is freed from the horizon of the meaning or truth of being, liberated from the values of the product's production or the present's presence. [S 107]

One of the 'effects' of *Spurs*, which Derrida is certain to 'produce,' is to push 'onto-hermeneutics' to its limit defined by the 'question of proper-ty' [S 111–113], exposing the shortcomings of 'a new metaphysic of property, indeed a new metaphysic' [S 117]. Metaphysics is a 'metaphysic of property' because, as the philosopher argues, it has been appropriating various phenomena for centuries. However, woman, truth, and text all resist appropriation and thus metaphysics is forced, once again, to surrender. As Derrida further observes, in its hopeless quest to appropriate truth – to reach truth in itself – metaphysics also has to surrender to the irreducible multiplicity of truths. The philosopher supports his claim by quoting Nietzsche. According to Derrida, for Nietzsche

There is no such thing as a woman, as a truth in itself of a woman in herself. That much, at least, Nietzsche has said. Not to mention the manifold typology of women in his work, its horde of mothers, daughters, sisters, old maids, wives, governesses, prostitutes, virgins, grandmothers, big and little girls. For just this reason then, there is no such thing either as the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche's text. [...] Indeed there is no such thing as a truth in itself. But only a surfeit of it. Even if it should be for me, about me, truth is plural. [S 101–103]

There are only 'multiple, variegated, contradictory [truths]' [S 103] that resist appropriation.

However, what exactly is the relationship between the metaphor of 'truth as a woman' and experience – except for the fact that Derrida 'repeats' the experience of unattainable truth through the experience of the unattainable woman? In *Spurs*, the word 'succumbing' appears only once in connection with the theme of seduction signalled by Derrida at the very beginning of his 'performance.' This is closely related to 'the question of the woman' posed by Nietzsche. While it appears only once, it is still very meaningful. Indeed, in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche argues that:

The magic and the most powerful effect of women is, in philosophical language, action at a distance, *actio in distans*; but this requires first of all and above all – *distance*.⁷⁰⁴

Derrida comments on the above thus:

A woman seduces from a distance. In fact, distance is the very element of her power. Yet one must beware to keep one's own distance from her beguiling song of enchantment. A distance from distance must be maintained. Not only for protection (the most obvious advantage) against the spell of her fascination, but also is a way of *succumbing* to it (emphasis mine – AB). [S 49]

Everything becomes clear at this moment. Nietzsche combines 'woman' and 'truth' (as seductive as they are deceptive) so that we may experience the seductive appeal of truth and succumb to its dangerous charm. This is Derrida's 'final touch' – it is at this point in his performance that we realize that the 'experience' of 'succumbing' to a woman resembles the 'experience' of 'succumbing' to truth. Thus, the question 'What is the desire for truth?' remains unanswered (at least Derrida would never pose such a metaphysical question). However, the desire for truth may be experienced through the desire for a woman – a woman after all does not surrender to a man just like truth does not surrender to philosophers. And it is this 'contamination' of two similar (though non-identical) experiences – the experience of the body, the senses, and emotions as opposed to the experience of the mind – that Derrida attempts to 'perform' in his text. The experience of unattainable truth and its deceptive and disruptive power is thus 'repeated' in a different, though similar, 'sexual' experience. In *Signesponge/Signsponge* Derrida begins his 'textual performance' by saying 'Francis Ponge will be my thing', while in *Spurs* he announces at the very beginning: 'It is woman who will be my subject.' Woman as a 'subject' resists objectification, which is why in Derrida's 'performance' she appears in the quotations from Nietzsche. She is present and distant at the same time, thus opposing objectification. Nietzsche (similarly to Ponge in *Signesponge/Signsponge*) acts as a guide for Derrida. For one, because, as Derrida observes in *Of Grammatology*, he is the only true empiricist in the metaphysical tradition, i.e. he manages to avoid the metaphysical traps of empiricism and binary oppositions. Nietzsche, as Derrida concisely (and eloquently) puts it, 'has *written what* he has written' [OG 19], demonstrating that it is possible to think and write about experience beyond the arbitrary metaphysical oppositions of the ideal and the sensory.

704 *The Gay Science*, p. 124.

In *Signesponge/Signsponge* Derrida once again refers to *Spurs* and the conference at Cerisy-la-Salle. He addresses his 'audience' thus:

You have the premonition that if a today were not always an idiom, 'Francis Ponge will be my thing,' I would hardly be lying if I said that this *repeats the event* (emphasis mine – AB) 'woman will be my subject' [SP 18].

Derrida thus 'repeats' an experience with which he tries to identify himself in *Spurs*, once again arguing that 'an event,' like 'an experience' (or the 'taking place' of experience), cannot be reproduced exactly in the form in which it happened 'for the first time' – it may only be 'repeated' through another experience. As the philosopher claims, the 'today' of an event or an experience is 'always idiomatic' insofar as it takes place only once. Thus, it may only be repeated by means of 'the same,' but at the same time is 'always already different' as an experience. The very act of repetition, in turn, implies that experiences are largely self-referential – they do not refer to something outside of themselves – like mirrors which only reflect other mirrors (as in Husserl's famous example of the Dresden Gallery which inspired Derrida at the beginning of his philosophical career⁷⁰⁵). It is the only way to make experiences 'present' – beautiful in its urgent desire to relive them. As Derrida observes in *Voice and Phenomenon*, the endless reference that Husserl describes as an 'individual experience' is at the same time 'the experience of the indefinite drift of signs as errancy and change of scenes (*Verwandlung*), linking the re-presentations (*Vergegenwartigungen*) to one another.'⁷⁰⁶ Yet another theatrical reference...

In his discussion of the Nietzschean question of truth as woman in *Spurs*, Derrida clearly alludes to erotic experiences, and thus becomes an ally of Roland Barthes. Derrida explains his reasons for abandoning rationality and wandering to the 'wild side' of experience, although he does it incidentally – as if on the margins of other more important topics. Derrida writes:

One can no longer [...] search for woman's femininity or female sexuality. And she is certainly not to be found in any of the familiar modes of concept of knowledge. Yet it is impossible to resist looking for her. [S 71]

If 'femininity' (and therefore the essence of a woman) is hidden in her 'sexuality,' this means that she cannot be 'pinned down' (in the twofold sense of the word). She resists rational understanding – she 'will not be pinned down'; she

705 He describes this in *Voice and Phenomenon*, p. 89. See also my commentary in *Dekonstrukcja i interpretacja*, p. 500.

706 J. Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, trans. Leonard Lawlor, Evanston 2011, p. 89.

will be experienced. A similar principle, in keeping with the rule of 'metonymic substitution' (which Nietzsche also observes), must therefore apply to truth. Thus, experience ultimately triumphs over reason, 'modes of concepts or knowledge,' and consequently over theory. It is only through experience that we can approach what is unattainable for the rational mind. Indeed, Derrida implies that perhaps the best way to achieve real intimacy with a woman and (against all appearances) with the truth is through erotic experience. Nietzsche shares this conviction. Derrida writes that:

All the emblems, all the shafts and allurements that Nietzsche found in woman, her seductive distance, her captivating inaccessibility, the ever-veiled promise of her provocative transcendence, the *Entfernung*, these all belong properly to a history of truth [...]. [S 89]

The philosopher further adds that:

As a result, the question 'what is proper-ty [...]' is no longer possible. Not only is appropriation a sexual operation, but *before* it there was no sexuality. And because it is finally undecidable, appropriation is more powerful than the question *ti esti*, more powerful than the veil of truth or the meaning of being. Furthermore, according to a second argument, which is neither secondary nor supplementary, appropriation is all the more powerful since it is its process that organized both the totality of language's process and symbolic exchange in general. [S 111]

If 'appropriation' has 'organized both the totality of language's process and symbolic exchange in general' and thus constitutes 'a sexual operation,'⁷⁰⁷ then this means that what marks language with ambiguity (and perhaps, as Nietzsche suggests, with 'sexual difference') is sexuality. It is after all the most primal experience. And at this point, Derrida comes close not only to Barthes and Freud, but above all to their insightful student – Kristeva.⁷⁰⁸

The sexuality of reading is also briefly discussed in *Signesponge/Signsponge*, although Derrida does not focus on this question as much as Barthes. However, Derrida also writes about the unique experience of intimacy of reading in which 'two (engaged-disengaged) entirely others' [SP 52] meet. Perhaps even *Spurs*, to which Derrida refers in his book on Ponge, is only a pilot study of such unintelligible experiences that give rise to the practice of reading. Or, better yet, it investigates the unexplored spheres of subjectivity first touched upon by

707 It was also a kind of 'endurance test' for metaphysics. Derrida believed that one of the basic metaphysical operations was to 'take ownership' of its objects. See e.g. [PO 55].

708 Due to a lack of space, I will not discuss the links between Derrida's and Kristeva's theoretical reflections.

Nietzsche and Freud. However, while in *Spurs* Derrida (inspired by Nietzsche) investigates to what extent woman and truth can be controlled, practically demonstrating that the seductive power of both defies all attempts at restraint; in *Signesponge/Signsponge* he comments more extensively on the experience of reading in the context of sexuality and aggression. Indeed, 'radical heteronomy in regard to the thing' paired with a desire for it lead to the feeling of 'disproportion.' As Derrida observes,

In the disproportion of this heteronomy, an erotics engages itself between two laws, a duel to the death whose bed and turf, object or objective (object) will always sketch out a signature in the *pre* of a text in abyss. [SP 12]

Derrida alludes here to the most primordial (and as Freud would put it 'mythological') of man's faculties – his drives. The philosopher refers to Eros and Thanatos, who according to Freud both play a role in one of the darkest human drives, namely deriving erotic pleasure from killing. While Freud has always been a significant influence on Derrida, in *Spurs* the philosopher is more concerned with Nietzsche and his concept of the 'original experience' of the power struggle that is love – 'the eternal war between the sexes' [S 109]. Thus, if the experience of reading stems from 'radical heteronomy in regard to the thing', and this heteronomy is essentially governed by a sexual (or murderous) conflict, then the experience of reading is also driven by desire and, as Derrida claims, the 'demand' of the Other who can never be satisfied. Derrida describes it thus, using his poetical language: 'Insatiable, yes, and insaturable, a point I insist on since it always also involves water, and thirst. He never has enough, neither of water nor of thirst' [SP 12].

Undoubtedly, in his careful reading of Heidegger, Derrida searches for the 'primordial experiences of being' which, as the author of *Being and Time* writes, existed even before they were first articulated in the language of metaphysics. Derrida looks for these 'primordial experiences' in literature. They could 'take place' in reading but only if reading is not constrained by rules or critical theories. These 'primordial experiences' discovered in reading are, above all, experiences of intimacy (or, as Derrida puts it in *Signesponge/Signsponge* 'vital engagement' [SP 50]), which cannot be created in a relation of 'exchange' or translated into a different language. They can only be experienced. Writing thus allows us to experience intimacy. This belief is shared by Francis Ponge who confesses in the preface to *Proems*: 'It all happens (or so I often imagine) as if, from the time I began to write, I had been running, without the slightest success, 'after' the esteem of a certain person' [SP 16]. And perhaps this desire to make the experience of reading intimate again (which Barthes describes in *Criticism and Truth*)

has inspired Derrida to venture into this dark underworld of human emotions, in which reading is a 'dance of an erection,' while the 'impossibility of appropriation' and 'moments of depressed impotence' are accompanied by short moments of delights and intimacy, when, as Derrida notices in his cryptic language (or perhaps simply repeats after Freud), 'jubilates' [SP 16]. And ultimately, the 'thing' that is supposed to become 'his' becomes (as Derrida observes after Ponge) 'the object of love' which 'live[s]' [SP 50], and thus 'breathe[s] *without me*' [SP 20]. Reading, freed from the limitations imposed on it by phenomenology, semiotics, and hermeneutics, thus becomes an intimate experience – it is dramatic and passionate (a duel of sovereign idioms or 'singularities' – [AL 69]). It is an erotic game in which the reader and the text have equal rights. Like Barthes, Derrida also explores experiences that resemble the irrational epiphany of intimacy. As an erotic experience, reading represents the dream of an intimate relationship with the Other and her text. What is more, in a sexual relationship there is no authority that would establish rules existing outside of it. Indeed, the partners in a relationship cannot remain neutral (uninvolved), because it creates its own 'rules.' It exists in the 'here and now' and is characterized by situationality, singularity, and uniqueness. And whatever can be understood (if anything) from (in) this relationship cannot be separated from the bodily and the sensual. What is more, such a sexual relation always carries an element of risk – we never know for sure if we are loved as much as we love the other person. Barthes addresses this question in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, and Derrida comments on it in his book on Ponge [SP 16]. 'Things in love' (as Barthes notes) exist only in a sexual interaction – they are born to experience love and die when it comes to an end. Thus, if the experience of reading is to be considered 'experience' in the full sense of the word, it is not structures or rules that come together in it but people. And, let me emphasize this once again, these people are not categories or entities, but real flesh and blood human beings – they feel, suffer, desire, and love – however banal this may sound. The literary text is not just a series of black marks on paper, but, as Derrida observes, a 'mark of singularity' of the Other, or, as Barthes adds, an 'anagram of [...] our erotic body.'⁷⁰⁹ Both Derrida and Barthes conclude that writing and reading are always intimate experiences – they are also inherently paradoxical, insofar as they are 'encounters' with an absent Other, whom we wish to 'make present' at any cost even if our efforts are doomed to failure. Ultimately, as a result of his careful exploration of the intimate secrets of reading, Derrida comes to somewhat obvious yet valid conclusions – reading is a singular

709 *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. R. Miller, New York 1975, p. 17.

meeting of 'two entirely others' who 'are outside of the contract process' that does not require any other rules except for those which, like in an erotic relationship, are established by two 'lovers' [SP 52] united in a shared, passionate, affectionate, sensual, and carnal experience, which they produce and at the same time are produced by. As Derrida observes in his interview with Derek Attridge: 'The experience, the passion of language and writing (I'm speaking here just as much of body, desire, ordeal)' [AL 50]. And perhaps this one short sentence is a perfect summary of Derrida's findings.

However, in the end we must ask whether this 'micrological' inquiry into the secrets of the experience of writing and reading, its 'archeology,' to which Derrida devoted so much time and effort can somehow inform contemporary reflection on experience and its poetics? I think so. Although it may seem like Derrida reduces the field of experience to 'literary experience' for the sake of its autonomy, he in fact demonstrates that literature is able to 'say' something important about experience in general. What is more, it does so much more 'economically' and thus much more effectively because of its 'eventicity' and potential for producing various experiences. Literature and reading, defined by the philosopher as a 'field' of experimentation, allow us to experience the very nature of experience. And while experience transgresses language, it still demands critical attention: what happens when we experience? How can we repeat a one-time experience? What remains of it in repetition? How does experience engage the mind and at the same time the body and the senses? And finally, what happens when we appropriate the text of the Other in reading? The writings of Derrida may thus be described as a 'laboratory' in which he 'experimentally' simulates how experience operates. In his analysis of the experiences of modern literature, Ryszard Nycz observes that perhaps the question of 'literature as experience'

should embrace diverse concepts, starting from Dewey's 'art as experience,' through Heidegger, Bataille, Blanchot, the 'late' Barthes and Derrida, Kristeva and Nancy, to Lacoue-Labarthe's 'poetry as experience' (not to mention the rich literary tradition of such writings). While these concepts may seem different, they are united, I think, by the belief that art, literature, and poetry, are a unique, significant (though often negative), and true form of experiencing reality (i.e. they are not a representation, a recreation, or a secondary copy).⁷¹⁰

This is exactly what happens in the writings of Derrida. Literature for him is a form of 'experiencing reality' and not its representation. Literature allows Derrida

710 R. Nycz, 'Literatura nowoczesna jako doświadczenie,' *Teksty Drugie* 2006, no. 6, pp. 65–66.

to recognize and capture the unique properties of experience. In a conversation with Derek Attridge the philosopher observes that if '[l]iterature 'is' the place or experience of this 'trouble' we also have with the essence of language, with truth and with essence, the language of essence in general' [AL 48], then literature is also 'the place or experience of this 'trouble' we have with experience. Literature 'demonstrates' the unique qualities of experience. However, the most important aspect of Derrida's writings, unorthodox and incomprehensible as they may at times be, whether it is searching for performativity in (and through) texts, or discovering hidden traces of experience (the word 'experience,' as Derrida observes in one interview, means 'crossing, journey, and ordeal'⁷¹¹), the most significant aspect of all his inquiries into the otherness of literature and its language is that he has always been guided (on his own 'territory') by literature. Inherently transgressive, literature has taught Derrida how to open up to the unpredictable. Philosophy has never given him the courage to do that. In conclusion, let me quote Ryszard Nycz, who ends his seminal article 'From Modern Theory to a Poetics of Experience' with an emotional appeal:

let us follow in the footsteps of literature, let us follow its verbal path of (and through) the experience of itself and the world. Let us take literature as a guide and not just as the subject of our research [...]. [KT2 58]

Regardless of how we assess the achievements of Derrida as a philosopher and as a reader from today's perspective, he is certainly one of the pioneers who cut this path.

711 J. Derrida, F. Ewald, 'A Certain Madness...', p. 290.

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