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A Deleuzean Poststructural Deconstruction

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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Abstract

This project seeks to reconceive a poststructural form of deconstructive criticism as a Deleuzian deconstructive commentary. I first explore the way Derrida's concept of *différance* is confined to a deconstructive criticism which traces it solely in order to critique metaphysical concepts. As an alternative to the confined use of *différance* in deconstructive criticism, I develop a deconstructive commentary which deconstructs the primacy of a commentated text. Instead of using *différance* solely to trace the limitations of philosophical concepts (Hegelian in particular), it can serve as a plane of immanence that tracks a multitude of differently configured philosophical concepts in their becoming, as opposed to focusing solely on their metaphysical limitations. This style of deconstructive commentary is found in and applied to Percy Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* despite belonging to the category of art—the poem figures a plane of immanence which tracks the mutation of different concepts.

Keywords:

Deleuze, Derrida, post-structuralism, deconstruction, Shelley, plane of immanence, conceptual personae, *différance*, commentary, concept.

Summary for Lay Audience

This project seeks to reconceive a poststructural form of deconstructive criticism as a Deleuzian deconstructive commentary. Deconstructive criticism critiques the implicit logocentric and metaphysical assumptions inherent within philosophy itself. This thesis seeks to re-examine deconstructive criticism's orientation towards metaphysics and logocentrism by identifying within its theorization a movement away from metaphysics. I first explore how Derrida's concept of *différance* is confined to a deconstructive criticism which solely traces it in order to critique metaphysical concepts. Deconstructive criticism's partial fixation on texts, which are read as logocentric, fails to directly engage with the texts' own perpetuation of *différance* because their primary concern is with how they conceal their own *différance* (rather than express it).

As an alternative to the confined use of *différance* in deconstructive criticism, I develop a deconstructive commentary, partly developed from Deleuze's and Isabelle Stengers' notion of commentary, in which the primacy of a commented text is deconstructed. Instead of a commentary that is subordinated to a prepositional function of a commented text, both commented text and commentary arise out of and are inseparable from one another. Instead of using *différance* to solely trace the limitations of philosophical concepts (Hegelian in particular), it can serve as a plane of immanence; *différance*, like the plane, can contain infinite virtual movements that track a multitude of differently configured philosophical concepts in their becoming, as opposed solely focusing on their metaphysical limitations.

I apply this style of deconstructive commentary to Percy Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* in arguing that the poem—despite belonging to the category of art—figures a

plane of immanence which tracks the mutation of different concepts. My commentary of the poem is inseparable from the figures chained to the Chariot producing different simulacra. Because the poem instantiates a plane of immanence on which concepts are created, the distinction Deleuze and Guattari make between philosophy as the creations of concepts and art as the creations of percepts and affects is subject to instability; art, specifically poems, have the ability to create new philosophical concepts aside from merely creating percepts and affects.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Dr. Vanderheide for serving as a supervisor for this project. He has patiently provided helpful feedback on all of my ideas while giving me the space to independently develop and revise them. He has helped provide a consistency in my ideas without limiting them to either a 'Derridean' or 'Deleuzean' perspective. I also want to thank and acknowledge Dr. Rajan for introducing me to Deleuze in the first place. The crossing of ideas between Deleuze and Derrida started from work under her supervision and she remains a personal and intellectual inspiration for myself. She has also helped me develop a SSHRC proposal with which this project is funded. I am grateful to both her and Dr. Plug for reading and providing comments of the first chapter. Gratitude is also owed to my parents who have always supported me.

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List of Abbreviations

Full bibliographic information can be found in the Works Cited.

(D) Jacques Derrida. *“Différance”*

(DF) Jean-François Lyotard. *Discourse, Figure*

(DR) Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*

(IOD) Rodolphe Gasché. *Inventions of Difference*

(LOS) Gilles Deleuze. *Logic of Sense*

(OG) Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*

(SP) Jacques Derrida. *Speech and Phenomena*

(SS) Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*

(TTOTM) Rodolphe Gasché. *The Tain of the Mirror*

(WIP) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy*

Introduction

The motivation for this study originates from a comparative claim Derrida makes about Deleuze in assessing his philosophy. Derrida notes that Deleuze remains one to whom he “judged [himself] to be the closest” (“I’m Going to Have to Wander All Alone” 3), which implies an affinity between their philosophical projects. Even though Derrida identifies similarities between their philosophies, there nevertheless remain “dissimilarities” (3) which he explicitly mentions in his reflection on Deleuze. This study aims to explore some of these dissimilarities between the two philosophers in an attempt to theorize a different deconstruction than has been currently explored in deconstructive writers including Derrida himself. This study aims to seriously consider Deleuze’s assessment of the changing history of the philosopher. In *What is Philosophy* Deleuze and Guattari note that a great philosopher “lay[s] out a new plane of immanence, introduce[s] a new substance of being and draw[s] up a new image of thought” (51). However, the philosopher does not aim to absolutize or freeze this image of thought according to a principle of unity. These philosophers also have “several philosophies ... because they have changed plane and once more found a new image [of thought]” (51). In a similar fashion, I attempt to seek out new images of thought and new virtual infinite movements on the plane of immanence that comprises Derrida’s deconstruction. This project attempts to seek out new images of thought associated with deconstruction as a reaction against “functionaries, who enjoy ready-made thought[s]” (51) of deconstruction. There is already a body of work which has attempted to reconceive the way in which deconstruction has been theorized in different schools of thought, none

which however explicitly conceive of deconstruction *through* Deleuze in the way that I propose.¹

While there are works which have joined in this project of reconceiving deconstruction in ways which challenge its monolithic image of thought, there have been fewer studies which have attempted to perform this theorizing through a comparative analysis between Derrida and Deleuze. In “Future Politics,” Paul Patton outlines a difference between Derrida’s and Deleuze’s ethico-political orientation towards the future which is effaced by the affinities of their methodologies. In his essay, there is never a questioning of deconstruction as a methodology which differs from Deleuze’s, but rather the affirmation of a deconstruction that is affinitive with Deleuze’s methodology (i.e. the creation of concepts).² Thus, for Patton, there is no avenue towards a re-theorizing of deconstruction because his study of both Derrida and Deleuze merely identifies a shared “political activity [of their philosophies which are] oriented towards the future,” (17) as opposed to articulating the “undeniable differences of style and method” (16) between the two philosophers. Patton’s approach of bridging deconstruction with Deleuzian methodologies is something that Deleuze himself warns against in *Difference and Repetition*. Expounding on how difference has been traditionally conceived within forms of representation and identity, he outlines a “fourfold root of reason” (29) which is tasked with subordinating difference to

¹ Examples of such studies include Tilottama Rajan’s *Deconstruction and the Reminders of Phenomenology*, where Rajan makes a neglected critical distinction between a deconstruction with a valence of phenomenology that develops before the linguistic turn and a post-structuralism that develops during and after the linguistic turn related to representation and the sign. The new ‘image of thought’ she initiates is an “untheorized awareness of [the] difference” (1) between the two terms.

² This kind of methodology is similar to Heidegger’s understanding of the equal, which he defines as “always [moving] toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator” (“...Poetically Man Dwells...” 216), where deconstruction is one and the same process as Deleuze’s deterritorialization.

representation in different ways. One of the ways difference is subordinated to reason is its conception as an “opposition, in the relation between *determinations* within the concept” (29). In the case of Patton, the philosophies of Derrida and Deleuze are opposed for the purposes of establishing differences from and similarities to one another. However, the basis on which their philosophies are opposed presupposes an unchanging and fundamental characteristic of each philosophy that elides critique.

As opposed to articulating the differences between the philosophies of Derrida and Deleuze for the purposes of resolving or abolishing these differences, this project seeks to reconceive the possibilities of deconstruction by tracing through its conception threads of Deleuze’s concepts and methodologies that form an assemblage with what I will later term a post-structural deconstructive commentary. In this sense, Deleuze’s concept of difference in-itself, which in many ways serves as the base for his other concepts, and which Derrida mentions as being the closest concept with which he agrees, is used as a thread that runs through my reconception of deconstruction.³ It should also be mentioned that the deconstruction I take up, both in regards to how it has traditionally been conceived and how I reconceive it, occurs alongside rather than before the linguistic turn. Tilottama Rajan has argued that the terms *deconstruction* and *poststructuralism* have been used interchangeably with little to no thought about their differences. She argues that *poststructuralism* is an Anglo-American term which “names the fact that deconstruction in England and American was perceived almost entirely as a problematizing of or emancipation from structuralism which retained the latter’s

³ In “I’m Going to Have to Wander all Alone,” Derrida mentions in responding to Deleuze’s concept of difference in-itself that “Deleuze undoubtedly still remains, despite so many dissimilarities, the one among all those of my ‘generation’ to whom [he has] always judged [him]self to be the closest” and that he “never felt the slightest ‘objection’” to any of Deleuze’s works” (3).

dismissal of phenomenology” (4), whereas deconstruction “emerged as a return of a phenomenological project” (4) that developed before an Anglo-American reception of deconstruction concerned solely with the linguistic sign. This study does not take up the “untheorized ... difference” (1) between deconstruction and poststructuralism which obscures the former’s engagement with (rather than immediate foreclosure of) phenomenology. Rather, my focus on deconstruction concerns its more semiotic dimension which aligns with a poststructuralism rather than an earlier phenomenological deconstruction. I maintain the use of the word *deconstruction* in place of a general *poststructuralism* because, as Rajan states, Derrida and other commentators on deconstruction (such as Gasché) do not explicitly use the word *poststructuralism* in place of *deconstruction*. Also, because the word *poststructuralism* is used to describe a collection of different theorists, some of whom have conflicting views with one another, I use the term *post-structural deconstruction* to designate a linguistic form of deconstruction without diluting it within the more general term *poststructuralism*. Because my engagement with deconstruction concerns primarily Derrida’s earlier works (“Différance” and *Of Grammatology*) which I have not supplemented with earlier phenomenological writers such as Blanchot and Sartre, my reference to the word *deconstruction*, if we accept the thesis of Rajan’s work, should be understood as a *post-structural deconstruction*.⁴

In the first chapter I aim to outline the ways in which the concept of *différance* has been conceived solely within deconstructive criticism rather than on its own.

⁴ I avoid the general use of the word *poststructuralism* here because it is often used to refer to multiple different philosophies, as opposed to my specific use of an Anglo-American conception of deconstruction. Thus, I resolve to use the word *post-structural deconstruction* to reference a kind of Anglo-American deconstruction as opposed to an earlier deconstruction more concerned with phenomenology.

Différance, like other philosophies of difference that Deleuze surveys in *Difference and Repetition*, has been thought within philosophical concepts (specifically Hegelian concepts) as opposed to being conceived in-itself. I first outline how Derrida's concept of *différance* has affinities with Deleuze's philosophy of difference. By exploring readings in "Différance" as well as secondary expositional criticism on deconstruction, I outline how *différance* is ultimately conceived within (and outside) metaphysical concepts as a free play which critiques and opens these metaphysical concepts towards an alterity outside them. As a result, Derrida's treatment of *différance* as solely conceived within deconstructive criticism is similar to other philosophies of difference that think difference within, as opposed to outside, philosophical concepts. The confinement of *différance* within metaphysical concepts is not only limited to Derrida, but is also found within other post-structural thinkers whose methodologies can be considered somewhat deconstructive. In *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard tries to think a figural difference which effaces the categorical distinctions between figure and discourse. However, like the limitations of *différance* that serve merely to critique the metaphysical concepts it conceives, the figural difference does not establish a conceptualization of the figure, but rather the figure's entwinement within discourse as the figural. The figural difference serves as a limitation of the conceptualization of discourses as opposed to being thought itself. Similarly, in "From One Identity to Another," Kristeva distinguishes the semiotic, which is a non-signifying element within language, in opposition to the symbolic, which is responsible for signification. Like *différance* and metaphysical concepts, and like the figural and discourse, the semiotic and symbolic are inseparable and only thought within the context of each other in an undecidable language. The semiotic as that which

constitutes the non-significative dimension of language is never conceived itself, but only traced as the limitation of the symbolic dimension of language. Thus, other deconstructive thinkers follow a pattern of conceiving the non-representational only as the limit of the representational in line with Derrida.

Having established several reasons why *différance* has been conceived solely within deconstructive criticism, and by extension traditional philosophical concepts, I aim to reconceive *différance* within a broader form of a Deleuzian post-structural deconstruction akin to a commentary rather than a criticism. I first identify a linear form of deconstructive criticism that performs a formalist operation in Gasché's expositional reading of deconstruction in *Inventions of Difference* as well as some earlier work by Derrida. To contrast this rendering of deconstructive criticism, I distinguish between criticism and commentary, where the latter has no linear and formalist operation performed on a text. This kind of commentary does not seek to conceive of *différance* as a limit of a metaphysical concept nor is it used in more formalist renderings of deconstructive criticism which reduce deconstruction to a mechanical operation. As an alternative to the confined use of *différance* within deconstructive criticism, I reconceive *différance* as a Deleuzian plane of immanence in an attempt to free the former from its confined interrogation within and of metaphysical concepts. Like the plane of immanence, *différance* accommodates different movements of many philosophical concepts, not solely Hegelian concepts. These movements are also infinite and nonlinear compared to an intended use of *différance* for the purposes of a criticism that deconstructs metaphysical concepts. A deconstructive commentary, as opposed to a criticism, would track some of these movements of *différance*. In addition, this

commentary would not be propositional in nature; typically, criticism concerns criticism *on* something, whereas my notion of commentary originates from, within, or alongside a text. Building on Deleuze's notion of commentary in *Difference and Repetition* and Isabelle Stengers' concept of commentary, a post-structural deconstructive commentary would arise out of texts but would also be indistinguishable from texts out of which they arise as well. A deconstructive commentary would explore the infinite virtual movements of a text's plane of immanence as opposed to identifying a philosophical concept for the purposes of exploring its aporias.

In the final chapter I perform a reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, which demonstrates a post-structural deconstructive commentary that I have developed in the previous two chapters. In my reading, I argue that the poem establishes a space of the simulacrum similarly theorized by both Baudrillard and Deleuze. I explore various different philosophical concepts that unfold on the poem's plane of immanence as opposed to merely identifying philosophical concepts for the purpose of deconstructing them. In its establishment of the simulacrum, I also argue that the poem figures a deconstructive commentary in that there is no clear way to distinguish my reading of the poem from the figures in the poem creating simulacra of their own. In this sense, my act of commentary is not outside the poem, but arises out of and alongside the poem. The broader implication of this argument concerns Deleuze's own distinction between art and philosophy. As my reading intimates, Shelley's poem creates a plane of immanence, and within it, changing concepts, that is a function Deleuze exclusively associates with philosophy. Even though Deleuze associates art with the creation of percepts rather than

concepts, my commentary on Shelley's poem raises doubt as to the division of philosophy and art by attributing to the latter the function of creating concepts.

Chapter 1: Conditions and Constraints of *Différance* in Deconstructive Criticism

This chapter begins with a question posed by Gilles Deleuze at the beginning of chapter one of *DR*. He asks whether or not difference must be represented within a philosophical concept in order to be schematized (30). Deleuze then outlines how difference can be conceived without being represented but not before surveying different philosophies that have confined difference to representational concepts. Similarly, this chapter will trace the ways in which Derrida's concept of *différance* has been confined to metaphysical concepts instead of being conceived in itself. I will explore the ways in which deconstructive criticism traces *différance* solely within traditional philosophical concepts for the purpose of critiquing them. Because *différance* is conceived as a free-play within the limitation of metaphysical concepts, deconstructive criticism tends to assume a linear structure in which its engagement with *différance* is meant only to critique metaphysical concepts.⁵ In outlining the limitations of deconstructive criticism's engagement with *différance*, I do not mean to create a binary division between an apolitical deconstruction and a more politically focused deconstruction, but merely try to account for certain limitations within a deconstructive criticism which uses *différance* only to critique metaphysical concepts.⁶ I am also not concerned with saving

⁵ I am not concerned with labeling one monolithic deconstructive criticism that is derivative of all deconstructive thinkers, nor am I concerned with associating and critiquing a particular kind of deconstructive criticism solely with Derrida. I am concerned with the way in which certain conceptualizations of deconstructive criticism have reduced it to a generalized and mechanical operation akin to other formalisms that are applied to texts. Some of these generalizable conceptualizations have been found in certain parts of deconstructive thinkers' works, including Derrida, but as I will show in later chapters, this is by no means evidence that their conceptualizations of deconstructive criticism are *solely* generalizable and mechanical.

⁶ In *Ideology and Inscription*, Tom Cohen creates this division of deconstruction within his historical account of deconstruction. He distinguishes De Man's deconstruction as being "philosophically remote from today's pragmatic concerns [about politics]" that is also referenced as "nihilistic" (41), as well as a more politically focused deconstruction based on aesthetic ideology.

deconstruction from a perceived malediction by returning it solely to the sphere of a philosophical category.⁷ Thus, I ultimately suggest in this chapter that Derrida's concept of *différance* has been constrained to a metaphysical concept which it seeks to critique.⁸ I first aim to outline the ways in which Deleuze's overview of philosophies of *difference* possesses an affinity with how Derrida theorizes *différance*. Like Aristotle's individuated difference, Derrida only theorizes *différance* by its relation to the metaphysical concepts out of which it emerges. Aristotle's individuated difference attempts to 'save' difference by representing it within a concept, and even though the process of *différance* cannot be accused of the same, it nonetheless reproduces a concept which subordinates differences regardless of its critical intent. I use examples of deconstructive readings from Derrida to suggest that the metaphysical concept still occupies a privileged position within deconstructive criticism because of the concept's necessary representation.

Before coming to an understanding of why difference can be conceived as being constrained within a concept, it is important to outline how difference has traditionally been thought within the concept. In chapter one of DR, Deleuze outlines the traditional ways in which difference has been constrained. In outlining this confinement, Deleuze's goal is to analyze a difference without thought or representation. Or, put differently, Deleuze aims to think difference in-itself as opposed to difference for-thought. Deleuze's project can be broadly characterized as a "philosophy of difference" (29) where difference is rescued from its subordination in the fourfold root of reason. In DR,

⁷ Gasché is one such figure who attempts to provide an account of deconstruction rooted in philosophy in *The Tain of the Mirror*, along with Jeffrey T. Nealon in *Double Reading: Postmodernism after Deconstruction* who attempts to return Derrida's deconstruction (which he distinguishes from de Man's deconstruction) to its focus on philosophy.

⁸ By traditional philosophical concept, I mean the Hegelian concept.

regardless of whether Deleuze traces the conception of difference in Aristotle, Leibniz, or Hegel, he always maintains that there is a fundamental mistake of treating “a concept of difference ... with the inscription of difference *within* concepts in general” (32).⁹

In *DR*, Deleuze outlines several different philosophies which make use of difference in an attempt to ultimately show how difference within these philosophies has been subordinated to the concept. Deleuze outlines several examples in which Aristotle’s use of individuated difference is subordinated to the fourfold root of identity. For Deleuze, Aristotle’s difference is productive in that genera are “divided by differences” (31) which produce corresponding species. However, genera always remain the same while being divided by differences which specify particularized species “condens[ed] in the chosen direction ... of the essence” (31). While difference for Aristotle may be productive in that it determines species, it is only ever predicative within a concept of individuation that relies on an identity of genera (32). Aristotle’s use of difference can never account for a concept of difference because there are certain differences that remain outside the identity of genera, such as differences between genera which “are not subject to the condition that they share an identical concept” (32). Thus, in this particular case of individuated difference, the concept of difference is subordinated to that of an anterior identity—one of the fourfold roots of reason—already assumed outside the process of individuation. This individuated difference is also subordinate to the principle of opposition: because “two terms differ [only] when they are other, not in themselves, but in something else” (32), the similarity which conditions an opposition will always remain the same in the form of a genus. Therefore contrariety “expresses the capacity of a

⁹ I am specifically referring to the philosophy of difference in *Difference and Repetition* rather than his later philosophy of multiplicity.

subject to bear opposites while remaining the same” (32) because there is a presupposed anterior identity from which these differences are prefigured.

In a similar fashion to the way Aristotle initially presents his philosophy which includes concepts of difference within it, Derrida initially seeks to distance *différance* from metaphysical concepts. Derrida explicitly claims in his essay D that *différance* is not subordinate to concepts. According to Derrida, *différance* is a term used to describe two different processes. First, it describes the ability of signs to differ from one another, which indicates that difference is used as “distinction, inequality, or discernibility” (129). Second, it describes the inevitability for signs to defer and thus displace (or delay) their presence onto other signs in the form of a perpetual trace. Both meanings of the term are encapsulated in the word ‘*différance*,’ which uses a silent letter, a, to designate the possibility of always referring to both processes rather than one when the word is spoken. The application of difference is found most notably in Derrida’s project of grammatology. The French word *grammatologie* can be translated as a writing-talk, a speaking of writing, or a science of writing: all definitions have in common a project that seeks to analyze writing. The decision to name the work *De la Grammatologie* as opposed to *La Grammatologie* is crucial in that the latter posits a self-present and stable science (or analysis) of writing, whereas the former suggests a critical commentary that literally works around that science as a mode of interrogation. Derrida himself states in *Positions* that the title does not denote “a defense and illustration of grammatology” (12) but rather seeks to explore the conditions by which this science is made possible.

The primary way in which Derrida explores the conditions of this science is by first outlining and challenging an assumption about the structure of language that has

gone unquestioned throughout the history of philosophy. This assumption refers to the idea in Western history that one can use language in order to make present a metaphysics. Implicit in this assumption is that language itself has the capacity to make present what it represents through semiotic signs. The belief that language constitutes a metaphysics of presence is the basis on which language can be said to present “truth.” Derrida argues in OG that the history of metaphysics, the concept of writing, and the concept of science are all governed by logocentrism, which is the privileging of logos (i.e. word, speech, story or reason) as “central truth” (3). Specifically, the history of metaphysics has suffered from a logocentrism that privileges “phonetic [speech]” (3) over the written word because it is “full speech” (3), i.e. fully present, compared to “debas[ed] ... writing” (3) whose origin of truth is absent. As Derrida notes, this “full speech” presupposes the presence of a subject (Being) whose voice constitutes “the absolute and irreducible” transcendental signified which “effaces the signifier” (20) in a process of auto-affection with itself. This voice of Being in proximity with itself “does not borrow from the outside of itself, in the world or in ‘reality,’ any accessory signifier” (20) in its mission to produce a transcendental signified meaning unmediated from the self. Phonocentrism is only able to sustain its order over the written word by having “the concept of the sign” (4) order these hierarchical systems, which perpetuate a privileging binary. Derrida deconstructs this privileging by revealing that speech is governed by the same concept of the sign that also governs writing, that displaces the logocentric fantasy of speech as fully present and representative of truth. What allows Derrida to deconstruct logocentrism is his critique of the Saussurean sign. In one sense, the relationship to the signifier and the signified is arbitrary because there is no absolute or transcendental connection that ensures a stable

reference from the former to the latter; writing becomes “the disappearance of natural presence” (1692) that logocentrism relies on. In another sense, signs themselves are never fully present (and therefore cannot signify truth) because they rely on their definition from other signs that are both similar and different from them, but never a sign that directly signifies them. In this sense, all signs are absent and are caught in a perpetual trace trying to establish their presence by their interdependence on similar and different signs. Truth becomes something that languages displaces rather than something it represents. Both speech and writing suffer from “running the risk of never being able to define the unity of [their] project or ... object” (4).

If probing the conditions of grammatology is Derrida’s goal in *OG*, it is through the process of difference that he seeks to undo the metaphysical privileging of speech over writing; the undoing of all metaphysical privileging within philosophical binaries is one of the functions of difference that prevent the process of difference from becoming a metaphysical concept itself. In *D*, Derrida notes that besides *différance*’s double meaning, it also refers to “the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences, the play of differences” (130) that are inherent within all metaphysical concepts—including logocentric languages used to communicate those concepts. *différance* is a process which critiques the stability and closure of metaphysical concepts but which is itself “no[t] a concept” (130). In other words, *différance*’s indication of “the closure of presence ... and the conceptual order and denomination” (131) does not imply that this indication reverses and endows difference with this purported authority. If *différance* is a process which reveals inherent differences within origins without ordering those differences, then there is no sense in which difference subordinates these

differences within a concept. As Derrida elsewhere notes in *Writing and Difference*, structures have “always been neutralized or reduced ... [by] the process of giving [them] a center or referring [them] to a point of presence, a fixed origin” (279) by virtue of the language in which those structures are expressed. The purpose of the center is “not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure” (279). The freeplay—a product of *différance* which unsettles the center and stability of structures—is not what triggers the impulse to order the structure according to an organizing principle. Yet again, *différance* is understood as liberating the internal productive differences within a structure from a metaphysical origin as opposed to instituting that metaphysical origin through the ordering of those differences. It is clear that *différance* is not meant to replace a metaphysical concept by itself becoming a concept, but rather seeks to critique the stability of a metaphysical concept through the tracing of differences.

Despite Derrida explicitly stating that difference has no concept of its own, it is still attached to the concept in a relationship that exceeds mere critique of the concept. Put differently, although Derrida’s *différance* might function as a difference which critiques metaphysical concepts in logocentric discourses it simulates, it is still *forced* to directly represent these concepts in order to critique them. While difference is traced solely for the purposes of simulating and deconstructing metaphysical concepts, *deconstructive criticism* constitutes the possibility of critique in its instrumentalization of *différance* as the trace of metaphysical concepts and their respective limits. Like Aristotle’s individuated difference and Leibniz’s infinitesimal difference, *différance*

appears to be distinguished from Deleuze's difference in-itself because the former still represents "difference within the concept" (DR 32) rather than a concept of difference: insofar as deconstructive criticism traces *différance* by the way in which it figures (and disfigures) metaphysical concepts, it makes *différance* in relation or within the concept rather than independent of the concept.¹⁰ According to Deleuze, difference has been constrained to the concept insofar as it is "'mediated' ... to the fourfold root of identity, opposition, analogy, and resemblance" (29). Regarding identity, difference is said to be 'saved' by "representing it ... and by relating it to the requirements of the concept in general" (29). Difference must be saved or represented because of the perceived threat of a monstrous difference which does not submit itself to a faculty of representation; this difference is exemplified by the relations of an object-A which distinguishes itself from an object-B—an object-B that *does* distinguish itself from object-A.¹¹ According to Deleuze, the difference that is 'saved' is one which is conceptualized by the four-fold root of reason. Difference is related to the four-fold root of reason insofar as the former represents an: "identity, in the form of an undetermined concept; analogy, in the relation between ultimately determinable concepts; opposition, in relation between determinations within concepts; and resemblance, in the determined object of the concept itself" (29). In the case of Aristotle, difference is productive in that genera are "divided by differences"

¹⁰In aligning *différance* with Deleuze's "difference within the concept" (30), I do not mean to argue that *différance* is itself conceptualized according to a representative faculty of a traditional metaphysical concept. Rather, I argue that deconstructive criticism *traces* *différance* by its relation to the constitution and de-constitution of traditional metaphysical concepts. An emphasis should be placed on deconstructive criticism as a predicative subject mobilizing *différance* for the purposes of a specific trace because I do not argue that *différance* authoritatively traces itself in a limited way.

¹¹ Deleuze uses the example of lighting (object b) and a black sky (object a) to typify difference in-itself. Lighting distinguishes itself from the black sky, yet the black sky does not distinguish itself from the lighting. Lighting is supposed to serve as a difference in-itself in that it is a "determination as such" (28) without submitting to an analogy, opposition, resemblance, or identity with respect to its distinction from the black sky.

(31), which produce corresponding species. However, genera always “remain the same in themselves” while being divided by differences, which specify particularized species “condens[ed] in the chosen direction ... of the essence” (31). While difference for Aristotle may be productive in that it determines species, it is only ever predicative within a concept of individuation that relies on an identity of genera (32). However, it is not immediately clear why a claim can be made that Derrida’s process of difference still lies subordinated within a concept despite his explicit resistance against this claim.¹²

One of the first clues that will make clear why Derridean difference is still thought within a concept is Derrida’s insistence on the onto-theological nature of the concept. In the introduction to *Speech and Phenomena*, David B. Allison notes that “there can never be an absolutely signified content” (xxxviii) which can be represented in language per the arbitrary nature of the sign. The aspiration of presence in logocentric texts to which Allison refers does not understand itself as purely semiotic as he notes that “philosophy has generated a system of concepts whose import can be seen as essentially theological, what Heidegger has called the tradition of ‘*onto-theology*’” (xxxviii; emphasis mine).¹³ Therefore, the play of difference within language is meant to deconstruct the signifier’s arbitrary relationship with a signified meaning. When Derrida

¹² It should be noted that Aristotle’s use of difference which at some level always assumes an identity of a genus that specifies a species is confined to a concept of difference in a different way from Derrida. Aristotle is content with maintaining categorical distinctions between genera and species in a way that cannot be equally characteristic of deconstructive criticism. Deconstructive criticism does not affirm logical categories of genus and species as in Aristotle; however, *différance* is sometimes used in a way which only critiques the limits of a concept. Put differently, some uses of *différance* in deconstructive criticism only deconstruct the conceptual oppositions within a concept which orders certain differences, but never explores the functions of *différance* outside these conceptual oppositions.

¹³ In *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger traces the onto-theological foundation of the concept through Hegel’s formulation of the idea. Thinking for Hegel is the positing of “an idea” (43) and the highest idea is found in “being ... the self knowing truth” (43). In *Positions*, Derrida himself notes that he has “never believed that there were metaphysical concepts in and of themselves” (165) although they dissimulate their own order based on these very claims.

critiques the claim that language can represent full presence, this presence is always conceived within an onto-theological concept that assigns “a universal account [and] a final reason to things” (xxxiv). Therefore, the “the continuous shifting of differences ... [and] sedimenting of traces” (xxxviii) is done only in relation to the onto-theological concept which is oriented by its own telos. These shifting differences prevent a stable representation of an “ideal identity” (xxxviii) within a concept and suggest that the play of difference does not subordinate differences within a concept. In this instance, unlike the fourfold root of reason which attempts to represent differences within a concept, *différance*—via its tracing function—acts as an eye which scouts hidden differences that deconstruct the concept.

In other places in Derrida’s corpus, he clearly understands the overall project of philosophy as a desire to present an onto-theological concept. In the “Outwork” in *Dissemination*, Derrida first raises doubts about the unity of a book via the assurance of a word’s or concept’s meaning. He notes that every time we use a word or concept in a book, we are “caught in the assurance of a certain fore-knowledge ... [of] ‘what has always been conceived and signified under that name’” (3-4) while simultaneously recognizing a difference from that traditional signification of that name or concept. This “double mark” (4) of words both within and outside this binary opposition “works the entire field within which these texts move” (4). Therefore “every concept necessarily receives two similar marks—a repetition without identity—one mark inside and the other outside the deconstructed system” which results in a generic “double reading” (4). Yet, to suggest that all structures that rely on signification of words and concepts ultimately result in a generic “double reading” presupposes a certain repetition or genericization of

text/structure/philosophy. As Derrida notes, “no concept, no name, no signifier can escape this structure” in which its function as a repetition of the same coincides with its repetition of difference.

Although there are many examples of this repeated structural feature of signs and concepts, Derrida specifically demonstrates that philosophy itself suffers the repeated symptom of both using a sign and concept in a way that allows it to be ‘double read’ for both the presence it purportedly posits and the failure of that aspiration; or put differently, philosophy functions as a generic system which institutes the possibility of this double-reading by its presumed positing of an onto-theological concept.¹⁴ Derrida admits that he wants to “deconstruct ... the philosophical opposition praxis/theoria [which] can no longer be sublated according to the process of Hegelian negativity” (4), and in also doing so, Derrida deconstructs the philosophical project itself because he sees no difference between the aspirations of Hegelian dialectics and the telos of philosophy itself.¹⁵ The preface “announce[s] in the future tense ... what will already have been written” in the form of a presence. In its announcement, the preface also “makes the future present, represents it, [and] draws it closer” (7) so as to function as an exposition of what is to come. According to Hegel, the preface as an “explanation of the author’s aim” is an *ineffectual* supplement of philosophy itself because the project of philosophy “moves essentially in the element of universality, which includes within itself the particular” (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 1). The preface, as Derrida notes, “reduces the thing itself ... to

¹⁴ Other examples of this double-reading in Derrida’s corpus include the structurality of structures, the necessity and impossibility of metaphors, the pharmakon as both medicine and poison, and, as explored here, the impossibility and necessity of the preface.

¹⁵ The equivocation I wish to emphasize here involves Derrida’s deconstruction of Hegelian dialectics and the deconstruction of a unitary philosophical project in that they both share aspirations of presenting an onto-theological concept.

the form of a particular, finite object” (10) from the outside of philosophy. Thus, the preface is “both negated and internalized in the presentation of philosophy by itself” (11) because philosophy presents its universal truth by appropriating or sublating the particularities of that truth that lie outside itself (i.e. the preface); the preface (as exposition of the particularity of concepts) is already always included within the general project of philosophy simultaneously as it is excluded from philosophy on the basis of its non-essentiality. If philosophy includes the presentation of truth within itself, then an external preface is unneeded; but if the aspirations of the preface are identical with the project of philosophy itself (i.e. the presentation of truth), then the preface exists as a marker of anxiety for what philosophy is ultimately unable to achieve and thus becomes an *effectual* or necessary supplement to philosophy and will always lie outside the project. What is important for the purposes of my argument is that Derrida’s rendering of the preface as belonging “both to the inside and outside of the concept” (11) is predicated on the assumption that philosophy is synonymous with Hegel’s dialectical philosophy which includes within its project the systematic exposition (*Darstellung*) of itself through the form of presentation.¹⁶ Thus, when speaking of philosophy directly, Derrida locates the tendency of philosophy to present an onto-theological concept of itself *de facto* because he traces its structural history to Hegel’s dialectic philosophy. Evidence of Hegel’s reliance on the onto-theological concept is elsewhere seen in the introduction of his *Encyclopaedia Logic* where he understands the entire system of philosophy as comprising “a unity ... as a whole” insofar as the derivations and predications of each concept can “form a single, comprehensive, closed system” that can serve to provide “an

¹⁶ The self-presentation of itself is opposed to representation (*Vorstellung*)

exhaustive account of the ideal structures underlying all reality” (xi). However, there is no reason to synonymize the project of philosophy (the history of Western philosophy according to Derrida) with the aim of Hegel’s dialectics to present a systematic account of itself through a metaphysical concept. For example, in “Outwork,” Derrida notes that the function of a preface as the presentation and representation of the future is a flawed operation because it “confine[s] [writing] to the discursive effects of an invention-to-mean” (7), which implies that the writing as a whole can serve a function other than an intention predicated on the presentation of a concept. Yet, when it concerns philosophy in particular, not a general writing, Derrida still self-admittedly “grumbles against [a] proposition ... that philosophy consists in ‘creating’ concepts” (“I’m Going to Have to Wander All Alone”) which suggests that he disagrees with Deleuze’s understanding of an inventive project of philosophy.¹⁷ Derrida has not fully taken up the possibility of philosophy as a project that attempts other functions of conceptualization beyond indicating its failed aspirations of presenting presence through a metaphysical concept.¹⁸

Even though there is a clear distinction between difference represented (and subordinated) within a concept and a difference which opens the concept, the latter is still implicated within the fourfold root of reason by virtue of its relation to a concept which uses differences to relay its comprehensibility. Allison notes that there is “no meaning, no signified content, that stands above and is free from [the] play of differences” (xxxviii);

¹⁷ The word ‘writing’ does not refer “to that which critiques, deconstructs, wrenches apart the traditional, hierarchic opposition between writing and speech” (*Dissemination* 4) similar to his notion of arche-writing, but rather a more general form of writing that includes within it (not *de facto*) a “textual displacement” (“Outwork” 7) that critiques the assumptions of writing as presentation of the ‘true’ intentions of the work or author.

¹⁸ It should be noted that I am not arguing that Derrida does not believe in any other function of philosophy than its failure to posit a presence through metaphysical concepts. Rather, he does not directly take up alternative possibilities regarding an inventive project of philosophy.

however, this statement can just as easily be reversed to reveal an equally true statement regarding *différance*: no play of differences can be separated from a ‘meaning,’ if we understand meaning to rely on a presence within a metaphysical concept. While the play of *différance* is not merely represented within the concept, it nevertheless reproduces the concept (and the differences which comprise it) as a necessary object of critique. For example, in his essay “Force and Signification,” Derrida aims to trace the way Jean Rousset’s *Forme et Signification* privileges a structural understanding of form over force (in Nietzsche’s sense). Structuralism contains “form, relation, and configuration ... [which comprises] a totality” (19). This totality is in part constructed by the way in which a different structural “lens” has a panorama effect in that different depths of meaning are flattened onto a single plane according to a ‘lens’ or perspective.¹⁹ This flattening of depths strips a text of its force because “meaning is rethought [purely] as form” (5) within a schematization of a text guided or viewed by a structural lens (5). Derrida further notes that the structural form of a text “appears more clearly” (5) when the content—or force—related to the text is neutralized. As a response to this metaphysico-historical conceptualization of form, Derrida seeks to “methodically threaten”(6) the structural privileging of form so that it can be comprehended more clearly. In particular, Rousset’s intention to protect the “internal truth and meaning of the work from historicism, biographism or psychologism” (14) risks eliding the hidden historicity of the work itself in that the work contains a subjective origin whose authority is threatened by its non-presence within language. Thus, the task of criticism to assign certain structural

¹⁹ Derrida uses the interchangeable term “perspectivism” to describe a democratized epistemology where different structural perspectives can be interchanged to reveal their respective totality of a text. In literary studies, there are different ‘literary lenses’ through which we filter texts in order analyze their totality.

perspectives to a work “has the counterpart role of being a restraint” (14) to the meaning and value of a work that escapes classical categorization. In Derrida’s analysis of Rousset, he has used difference to critique the unity of a self-present origin within the form of a work, but in doing so, he has reproduced the unity of form as an object of critique.²⁰ While exposing this unity through a certain set of differences, his deconstructive criticism has nonetheless archived a previous set of subordinated differences within the operative concept of form to which *différance* is invariably a relation. *différance* is a relation to the deconstructed concept of form because—while reproducing it for the purposes of critique—it stands outside the concept of form.

Even though *différance* is not typically used to establish differences and conceptualizations without dependence on traditional philosophical concepts, there is no clear sense in which *différance* must retrace a prefigured metaphysical concept which it moves beyond. This is evident when we reflect on the initial goals of the essay which Derrida has outlined. First, Derrida notes that because we proceed from within structuralism, we “must muse upon what might signify from within it” (4); here, he establishes a linear movement of deconstructive criticism that moves from an internal structure regardless of its intended or possible destination. He repeats this aim for deconstructive criticism to move from within when he states that it is necessary to “seek new concepts and new models... *escaping* this system of metaphysical opposition” (19; emphasis mine): unclear in this statement is whether Derrida means that it is necessary to seek out new concepts or that the concept—regardless of its novelty—must have a

²⁰ Note that I do not argue that the tracing of *différance* to deconstruct metaphysical concepts ultimately resubmits the trace into a logocentric concept. I argue that the tracing of *différance* within and outside metaphysical concepts necessarily *reproduces* the metaphysical concept regardless of the fact that *différance* does not assume an identity within metaphysical concepts.

function of escape from a metaphysical opposition from which it appears. Arguably, the former meaning is just as plausible as the latter, which suggests that the play of *différance* which institutes new concepts does not have to proceed from or escape metaphysical dualities. While the play of *différance* usually reproduces the conditions of metaphysical identity in what it wishes to open, this reproduction is itself not an *inherent* condition and thus it raises the possibility of a *différance* as a concept that is not exclusive to the aims of a deconstructive criticism that uses *différance* only to critique metaphysical concepts.²¹ Further, Derrida states that the hidden “ history of the work” (14) has been obscured by the purported stability of its origin within form. The hidden history is not present and as a result, “there is no space of the work, if by space we mean presence and synopsis” (14). However, if one does not assume space to have a metaphysical presence that is represented, then there can exist a space beyond a representative metaphysical opposition which does not reduce space to a static concept which ‘is.’²² Practically, *différance* without relation to its interrogation of metaphysical oppositions within deconstructive criticism is a viable approach in that Derrida can just as easily proceed from the premise on which he ended the first section of his commentary: instead of ending his commentary on Rousset with an understanding that a work’s subjective origin initiates a reflection of its meaning outside of classical categories, he could explore the various possibilities of these meanings and the new categories they create.

²¹ Derrida’s and Deleuze’s orientation towards the history of philosophy are different in that Derrida seeks to expose the long-standing tradition of logocentrism in the history and does so by tracing *différences* within philosophies. Alternatively, Deleuze understands the history of philosophy as a “collage or painting” in that it reproduces philosophy but “bear[s] the maximal modification appropriate to a Double” such that the reproduced philosophy would coincide with “an imaginary” (DR xxi-xxii) double of that same philosophy as other than what it is. Therefore, Deleuze is not merely locating a logocentric pattern throughout works within the history of philosophy but imagining them as other than what they are.

²² This kind of space that is productive rather than produced is found in Derrida’s definition of *différance* which is spatializing in its differing/deferring movement.

One objection to *différance* conceived without a relation to that which it unsettles is Derrida's qualification on the economy of new concepts in the same essay. He states that an economy which escapes opposition "would not be an energetics of pure, shapeless force" (19): the keyword is 'would,' which signifies an evaluative statement about this economy rather than its possible existence. It is not the case that an economy of force could not exist, but rather that Derrida chooses not to pursue this economy in favour of one that includes "differences of site" as opposed to "differences of force" (20).²³ He goes on to say that the appearance of opposing differences of site and force result from his "wish to make apparent the noncritical privilege naively granted ... by a certain structuralism" (20). Here again Derrida's choice of the word 'wish' indicates his desire for the intended economy he wishes to pursue rather than an alternate possibility of an economy without relation to metaphysical opposition. Therefore, from these statements one can at least conclude that *différance* need not necessarily relate to a metaphysical opposition as part of the aims of deconstructive criticism, although this possibility has yet to be explored.

The conception of *différance* within modes of representation, in this case the philosophical concept, is not confined to Derrida's use of deconstructive criticism. Other thinkers have attempted to think outside the philosophical concept, or more broadly outside of any representative faculty, through unique figures. In DF Jean-Francois Lyotard is concerned with deconstructing the purported "self-sufficiency of discourse" (28) by exploring a difference within discourse that he calls the figural. Lyotard aims to critique the "current prestige of the system and the closure" which characterizes

²³Site is a synonym for structure.

discourses by identifying “the existence of an absolute excess of meaning in the ordinary word” (28). Lyotard identifies art as opposed to the signification of discourse because it “indicates a function of the figure, which is not signified” (29). Sometimes Lyotard will refer to the figural as a “true symbol [which] gives rise to thought, but not before lending itself to ‘sight’” (29) which is also subject to representation. While this symbol inevitably signifies as a result of its representation and identification within language, it remains as “absolutely-other” (29) to signification in discourses, which in turn produces a difference within (and outside) discourses constitutive of the figural.

However, even though Lyotard’s figural difference is meant to identify a symbol which escapes signification within discourses, it still remains wedded to discourses as an expression of the limit of discourses. For example, the ‘pure’ silence, perception, and sight associated with figures is “impossible” because it is “only from within language [that] one can get to and enter the figure” (29). Thus, the figure will never be seen as the figure but only the figural that enters and deconstructs discourses through its difference from the organizing and signifying principles of discourse. At most, the figural points to the “sight on the edge of discourse” (29) similar to the way in which *différance*, through the movement of free play, points to the alterity of conceptual oppositions within metaphysical concepts. Like Derrida’s *différance*, the figural is “both without and within” discourses it deconstructs. Because the figural “must remain outside of language as a system” while remaining the “very condition of discourse” (30), it will only ever be expressed as a figurative limit of discourses rather than a figure without its valence as a limit of discourse. Thus, looking to Lyotard’s difference does not offer a viable alternative to conceiving a difference without its representation as a limit of

representation. Instead of the figural becoming an emancipated figure freed from discourse, it falls back to the significative function of discourse to express the limits of discourse.

Other thinkers, such as Julia Kristeva, have also theorized a difference outside of representation. In “From One Identity to Another,” Kristeva identifies a signifying language that contains within it a “heterogeneousness” (133) opposed to the purposes of signification and meaning. This heterogeneous quality produces qualities approximated with the “‘musical’ [and] also nonsense effects that destroy ... accepted beliefs and significations” (133) within language. This signification of heterogeneity, not a signification of meaning, has “no sign, no predication, no signified object and therefore no operating conscious of a transcendental ego” (133). This heterogeneity is also identified as the semiotic as well as Plato’s *chora*, which is something “unnamable, improbable, [and] anterior to naming” (133). In opposition to the semiotic is the symbolic which represents “the inevitable attribute of meaning, sign, and the signified object” (134). According to Kristeva, the “semiotic heterogeneity ... is inseparable from ... the symbolic” function of significance. The semiotic constraints “perform an organizing function that could go so far as to violate certain grammatical rules,” and yet the “the symbolic function nonetheless maintains its presence” (134) in language. The inseparability of both the semiotic and symbolic constitute a language as a signifying apparatus that acts as an “undecidable process between sense and nonsense” (135). Thus, the semiotic, like *différance*, which escapes linguistic signification, is never studied in itself, but rather always thought through the limitations of signification or the symbolic. Kristeva admits, either according to a theoretical impossibility or her theoretical

intention, that she is concerned with thinking “an analytic theory of signifying systems and practices that would search within the signifying phenomena for the *crisis* or *unsettling* process of meaning” (135), rather than explore a theory of the semiotic which constitutes that signifying disruption in the first place. Like Derrida, Kristeva is not concerned, at least overtly, with conceiving a theory of the semiotic without its attribution to the symbolic, and instead seeks to study the former only as a limitation of the latter.

In this chapter, I have revealed how Derrida has limited the conceptualization of *différance* by necessarily relating it to metaphysical concepts it critiques. I have tracked both Derrida’s explication of *différance* in “Différance” as well as secondary expositional criticism which has, in many ways, side-stepped the theorizing of *différance* as a process distinct from its critical function in relation to the limitation of metaphysical concepts. However, the issue of a limited treatment of *différance* is not the sole way in which *différance* must be theorized. As I will argue in the next chapter, I offer ways different ways in which *différance* could be conceptualized outside of metaphysical concepts. My offering of different ideas initiates a plurality of possibilities rather than indicates a privileged ‘solution’ that would foreclose the questioning of *différance* that I have raised in this chapter. The play initiated by *différance* would no longer be tasked with tracing a preexisting concept but would be free to create new phantoms, simulacra, and even concepts; moreover, a conception of *différance* outside metaphysical opposition is intimated by Derrida himself. Common to either strategy I have outlined is a conception of *différance* apart from deconstructive criticism—a conception of *différance* that serves

as a plane of immanence that prefigures *many* concepts both metaphysical and non-metaphysical.

Chapter 2: Spaces of a Deconstructive Commentary

In this chapter I reconceive the space of *différance* as having affinities with Deleuzean spaces of simulacra and the plane of immanence in an attempt to distance it from any confined conceptualization within the interpretative models of deconstructive criticism. I develop this argument by exploring the possibilities for different conceptualizations of deconstruction that do not solely rely on its function as a propositional and formalist criticism. Since deconstructive criticism has often been conceived as propositionally performing an operation to a text (i.e. deconstructing it), I alternatively theorize a deconstructive commentary whose function is not solely propositional to a text but rather immanent to it. By exploring affinities between spaces implied—but unacknowledged—in conceptions of deconstruction *and* spaces of the simulacrum and the infinite space of the plane of immanence, I theorize a deconstructive commentary, as opposed to a criticism, which arises out of and alongside texts commented upon. This criticism, far from acting as a propositional criticism that performs an operation on texts commented upon, explores the movement of different concepts and the planes they figure and disfigure within an infinite movement of the plane of immanence. If *différance* was conceived solely through its figuring and disfiguring of metaphysical concepts in the preceding chapter, this chapter seeks to envision new ways of conceiving deconstruction—specifically a deconstructive commentary—by drawing affinities between spaces implied by deconstruction and spaces of the simulacrum and the plane of immanence in Deleuze’s works.

Expositions of deconstruction, such as Gasché’s “Deconstruction as Criticism” in *Inventions of Difference* and even some of Derrida’s own descriptions of deconstruction,

tend to elide alternative spaces outside the sphere of metaphysics when discussing the function of deconstruction.²⁴ In “Deconstruction as Criticism,” Gasché attempts to provide reasons as to why American literary criticism has understood deconstruction as a “mechanical exercise similar to ... formalism” (23). Gasché believes that modern American criticism has misinterpreted deconstruction as an earlier New Critical formalism which has prolonged “the impasses of traditional academic criticism [rather] than ... opening up new areas of research” (23). An American misinterpretation of deconstruction as a formalism has led critics to search for a “beyond-deconstruction” (23) in keeping with their interpretation of deconstruction as a re-brandished version of earlier formalisms.²⁵ Gasché is also critical of how deconstruction has become an “ill-founded application of conceptual tools borrowed from certain pilot sciences to the analysis of literary texts” (24). Because deconstruction has been treated as a formalism tasked with performing an operation on literary texts, many critics have ignored the “philosophical debates” (23) which directly concern deconstruction before its instrumentalization as a literary operation. In order to address the misinterpretation of deconstruction as a formalism and its uncritical application to literary texts as an operation, Gasché attempts to provide “one aspect of deconstruction” (28) that challenges these presuppositions held by American criticism. Building on SP and OG, Gasché asserts that deconstruction “aims at nothing less than producing such a primordial threefold structure that can account for the exteriority constitutive of three fundamental and interrelated topoi of Western

²⁴ Important to note here is that Gasché does not overtly distinguish between a deconstructive commentary and criticism. He uses the word ‘deconstruction’ in a synonymous way with its function as a linear form of criticism. Yet, as evidenced by his use of a preposition in the title of his chapter, deconstruction is conceived *as* criticism in contrast with other things as which it can function.

²⁵ While Gasché is certainly right in critiquing a strain of critics who seek to move beyond deconstruction by misinterpreting it as an empty formalism, there is reason enough to inquire about moving beyond deconstruction *as* criticism opposed to another mode like commentary as I will later argue.

metaphysics: presence, time, and sense” (41). In order for deconstruction to account for the exteriority of these topoi, it must first initiate “a reversal of conceptual binaries ... and a reinscription of the newly privileged term” (38). Even though all conceptual binaries, according to Gasché and Derrida, are hierarchically ordered spaces” (*D* 5), the re-privileged term should not be understood as situated within the same conceptual binary but should rather be seen as a radical alterity of these conceptual binaries. Derrida himself in *D* similarly describes a deconstruction where the re-privileged term within a philosophical binary acts as a “radical otherness” which philosophy cannot understand except through an appropriated “negative image” (33).

Gasché’s aim to provide an accurate account, or an ‘aspect,’ of deconstruction assumes a structural linearity of deconstruction that elides the movement—or free-play-- of *différance* within philosophy. Both Gasché and Derrida, in some places in his writing, trace a linear movement of deconstruction’s identification of a conceptual binary and then its subsequent overturning and re-inscription within the text. This much is seen in Gasché’s account of deconstruction’s origin. Far from asserting a unitary origin from which deconstruction proceeds, he traces the theme of self-reflexivity as an essential component of deconstruction at the expense of overlooking the heterogenous possibilities of philosophy itself. According to Gasché, one of modern American criticism’s misunderstandings of deconstruction is that it assumes the self-reflexivity of the text. To argue against this presupposition, Gasché notes that contemporary deconstructive criticism treats self-reflexivity as a part of “totalizing emblems, such as tropes, images, [and] similes” (27) which are “subject to the same aporias that haunt perception and consciousness” (27). Because “the act of production of the text will never coincide with

its reflection through totalizing emblems” (27), Gasché implies that productions of the text always intend to unify themselves with their stable reflection in language. He also notes that “deconstruction proceeds from and at the limits of the text” (28), where the limit is understood as an impossibility of a text’s reflexivity of its unified self. Gasché presumes to know the domain of the text “in its entirety” (28) by consistently creating a duality between the text’s tendency towards self-reflection and its subsequent failure to enact that reflection (i.e. deconstruction). A linear movement, or Gasché’s ‘aspect,’ of deconstruction, consists in figuring it as a repeatable operation which moves from point A (a hierarchized space) to point B (the deconstruction of that space and its subsequent reinscription within the margins of that space) as evidenced by Figure 1. Gasché himself is privy to this movement by acknowledging a “radical critique” of deconstruction which “mistak[es] the reflexive strata and the cognitive functions of the text that it describes for the text as a whole” (27-28). However, he himself conflates the reflexive dimension of the text with the text in its entirety in his refusal to properly distinguish the terms from one another and acknowledge a text without the tendency towards a hierarchized conceptual binary. He does note that reflexive strata “constitute *almost* all of the text” (28), but he never properly notes this distinction when outlining the movement of deconstructive criticism from conceptual opposition to deconstruction. In addition, it is also unclear what quantifiably constitutes ‘almost’ all of the text’s self-reflexive intention, given that a quantifiable determinant of a text’s intention also implies a certain agency, unity, or reflexivity of the text. Thus, in Gasché’s account of deconstruction as a criticism, he traces a linear movement from a self-reflexivity that he associates with a text

(and by extension, philosophy) to the deconstruction of that self-reflexivity.²⁶ In this sense, he ends up reinscribing his interpretation of deconstructive criticism back into contemporary American Criticism's treatment of deconstruction as a formal mechanical operation that he initially sought to critique.

Even though there seems to be a linear movement from order to deconstruction that Gasché traces, this is by no means characteristic of all conceptualizations of deconstruction. In OG, Derrida notes that “the movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside” but rather “inhabit [those structures] ... borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure” (24). What is important to note is that Derrida never uses the word ‘criticism’ in distinguishing a particular kind of deconstruction akin to a formalism, nor does he use deconstruction in a prepositional way that is applied to different texts. Deconstruction is likened to a movement of temporary inhabitation of texts which contrasts Gasché's previous schema of deconstructive criticism's linear movement from conceptual binary to deconstruction.

If *différance* can be used in such a way that is not figured as a response to (and by extension reproduction of) structuralism, as in Gasché's ‘aspect of deconstruction,’ then it remains to be seen how *Différance* can be conceived without a relation to metaphysical opposition. One of the first ways to initiate this thinking is to explore alternate conceptions of the philosophical concept that are not solely Hegelian. As noted before, Derrida conceives of the philosophical concept solely as Hegelian. One way in which we can begin to understand concepts of philosophy that are not solely Hegelian is to turn to

²⁶ I include the word ‘philosophy’ alongside ‘text’ because even though Gasché rarely uses the former word, he is in agreement with Derrida that “all conceptual dyads constitutive of the discourse of philosophy” (IOD 39) hierarchically try to repress or appropriate their exteriority.

Deleuze and Guattari's WIP. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "all concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning" (16) and are thus inseparable from problems. These problems, elsewhere understood by Deleuze as the "objectivity of a problem (Idea)" (DR 164), do not presuppose any transcendental solution (in the sense of Hegel's aspirations of philosophy) to the staging of these problems, but rather orient the philosopher towards a certain method of learning.²⁷ Learning opposes solutions in that the latter presuppose the stability of knowledge within a concept whereas the former "enter into the universal of the relations which constitute the Idea" (165) as a problematic itself. Because "problematic Ideas are precisely the ultimate elements of nature" (165), the concept seeks not to represent or solve the Idea *by* representing it through stable signification, as has been seen in the Hegelian concept. Rather, signs represent Ideas insofar as the "problematic structure is part of [Ideas] themselves" (163).²⁸ This problematic field presupposes "no ultimate or original responses or solutions, there are only problem-questions, in the guise of a mask behind every mask and a displacement behind every place" (107) *ad infinitum*. But this infinity of difference, or disparity as Deleuze calls it, that constitutes the problem-space does not submit to the opposition of 'good' and 'bad' infinity that Hegel conceptualizes. In the *Jena System* Hegel understands bad infinity to be that which "cannot express itself in

²⁷ The concept of problems that are staged in each philosophy are further explained in D&G's reading of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. D&G compare the problem space to the limits of law in that the latter "cannot be a domain of knowledge" (44) because it has no transcendental object that designates itself as true. Because the law is merely practical for establishing punishment rather than truth, the limits of law are a problem space which does not affirm any transcendental truth but rather explores the condition of its own difference, which never aims to solve itself by resorting to a transcendental solution. This is noted in the example of K exposing the lack of transcendental authority of law that remains missing "in the office next door, or behind the door, on to infinity" (45).

²⁸ One can think of the sign's representation of the problematic structure of Ideas as equivalent to Saussure's division between the signifier and signified. Contrary to Saussure's intention of the sign, the sign institutes its representative function of the gap between signifier and signified rather than their ideal completion.

truth” because it is only infinite “with respect to [qualities]” that lie outside of its aggregate. Quality or multiplicity that lie outside of infinity are a limit which must be sublated infinitely as a process which perpetually moves outside itself.²⁹ In contrast, the good infinite does not have its completion in the other that exists outside the self but rather expresses the absolute contradiction of “the other ... in the determinate itself” (35) or the “return into self within the other” (35). Deleuze’s problem-space, which produces problem-questions *ad infinitum*, is not a good infinite in that it obviously does not present a truth or definitive solution to the problems posed. It is also not a bad infinite because the intensive differences that comprise problem-spaces are not extensive magnitudes that lie outside the infinite series of which they are a part. What is important for the purposes of my argument is that this problem-space of intensive differences that are neither intentional nor extensional is synonymous with WIP’s “plane of immanence or consistency.” The plane of immanence is an infinite plane in which concepts of “infinite speeds and finite movements” (36) are occupied with problem spaces.

Even though Derrida seems to be concerned with a theorization of *Différance* as essentially tied to metaphysical binaries or systems of conceptualization, he does intimate that there might exist a separate space outside of metaphysical conceptualization within language.³⁰ For example, he understands the concept of play as that which is “beyond oppositions” (135) that it opens. Play is also indicative of “the unity of chance ... in an endless calculus” (135), which suggests an infinite space of calculus or of change

²⁹ The bad infinite is also linked with extensional views of the concept with the expressive purpose of a proposition (WIP 22).

³⁰ This spatial metaphor is one that follows the conclusions of *différance*’s definition. If *différance* is spatializing and temporalizing, then it is capable of instituting new spaces instead of tracing the limitations of old (metaphysical) spaces.

conceived without a necessary relation to a metaphysical system from which it is confined or gridded.³¹ Elsewhere Derrida speaks of the closure of metaphysical concepts and the terms they produce by referencing the metaphor of a “circle” (141). The outside of this circle contains a “fabric of differences” (141) that produce many things, but Derrida believes such an analysis that focuses on the theorization of the circle itself, and consequently the background or outside from which the circle is theorized, “draws us too far away” (141) towards a space that he is unwilling to think. He even admits that he uses the terms of metaphysics “out of strategic convenience” (141) to orient deconstruction towards that system (i.e. the circle), rather than anything outside it. Therefore, there are subtle hints throughout the essay that gesture toward a series of overlapping and cross-hatched differences that exist outside a confined circle of metaphysics. At the very least, Derrida acknowledges that an alternate space of difference does exist, but he seems unsure of how to speak about it without using “the language of presence or absence” (152).

It is possible to conceive of Derrida’s *différance* as a Deleuzian plane of immanence separate from the aims of deconstructive criticism. As has been already noted, Derrida explicitly chooses not to schematize a project of *différance* without its function within metaphysical concepts, although he does not outright deny the possibility of its existence either. In *D*, *différance* is a term used to describe two different processes. First, it describes the ability of signs to differ from one another, which indicates that difference is used as “distinction, inequality, or discernibility” (129). Secondly, it

³¹ This notion of calculus is strongly similar to Deleuze’s conception of intensive differences that are expressed in his differential calculus.

describes the inevitability of signs deferring and thus displacing (or delaying) their presence onto other signs in the form of a perpetual trace.

Différance is usually used in the second sense, where it implicates itself within an established set of differences that comprise a metaphysical concept. In order to speak about *différance*, Derrida makes gestures towards the concepts of strategy and risk. A discourse about *différance* is strategic in that an appeal to a transcendental truth cannot be evoked to ground *différance* metaphysically as a stable concept. Because transcendental presence within writing is impossible, a discourse about *différance* is risky in that discourse will not be oriented towards “a telos or the theme of domination” (135). The first definition of *différance* also suggests a function that precedes the constitution of origins through a series of inter-differences. We also know that *différance*—by virtue of its first definition—is spatializing and temporalizing because of its differing/deferring movement. It is clear from these two observations that the definition of *différance* suggests the possibility of a new space outside metaphysical opposition.

This alternative nonlinear movement has affinities with Deleuze’s conception of philosophy. In *WIP*, Deleuze understands philosophy as the “creation of concepts and the laying out of a plane” (36). Concepts can occupy the plane “without measuring it out” because the “concept’s combination is not a number” (36). We should immediately note that the idea of a concept occupying a plane without gridding, sedimenting, controlling, or quantifying it is notably different from both Gasché’s and Derrida’s understanding of the concept. As mentioned previously, the philosophical concept for them already takes the form of a “conceptual binary” that seeks to hierarchically subordinate a term. In addition, the concept is often construed as constituting the text itself, or in some

instances, *almost* all of the text, through a process of measuring a text. From Deleuze's perspective, concepts would not assume a hierarchical structure and they would also not map out a pseudo-quantifiable space of a text. Deleuze also mentions that the plane of immanence envelops infinite movements which are defined "by a coming and going" (38) to no one particular destination. This nonlinear movement contrasts an earlier figure of deconstructive criticism which moves in one line. Instead of identifying a conceptual binary and then re-privileging it through its appropriation of an exteriority the binary tried to suppress, there are infinite possibilities of movements of concepts and their formations as concepts themselves. For example, Deleuze notes that every movement of the plane of immanence "[turns] back on and [folds] itself and also ... fold[s] other movements or allow[s] itself to be folded by them" (39) such that there is no one repeatable linear movement within the plane of immanence.³² Thus, the Deleuzian plane of immanence, if understood as roughly analogous to Derrida's *différance*, would not create one linear movement as part of a project of criticism, but would explore different possible movements of figuring concepts (as not necessarily metaphysical) and their respective and infinite movements, as opposed to their limitations. The difference between linear forms of deconstruction which use *différance* for a teleological end and the infinite movements of planes of immanence which explore infinite virtual

³² It should be noted that Deleuze also characterizes the movement of the plane of immanence as a "reversibility" (WIP 38) in the sense that movements towards truth can also be reversed as movements away from truth. I disagree with Deleuze's usage of the word 'reversibility' because it implies that there could exist the stability of a movement that is grounded by its relation to assumed orientations towards 'truth.' For example, a reversible movement towards and away from truth would imply a movement that has no spatial difference from its current configuration. One could imagine a line from A to B that is altered in no way which constitutes a reversible movement from A to B and from B back to A. This privileged movement seems to contradict the infinite movements of the plane by its assumed linearity as well as the presumed objects of truth toward which the line is oriented. Thus, I favour characterizing the movements of the plane as infinitely different rather than reversible.

movements, rather than repeatable and linear, is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. In Figure 1, Gasché's account of deconstructive criticism establishes a structurally linear movement from an identification of a conceptual binary, its deconstruction, and the re-privileging of the subordinate term within the binary as a negative face of exteriority.³³ In contrast to this rigid movement, Figure 2 is a model of a potential plane of immanence populated with a concept.³⁴ In this model, there is a concept (A) which is configured in many different ways beyond a Hegelian formation of the concept (e.g. A1, A2) which continues infinitely. Within those configurations, there are different movements and limitations of the concept demarcated by variations of B, some of which include the limitations of Hegelian concept which both Derrida and Gasché recognize in their accounts of deconstructive criticism. Each of these variations of the concept (B) contains the condition for another concept to arise or fold upon concept A, such as concept D. Concept D could be configured differently depending on how concept A moves and which configurations it takes (e.g A2 opposed to A1). Understood less abstractly, Deleuze uses conceptual personae to track the movements of a changing concept on the plane of immanence. For example, he tracks the persona of an idiot who "wants to think for himself" (WIP 62) within the context of Christianity by searching for a truth. This idiot reappears in an altered way in later thinkers as a persona who no longer seeks a truth but affirms the absence of any truth. The persona is meant to demonstrate the "mutation"

³³ Gasché notes that the "contradictions inherent in philosophical discourse" (IOD 36) allow "the operation of deconstruction to be possible" (36), yet the word *possibility* suggests one possible configuration or intention of deconstruction. Nowhere in his chapter does Gasché imply any other intention or possibility of deconstruction other than its linear function he outlines. So, his characterization of deconstruction as just one possibility amongst many is slightly misleading.

³⁴ I use the word 'potential' here because this model is one possible configuration of the plane of immanence populated with concepts rather than a definitive structural representation that mandates how a plane *must* function. There are many other ways to figure the model than I have done in Figure 2.

(63) or movement of the changing concept on the plane of immanence. Far from being a linear movement, the model of the plane serves as a precarious movement of concepts that are not privileged in any linear way.

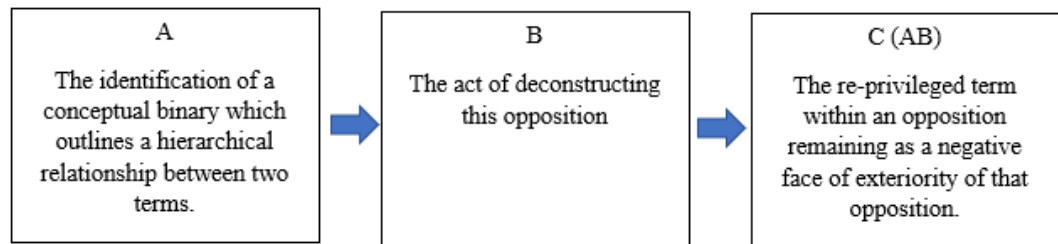


Figure 1. This linear path resembles Gasché's structure of deconstructive criticism which initially identifies a conceptual opposition that comprises a concept (A), deconstructs it (B), and then re-privileges the term as a negative face of exteriority (C).

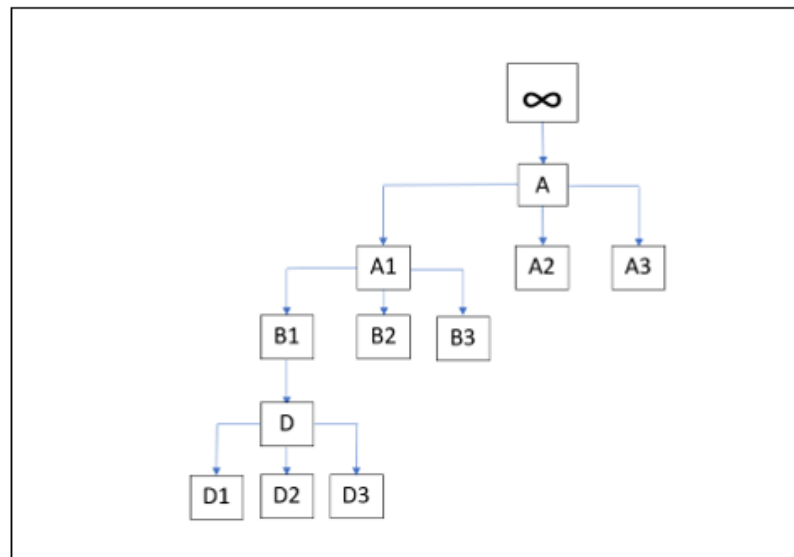


Figure 2. This is a model of a possible plane of immanence populated with concepts. The infinity sign serves as the plane of infinite movements. "A" is a concept which is not solely conceptualized from a Hegelian perspective and takes on different configurations (e.g. A1, A2 towards infinity). The variations of "B" represent different movements and limitations of the concept. Within those movements, there arises the conditions for a new concept ("D" and its variations).

Gasché has similarly theorized the conditions of a new space instituted by *différance*. In TTOTM, he notes that the infrastructures conceptualized by deconstructive commentary must account for “the inability of concepts to be purely metaphysical concepts” by tracing “specific aporias and differences between concepts” (165). These infrastructures preserve old names—i.e. a previous metaphysical concept—because they serve to designate “something that is of a certain exteriority to the discourse of metaphysics, to the extent that it is of the order of an unthought structural possibility of [metaphysical discourses]” (166). However, we see the same pattern of an infrastructural possibility—or what he sometimes calls infrastructural *x*—being subordinated within a concept by virtue of the fact that its possibility is preconditioned as an effect of the concept.³⁵ Nevertheless, these infrastructural possibilities are often figured as other[s] in relation to the systems from which they are excluded despite these possibilities serving as the condition “from which logic proceeds” (166). Derrida takes up this notion of infrastructural *x*, although he does not use the phrase. In D Derrida notes that *différance* “commands nothing, rules over nothing, and nowhere does it exercise any authority” (153) in the same way that the infrastructural *x* does not attempt to reverse the authority it critiques within a metaphysical concept: both make no claims of authority that follow from the critique they perform. Rather, they critique the grounds on which anything can claim authority within a metaphysical concept. The infrastructural *x* is threatening according to Derrida because it undermines a desire for a “presence of realm” (153) rather than any realm. This is why the infrastructural *x* attempts to “think this *unheard-of*

³⁵ The word *infrastructural x* is deliberately abstract because the different infrastructural possibilities which are in excess of metaphysical conceptualization have names that are contingent upon different historical metaphysical conceptualizations. Therefore, *x* is used as a generic name which accounts for the historical contingency of different infrastructural possibilities and the discourses out of which they emerge.

thought, this silent tracing” (153) outside the confines of the history of being. This particular process of thought does not “conceive the sense or truth of being” (153) but rather initiates a ‘non-sense’ in that the sense of something has always been assigned comprehension.³⁶ Derrida also understands *Différance* as being “older than the ontological difference or the truth of Being” (154), as well constituting an originary “play” from which the “sense of being is borne and bound” (154).

If the space of difference is one of non-sense (in that it does not aim to represent a truth within a metaphysical concept), Deleuze might offer a way in which we can rethink this ‘non-sense’ as paradox. In *Logic of Sense* Deleuze distinguishes between being and becoming through a series of different metaphors. There is a ‘good sense’ which “affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction” (1), but there is also paradox which is “the affirmation of both sense or directions at the same time” (1). In Plato, there is a dimension of “limited and measured things” and “a pure becoming without measure” (1). What is common in these dualities is the reversed movement from order or being to a mobile and paradoxical becoming (i.e. an opening or transgression of order). This transgression produces “the paradox of infinite identity” (2) in that a multiplicitous expansion of identities are all affirmed as opposed to the stability and metaphysical character of a certain identity. This infinite identity is further explored in the paradox of surface effects where effects are no longer attached and subordinated to a corresponding cause, thereby becoming quasi-causes. Simulacra “cease to be subterranean rebels and make the most of their effects” (7) in that they can now produce surfaces that were not

³⁶ Derrida notes that “being has always made ‘sense’” (D 154), so *différance*’s attempt to think of an unheard thought is not preoccupied with this particular connotation of sense. Derrida tends to synonymize the sense of something with the truth of something in that he uses the two terms synonymously

possible under the constraints of a corresponding depth. The reversal between platonic copy and simulacra does not indicate a subversive practice that asserts the rights of the copy over the Idea, but rather seeks to deconstruct the Idea-copy distinction altogether. Deleuze initiates this deconstruction by first indicating that Plato has inherently distinguished “good and bad copies, or rather copies (always well-founded) and simulacra (always engulfed in dissimilarity)” (257), so as to privilege the former over the latter. Plato can be broadly seen as ordering the free play of the simulacrum by denying its validity within the domain of “image-idols” (256). Copies are privileged because they are “endowed with resemblance” (257) to the Idea of objects that they imitate, whereas simulacra represent a “subversion” (257) because they do not “pass through the Idea” (257). Simulacra may still produce “an effect of resemblance” (258) to an object which it dissimulates, but it fundamentally “internalizes a dissimilarity” (258) with it at the same time. This is why the simulacrum falls outside the Idea-copy system that Plato outlines.³⁷ Because the simulacrum does not correspond to any material referent, it is characterized by a “becoming-unlimited” (258) able to evade “the limit” (258) of the material world it dissimulates a relationship with. For Deleuze, the simulacrum, by virtue of its non-representative and imitative quality, can be creatively used to generate a possibility of meanings.

Taking up Deleuze’s idea of an ‘infinite identity’ dispersed through creative simulacra, it is possible to conceive of a *différance* populated by these endless surfaces.

³⁷ Deleuze’s simulacrum falls outside the Idea-copy binary insofar as the simulacrum is not a copy subordinated to an idea, but rather a liberated image divorced from any Idea or model. The use of the word *Idea* refers to Plato’s understanding of Idea with model in this context rather than Deleuze’s understanding of the word differently explored as the doctrine of ideas in *DR*. Put differently, the simulacrum deconstructs the Idea-copy system insofar as it “contests both *model* and *copy* at once” (LOS 2).

As Deleuze noted, these surfaces do not posit an identity or presence, so their representation would not betray what *différance* has been trying to critique this entire time. Derrida's understanding of 'non-sense' can be rethought as a Deleuzian paradox which affirms all senses as opposed to those solely associated with comprehension and truth. Perhaps the play of *différance* has "no support and no depth" (D 154) because this spacio-temporal play is the production of creative simulacra without relation to a metaphysical concept which sets them in motion. Gasché notes that Derrida will often use the phrase 'phantom' (165) to describe the quality of the infrastructural x, which implies that *différance* can produce simulacra that are not mere copies of a system they critique. Instead of *différance* conceived as a process only related to that which it exceeds (that being a metaphysical concept), it can be conceived as a series of interlaced differences which allow "lines of sense or force to separate" (132) and connect for a seemingly infinite period.

However, merely intimating these separate spaces of *différance* outside of metaphysics as well as their affinities with Deleuzian concepts such as his philosophical concept and plane of immanence is not enough to establish a deconstructive commentary as separate from deconstructive criticism as theorized by Gasché. Deleuzian commentary outlined in DR is likened to the function of a preposition: there must be a commentary always *of* something or *on* something.³⁸ The nature of this prepositional function is to "represent a kind of slow motion, a congelation or immobilization of the text" (xxii), where 'text' refers to both the prior work and the commentary itself. Commentary as

³⁸ The commentary that Deleuze outlines is in specific relation to "the history of philosophy" (WIP xxii). However, since he does not distinguish between commentaries of philosophy and art, I have resolved to apply his model to art works since for the moment I see no prescient reason why it should not be used in this manner.

outlined by Deleuze relies on a stable representation of the commentated text to which the commentary is then defined. Because the commentary is always defined by a representation “of the text to which [the commentary] relate[s]” (xxii), it must always assume the stable representation of a commentated text to then stabilize the commentary in a referential relation. The relation between commentary and text is structured according to the fourfold root of reason, particularly analogy, which describes “the relation between ultimate *determinable* concepts” (33) such as the representations of text and its corresponding commentaries.

But Deleuze’s notion of commentary does not simply reproduce a stable representation of a text on which it comments. Deleuze notes that the commentary should immobilize “the text to which [the commentary] relates,” and also the “the text in which they are asserted” (xxii). Deleuze goes on to state that commentaries include “the pure repetition of the former text *and* the present text *in one another*” (xxii; emphasis mine), where it is seemingly impossible to conceive of either of the two texts as entirely separate from one another. Therefore, Deleuzean commentaries do not have to be conceived as instantiating a stable representation of two texts in an analogous relation, but rather can only be conceived as “double existence[s]” which are already implicated within the text on which they comment. The commentary is not an exterior relation that stabilizes the representation of texts within a relation, but is rather an inseparable part of a text regardless of how it is represented. Thus, contrary to the tendency of Deleuzean commentaries to congeal or arrest the text, this arresting is a “slow motion” (xxii) rather

than the establishment of a definitive arrest.³⁹ In the biological metaphor which Deleuze intimates, the scab is a formation that results from congealed blood over a cut on the body. The congealation does not come from an exteriority outside the body which seeks to arrest the entire body, but rather responds to an interior process within a specific section of the body. The commentary, like the scab formed through congealation, does not seek to arrest the entire text within a unitary representation, but rather arises from a particular location within its inseparable relation to the text.⁴⁰

Along with Deleuze's double existence of commentary as *with* or *alongside* 'primary' or commentated texts, Isabelle Stengers goes one step further in challenging the structural positions of 'commentary' texts and 'primary' or 'commentated' texts.⁴¹ Whereas Deleuze always used the terms 'commentaries' and texts of 'philosophy' in relatively immobile ways regardless of their inseparability from one another, Stengers provides an argument which challenges the basis on which those two terms are distinguished as different from one another. In "Relaying a War Machine?" she notes, similarly to Deleuze, that commentary is a form of "thinking-with [or] becoming-with," which figures commentary as inseparable from that on which it comments. However,

³⁹ This kind of commentary is also intimated in *K* where Deleuze describes "a *procedure* as an infinite virtual movement" (48) in relation to *K*'s questioning of the law. This procedure is contrasted with a method performing a critique.

⁴⁰ The implications of this metaphor suggest that a commentary serves as a healing salve to the text which is wounded. Elsewhere in *LOS* Deleuze understands the event as a wound in that it shares an affinity with death that both addresses the present and non-present in a double movement (152). There are good reasons why the notion of deconstructive commentary should not be understood as a healing salve of the text which is wounded like the event. The event is associated with a wound only because of its double property. To 'heal' this property would resort to a Platonic dualism that distinguishes between "limited and measures things" and a "pure becoming" (1). The goal of a deconstructive commentary would not seek to render the text as a determinable and measurable entity, but rather explore its 'pure becoming' (1) dimension.

⁴¹ The terms 'primary text' and 'commentaries' come from Deleuze's distinction in *DR* between 'commentaries' and texts of philosophy which are referred to as a "history of philosophy" (xxii). I have opted to use the term 'primary text' in reference to any text—philosophical or not—that is commentated on and which is distinguished from commentaries.

unlike Deleuze, she is critical of a “thinking ‘between’” which results from the relaying of commentary to primary texts. Instead, she theorizes a “creative uncertainty” which does not guarantee the actual stability of terms such as ‘primary text’ or ‘commentary.’ One term must be “passive” and act as a “string of entanglement for the other to operate only to become active again at the next step, when the other presents a new entanglement” (134). Therefore, the terms ‘commentary’ and ‘primary text’ or ‘philosophical text’ are not only inseparable, as Deleuze intimates, but the actual distinction between the two texts is unstable in that they consistently trade places with one another, where commentary becomes a philosophical text and the text becomes its commentary (and vice versa).⁴²

Deleuze also theorizes a kind of commentary through his concept of machinic portraits. In *WIP*, Deleuze likens the critic or commentator’s respective critiques or comments on the history of philosophy as a machinic portrait. The portrait is meant to produce “resemblance[s] [of philosophy] by separating out both the plane of immanence [which the philosopher] instituted and the new concepts he created” (55) in an attempt to

⁴² My interpretation of Stengers’ argument is slightly different from her intended argument in that while she wants to critique the basis on which commentary and text are distinguished as stable and present forms of address, she ultimately characterizes the process by which commentary turns into commented text with a hidden stability. Despite her claims that there is a creative uncertainty which allows for the reversal of passive and active positions in relation to commentary and primary texts, she frames this reversal after the successful “operations” of one text actively operating on a passive text. Rather than understanding the reversal of passive and active distinctions between commentaries and primary texts only after they have already served stably as active and passive in their roles, one can extend Stengers’ creative uncertainty towards the active/passive distinctions of texts as *perpetually* uncertain. Thus, the unstable roles of active/passive would make it impossible to ever stably identify the two terms in an “operation,” and would instead result in an inability to ever stabilize the terms in a relation. This perpetual uncertainty of active and passive roles is similar to how D&G theorize the plane of consistency in *WIP* where philosophy must give “consistency without losing anything of the infinite” (42); this is not to say that the plane tries to repress chaos, but rather tries to accommodate the conditions of infinite movements. Chaos here would not designate anything outside of consistency since it is conceived as an active force which tries to ‘undo’ (42) consistency. Therefore, this commentary which consists of a perpetual uncertainty of active and passive descriptors towards texts would form a consistency so long as it would not repress the infinite (as opposed to chaos which is distinct from the infinite).

represent “linked or alternating ... infinite movements that can be folded over or spread out” (55). The machinic portraits try to explore the potential of a work’s concepts that traverse uniquely infinite movements on its plane; in this sense, it is useful to adapt a Deleuzian commentary, which involves a mapping of these movements on a text’s planes.⁴³ However, the model is not without issue. As noted in *WIP*, concepts that populate the plane of immanence are not “calm determinations” (54) and do not “refer to spatiotemporal coordinates that define the successive positions of a moving object” (37). The machinic portrait, despite its name, which intimates the dynamic movement of the portrait, is a static representation of one arrested combination of concepts which occupy the plane of immanence. Rather than the plane fulfilling its function as an infinite movement, it is frozen within an immobile graphic representation which is hardly attractive for the purposes of a deconstructive commentary that I am trying to develop. Derrida himself can also be read as trying to conceive of a commentary that would not simply serve a propositional function. In the genre bending book *Glas*, Derrida performs, amongst many other things, a reading of Hegel. In the opening page he notes that his book is a “legend” that provides a reading “of two figures” (1) in Hegel’s philosophy. In addition, the book is vertically divided into two columns which serve different functions. The two columns arranged vertically on the page “envelop(e) ... incalculably reverses, turns inside out, replaces, remarks, overlaps the other” (1), which is similar to my theorizing of deconstructive commentary that conceives of commentary arising outside

⁴³ The use of the word *mapping* is not to be confused with tracing any pre-given “structural or generative model” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 12). Mapping is contrasted with tracing in that the former “is orientated towards an experimentation,” and it does not re-present assumed structures like the unconscious. Maps are “detachable, reversible, [and] susceptible to constant modification” (12) without an assumed stable representation that is traced. Therefore, the use of the word ‘mapping’ concerns more of an experiment of possibilities rather than a linear tracing (such as deconstructive criticism’s tracing of *différance*) of a pre-given concept or representation.

and within a commentated text.⁴⁴ The tracking of philosophical figures is also similar to a deconstructive commentary exploring different virtual movements of the concept on a plane of immanence. However, both the mappings of the figures and the incalculable and infinite reversal of the two columns interchanging with one another are conditioned by their aspirations “almost” (1) being fulfilled. It is true that two figures in Hegel’s philosophy are explored, but only insofar as they are revealed to be “in the act of effacing themselves” (1) similar to Derrida’s treatment of the Hegelian concept in his own deconstructive criticism. Other readings of *Glas* also identify the work as thematizing its own failure to establish truth.⁴⁵ The conditional ‘almost’ of the work’s aspirations also implies two functions characteristic of the double columns’ interaction with each other. The first function “assures, guards, assimilates, interiorizes, idealizes, relieves the fall into the monument,” while the second function explicitly “monumentalizes and names itself” (1). For Derrida, even though the two columns intersect and arise out of one another to reveal “what remain[s] infinitely calculable” (1), this infinity always falls back to a tendency for the text to monumentalize and establish a foundation for itself. In other words, the commentary in *Glas* attempts to establish an inseparable link between two columns (or texts) while ultimately reassuming a tendency for these texts (and Derrida’s own commentary) to “congeal” as an interiority in an attempt to stably “name itself”

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Hartman reads the work as a blending of commentaries rather than traditional criticism in “Homage to *Glas*”

⁴⁵ See Gayatri Spivak’s “*Glas*-Piece: A Compte Rendu” where she argues that the work is inspired by “the absence of Father or Truth behind the veil” which contextualizes Derrida’s “attempt to place the son’s (his own) signature as a mourning for his natural father” (1). I do not mean to suggest that Derrida is engaged in trying to stably name his own project, but that he—as Spivak seems to suggest—thematizes the failure of a text’s aspiration to name its own project of which he himself is well aware.

(1).⁴⁶ While there are elements of Derrida's commentary in *Glas* that are similar to the deconstructive commentary, such as the inseparability of commentary and the commented text, Derrida is still committed to exploring figures in philosophy only in their tendency towards self-effacement and only in the text's eventual intention towards a stable interiority in its attempt to name itself.

Another way in which Deleuze's plane of immanence could initiate a deconstructive commentary is its different treatment of repetition with respect to the plane's movements. In SP, Derrida outlines the dependence of the sign's signification on a general repetition. He states that when one "effectively use[s] words ... [they] must from the outset operate (within) a structure of repetition whose basic element can only be representation" (50). In order for the sign to function, it must remain the "same" (50). The repetitive function of the sign has also been seen in the formulation of Hegelian concepts which are tasked with presenting an idea which is dependent on the identity of the sign. Along with the Hegelian concept, the repetition of the sign has been seen in formulations of metaphors. In "White Mythology," Derrida defines the term as a kind of "metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being" (11). The scene which brought it into being is always expressed in the form of a metaphor, regardless of how much one attempts to "restore or reconstitute, beneath the metaphor, [that] which at once conceals and is concealed, [by] what was 'originally represented'" (8). The 'original representation' becomes a metaphor and thus effaces its original representation as soon as it is put "in circulation in philosophical discourse" (9),

⁴⁶ Important to note is that Derrida's use of the word *congelation* is significantly different from Deleuze's use of the word. For Deleuze, congelation never served as a metaphor for the stable signification of the text, whereas Derrida uses the word to describe the text's tendency towards stability.

which is to say, as soon as it is represented by words. Derrida notes that the metaphor has always been “defined as the trope of resemblance; not simply between signifier and signified, but between what are already two signs, the one designating the other” (13) such that the use of metaphor implies the stability of two signs in a relation of resemblance. The stability of two signs, and their general repetition that allows them to signify a referent, are already implied in the formulation of a metaphor.⁴⁷ Therefore, Derrida notes that insofar as various discourses have uncritically used metaphors as the basis on which to establish the stability of their projects, truths--citing Nietzsche’s “On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense”-- are “illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions” (15). Derrida’s critique of the metaphor is not concerned only with the metaphor in itself, but rather the semiotic structure of signification—specifically explored through the concept of *différance*—by which the metaphor functions. Because both signs and metaphors function according to a repetition of the same, deconstructive criticism tends to repeat a structural operation of deconstructing a metaphysical presence that relies on a repetition of the same.⁴⁸ However, as Deleuze notes in DR, there exists a repetition of difference which is opposed to a repetition of the same. This repetition does not seek to represent the sign but rather serves as an originary condition of every sign. A deconstructive commentary which tracks the movements of concepts on a plane of

⁴⁷ The idea of a metaphor implying a repetition of the same is also referenced by Derrida in relation to the meta-metaphor. According to Derrida, if we “wanted to conceive and classify all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy, there would always be at least one metaphor which would be excluded and remain outside the system” (“White Mythology” 15) because of its reliance on the stability of the sign for signification. Thus, “concept, theory, foundation, and philosophical concepts are metaphors” (23) insofar as both sign and metaphor share in the stability of the sign.

⁴⁸ This is not to say that deconstructive criticism relies upon the repetition of the sign’s signification in the same way as signs themselves, but that it often structurally repeats itself as a critical procedure because of the repetitive aspirations of all signs and (Hegelian) concepts.

immanence would not rely—as in Gasché’s account of deconstructive criticism—on a repetition of the same, nor would it perform a structurally repetitive operation.

Even though Deleuze’s plane of immanence can serve as a model for a deconstructive commentary, something must be said of my relatively one-sided use of Deleuze as a heuristic for theorizing a deconstructive commentary as opposed to a criticism. Similar to Gasché’s repudiation of American criticism’s tendency to apply deconstructive criticism as a formalism to literary texts, this chapter can be accused of using Deleuze as a heuristic that is protected from critique in order to theorize a deconstructive commentary. However, many of Deleuze’s concepts are not free from critique. For example, Deleuze’s characterization of the plane of immanence seems to be conflictingly theorized as both singular and plural. Deleuze initially characterizes the plane as “neither a concept nor the concept of concepts” (35), which suggests that there is no unitary plane responsible for all other planes. Throughout *WIP*, Deleuze uses a series of similar metaphors to describe the plane of immanence as something specific to certain concepts.⁴⁹ For example, philosophy involves the “creation of concepts” (36) as well as the “laying out of a plane” (36) specific to those concepts. Deleuze will also describe the plane as likened to a desert which houses concepts (36). Yet in other metaphors, the plane’s subjective relationship with concepts seems to be structurally generalized such that there is no specific relationship of the plane with certain concepts. Philosophy creates a “powerful One-All... that includes all of the concepts on one and the same plane” (35), also known as “THE plane of immanence” (50), such that the plane does not seem to contain infinite movements given that its structural instantiation of concepts is

⁴⁹ This is seen in more depth when D&G talk about the changing of planes with respect to new concepts created. The creation of the plane is dependent on the concepts that populate it (*WIP* 57).

generalizable. The plane is also likened to a breath which suffuses a skeleton frame (the frame being concepts), which is also a generalization of the plane. In addition, Deleuze also asserts that there is a “pre-philosophical element of philosophy which “does not exist outside of philosophy although philosophy presupposes it” (41). The pre-philosophical becomes “the absolute ground of philosophy” (41), similar to Derrida’s attribution of the Hegelian concept to Western philosophy, which raises doubts as to the specific relationship of the plane and its respective concepts. To resolve this tension in D&G’s account of the plane, I have chosen to use the plane as instantiating a particular relationship with concepts rather than using it as a model to generalize and systematize all of philosophy. Even so, the fact that there is a confused conceptualization of the plane as both infinitely conceptualizable and structurally generic is evidence enough to suggest that Deleuze is by no means a heuristic for my theorizing of deconstructive commentary protected from critique.

To briefly summarize, in this chapter I have tried to first outline ways in which deconstructive criticism as theorized by Derrida and Gasché has tended to assume a linear movement from the identification of a metaphysical binary, its deconstruction, and the subsequent re-inscription of an underprivileged term that returns as a negative face of exteriority. Alternative to this linear understanding of deconstructive criticism, I first outline alternate spaces implied in accounts of deconstruction which have gone unacknowledged within accounts of a linear deconstructive criticism. I then compare these spaces to spaces implied by D&G such as a productive simulacrum and the plane of immanence which move infinitely different. Alternative to accounts of deconstructive criticism which conceive of deconstruction in a prepositional—and operative—way, I

develop a deconstructive commentary which is non-prepositional in that the commentary arises out of and is inseparable from the traditionally commented text. This commentary would trace the movements of different concepts that populate the plane of immanence rather than focus on a linear movement concerned with the limitations of a Hegelian concept. One of the consequences of a deconstructive commentary that arises out of and alongside a commented text is its inability to be distinguished from the commented text. This is an implication I will address in the third chapter.

Chapter 3: *The Triumph of Life* and the Crossing of Simulacra: A Deconstructive Commentary

In this chapter I will offer a reading of Percy Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* which suggests that life in the poem acts as a simulacrum, both Deleuzean and Baudrillardian in nature. In its thematization of the simulacrum through the figure of life as well as in the affinities between the plane of immanence and the Chariot, the poem sketches different spaces of *différance* explored in the previous chapter. This reading of the poem enacts a form of the deconstructive commentary theorized in the previous chapter, coinciding with and arising out of the 'primary' text, in this case the poem. The commentary's inseparability from and co-creation with the poem is demonstrated by the way in which the process of commentating is indistinguishable from the incessant, endless, and contingent figuring of simulacra that comprise activities of life in poem. By providing a commentary on the poem which tracks the way in which different concepts are created through simulacra and by viewing the Chariot as a plane of immanence, I—the critic—become indistinguishable from the people chained to the Chariot creating different simulacra. My commentary is the collapse between itself and the poem, as I—through my commentary that tracks different simulacra—*live* the poem by performing what it already performs.

The Triumph of Life's title need not be completely ironic in that the "real" triumph of life is its offering of no "real" or "absolute" answer which forecloses any further questioning of life. Why would life allow itself to be reduced under a singular answer, preventing itself from ever problematizing, and thus rethinking, its own identity? Lee Edelman notes in "The Pathology of the Future, or the endless Triumphs of Life" that "Life ... poses a constant threat to life itself" because of its own "resistance to

apprehension” (37). Taking up the idea that life resists its own apprehension, I argue that the poem suggests a violence in the way it awakens us to the fact that there is nothing to which we awaken. The simulacrum is evoked to demonstrate what life endlessly dissimulates, or what we dissimulate life as being. There is no dark vision revealing something about reality or life; rather, life itself is the “perpetual dream” (397). Shelley’s poem partly demonstrates what Baudrillard identifies as the precession of the simulacra explored in *Simulacra and Simulation*: a development of the simulacrum where signs no longer signify ‘reality,’ but only refer back to themselves, preceding the reality they are supposed to represent.⁵⁰ Reality itself is preceded by a “hyperreality” (17) of signs that do not refer to anything beyond themselves, effectually concealing the fact that they do not represent any one thing. The reason why some commentators have read the poem as a pessimistic representation of life has to do with the seeming endlessness of visions that cannot answer vital questions about life.⁵¹ However, there is also something secretly productive about the poem which never allows life to be fully known via a vision, fully captured within semiotic representation. It is true that questions about life cannot be answered by seemingly incomplete visions that perpetually repeat their disfigurement, but the element of repetition (specifically the repetition of visions) opens new ways of interrogating life, even if we receive no definitive answers. The continual movement towards life, expressed through repetitive visions which promise the origin of life, is

⁵⁰ I mention the crossed theorizing of the simulacrum between Baudrillard and Deleuze because both theorists think differently about the simulacrum. While Deleuze’s conception of the simulacrum is more concerned with its creative possibilities, Baudrillard is inflected within the history of the simulacrum a desire (and ultimately inability) to represent the Real. By exploring the simulacrum through both Baudrillard and Deleuze, I can better capture the multifaceted ways in which simulacra function (both as a Deleuzian creativity and as a potential encounter with the Real) in the poem as I will later explain.

⁵¹ Such criticism includes Ross Woodman’s depiction of the Chariot in the poem as “the mindless destruction of all earthly existence” (*Sanity, Madness, Transformation: The Psyche in Romanticism* 151), as well as De Man’s thematizing of the failure for the poem to establish an origin in “Shelley Disfigured.”

precisely what gives life any significance at all, because its simulative potential to revise meanings people slavishly apply to it is liberating. Therefore, while the poem ‘awakens’ us to a consciousness of reality as comprised of simulacra, its inability to sustain a vision that answers questions that we ask of life is necessarily productive for the creative potential of life and what it can mean. This is not to say that the poem affirms a more Deleuzean sense of the simulacrum over Baudrillard’s hyperreality, but to suggest that both orientations to the simulacrum are mediated in the poem. This mediation, I suggest, complicates a reading of the poem purely in terms of the simulacrum, by the fact that neither theorist (Baudrillard or Deleuze) can account for residues of a Platonic original that continue to haunt the poem.⁵²

The beginning of the poem supposedly takes place outside the dream-vision that the narrator subsequently enters. The way the narrator describes “the mask / Of darkness [falling] from the awakened earth” (3-4) possibly mirrors what the vision he experiences is supposed to do, where vision is associated with revelation via an unveiling of life. This idea is soon complicated, though, when the light of the sun is figured in a contradictory way that conceals rather than reveals things in the world. The narrator describes the transparent shade of his slumber “clear as when a veil of light is drawn / O’er evening hills” (32-33), and creates an incongruity as to whether light half conceals objects, making them “...glimmer” (33), or presents them without a mask. This same concept of light as both revealing and concealing has been seen in the description of the Witch, but where she used it to clothe herself as a beautiful figure, its presence in this poem suggests an uncertainty regarding how all light functions. The uncertainty can be extended to the

⁵² As I will further mention in my commentary, there are intimated spaces of a Platonic original that resists absorption within Deleuzean and Baudrillardian accounts of the simulacrum.

narrator's mode of perception regarding whether what he perceives through the agency of light is an essence of something or an outward appearance of it. The ambiguity of what he perceives as either an essence or appearance is what makes it hard to identify if the narrator is even in an outer "reality" before he experiences his vision. When the vision does occur, he refers to it as a "waking dream" (42), creating further ambiguity by his inability to separate the dream as an illusion from the dream as a waking reality. This ambiguity recurs when the figure of Rousseau recounts the way in which he first conceived his vision, and the fact that he knew not "Whether life had been before that sleep / The Heaven which [he] imagine[d], or a Hell" (332-333), confusing an origin that he supposedly comes from but cannot remember. The suggestion, then, is that there is much uncertainty as to whether there exists a distinct reality free from the concealment of things or whether all life is merely a "waking dream" (42) somewhere in between revelation and concealment. Put differently, the reader is already involved in the tracking of an empirical and 'objective' reality as a Deleuzian concept and its subsequent limitations by its effaced difference from a dream space. This 'objective' reality initially hinted functions as a Deleuzian concept of a dream. This objective reality initially tries to establish itself as objective through its status of 'reality' distinct from dreams, but transforms into a site at which the distinction between an objective reality and dream vision is no longer significant. The transformation of an objective reality into a space of simulacra is seen in Rousseau's gradual shift away from establishing what is real, as evidenced by his obliviousness to entering into a vision within the vision he relays to the narrator in an attempt to explain the origin of the Chariot; in other words, reality no longer grounds itself according to an objective principle but rather transforms into a

space of simulacra where these distinctions are deconstructed. The inability to determine reality from dream is not the focus of a central aporia within the poem unlike in De Man's reading of the poem. In "Shelley Disfigured," De Man explicitly focuses on the poem "as a fragment of something whole" (94) as a result of its (and our) inability to answer questions as to the meaning of the poem. However, my commentary is not principally about the limitations of the poem as a fragment, so much as it expresses the multi-varied functions of the simulacrum.

While many critics (including "Shelley" at line 176 and 299) have judged the representation of life in this poem as a cold, impersonal procession through time, many of these judgements can be explained by the depiction of specific (namely Baudrillardian) simulacra.⁵³ The central image presented in the poem is the procession of the chariot traveling throughout history. The narrator first sees "a great stream / Of people ... hurrying to and fro" (44-45), while none of them know "Whither [they] went, or whence [they] came" (48): these wandering people, much like the Poet in *Alastor* who begins travelling at an unknown point, form a stream of simulacra whose movement cannot be traced to an origin or a final destination. They also inhabit some "ether lost" (63) that is unidentifiable as a location. Part of what makes this depiction so pessimistic is the meaninglessness of these multitudes who "pursued or shunned the shadows" (63) that

⁵³ There are three orders of the simulacrum theorized by Baudrillard. The first order is the "counterfeit" which corresponds to the Renaissance; it describes the way in which the signs dissimulate a reference to reality by preserving the distinctions between original and copy. The second order is "production" which describes the Industrial era. A notion of the "real" no longer exists, and has been replaced by a general equivalency between all signs. This equivalency participates in a system of production where the end goal is reproducibility. The third order is "simulation" (or the procession of simulacra) which describes late capitalism. Signs have completely preceded the reality that they represent, producing a hyperreality of signs. While there are similarities between the orders of production and simulation, I do not take up the former because it has a heavy emphasis on the economic principle of labour in the Industrial era. Because of this socioeconomic context, it would not be appropriate to trace this development of the simulacrum in Shelley's works.

accompany them through different stages in their lives. Their relationships with their shadows become vitally important as I will later show, but it is enough to say that the motivation to pursue or reject these shadows in life is a “vain toil” (66).

The image of wandering people is developed into a movement of “the million with fierce song and maniac dance / Raging around” (110-111) the chariot of life—an image from which no origin can be derived. These people are “fleet as shadows on the green” (139), but shadows are the product of an object’s interaction with light and there is no clear sense in which any of the “ribald crowd” (135) can be considered subjects or objects if they are merely shadows without an anterior object on which their identity is based, or a locatable interiority that defines them. In fact, there is no way in which any of these people are truly distinguished from each other as they constantly “mix with each other” (141), becoming equally replaceable and indistinguishable as substitutes and thus simulacra. As Shelley writes, the crowd that follows the chariot “sen[ds] forth incessantly / [Their] shadows” (527-528) which are “each, like himself and like each other” (530). After Rousseau explains the scene of Life, the narrator asks him “How ... [his] course beg[a]n” (297), seeking the origin from which Rousseau himself comes. As Paul de Man notes in “Shelley Disfigured,” questions of origin “always lead back to a new scene of questioning which merely repeats the quest and leads into infinite regress” (44). This is clearly seen when Rousseau recounts his own vision from which he has a further vision that leaves the question of life’s origin just as unanswered. It seems that life, or reality (in Baudrillard’s sense), is a simulacrum that sees itself as having been preceded by artificial signs that refer to nothing beyond themselves. When tasked with probing the origin of life, we find that life—as a simulacrum—refers to nothing beyond its own artificial

representation as an empty sign. The repetitive questioning of a possible origin is part of an earlier attitude towards the simulacrum (formerly recognized as the counterfeit), that dissimulates a natural relationship with ‘reality.’ Arguably, Rousseau is disciplined to regard life, not as a counterfeit sign, but as a simulacrum completely divorced from a representation of ‘reality’, when he observes within his vision the falling of “mask after mask” (536), revealing that there is nothing beyond the creative simulacra we mistake for representations of a deeper reality.

Baudrillard’s third order of the simulacrum is also represented by the Shape, who is a double of Rousseau.⁵⁴ Just as Rousseau acts as a guide for the narrator’s questions about origins, the Shape all light might potentially seem a guide for Rousseau, allowing him to question the possibility of what life is. She is associated with “A silver music” (355) that draws Rousseau’s attention as does the dream-woman in *Alastor* who produces a music of her own (154-55). Now, as the figure changes shape again and appears in *The Triumph of Life* as the shape all light, “the gazer’s mind [is] strewn beneath / Her feet like embers, and she, thought by thought, / Tramples its fires into the dust of death” (385-387). The Shape, as a simulacrum that refuses to be comprehended, “blot[s] / The thoughts of [those] who gaze on [her]” (383-384), demonstrating a negative and destructive side to the simulacrum that obliterates meaning. Some characteristics of the Shape link her to the automaton, such as her silence regarding Rousseau’s questioning,

⁵⁴ The third order of the simulacrum is what Baudrillard calls “the precession of the simulacrum” (SS 1) where simulacra are “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1). Simulacra do not signify other things, but contain a model of meaning preceding the forms of linguistic signs and even reality itself—a mode that refers back only towards itself. This preceding model rejects “being and appearances, of the real and its concept” (2), which is another way of saying that simulation rejects differences of concepts in an all-encompassing artificial system that masks the nothingness it represents. For Baudrillard, all of reality has been replaced by a hyperreality of signs that precede reality itself and which conceal their nothingness or lack of presence.

but she is too active to be considered mechanical. The Shape seems to be too autonomously active and creative to be automatons in Baudrillard's sense.⁵⁵

The impossibility of finding an origin, coupled with Baudrillard's notion of the precession of simulacra, makes the project of seeking a "truth" behind life seem futile, and ultimately misguided, as De Man has argued in "Shelley Disfigured."⁵⁶ However, there is a secret productiveness in these simulations which is at odds with a sense of the poem as merely a repetitive failure to realize life's meaning. It is a productiveness that is enacted by the creation of different spaces (such as visions) and figures of simulacra which are not trying to serve as definitive answers to originary questions about life despite the narrator's enacting of these questions. The events of the poem are mediated by the narrator's "thoughts which must remain untold" (21), much in the same way that the unborn visions of the Witch necessarily veil what they envision. One of the first indications of an essential productive force associated with life is the chariot's movement on "the silent storm / Of its own rushing splendour" (85-86). There is an intense chaotic force, or "fierce splendour" (145), inspiring the "fierce song and maniac dance" (110) in those who follow it. This momentous force contains within its movement "all that is, has been, or will be done" (104), so as to include a totality of history: the spirit that has

⁵⁵ My use of the word *automaton* references Baudrillard's counterfeit simulacra. He describes the counterfeit democratizing the sign's exchange value across classes, opening an "unlimited potential" of meaning opposed to the confined and strict meaning of the feudal sign (*Symbolic Exchange and Death* 51). The most obvious difference between the counterfeit and the feudal sign is that the former is characterized by a freedom from a social obligation that the latter requires. This obligation concerns both the sign's meaning which is confined to one class and its reference to "reality" (51). But at the same time, the counterfeit does not change "the nature of an 'original'" (51), i.e. a feudal sign, but alters its dependence upon "a restriction" (51) of class to a freedom from it. Despite the supposed emancipation of the counterfeit, Baudrillard still maintains that it "simulates ... by giving the appearance that it is bound to the world" (51), hence my reluctance to describe the Shape as a significantly restrictive automaton.

⁵⁶ In particular, De Man mentions that part of the problem of the poem is its architectural framing of questions of how, why, and what, which relies on a "system that links these interrogative pronouns ... to questions of definitions" (94) that are not stable.

driven figures of the past is the same spirit that now drives us and those who will later come, effectually unifying the movement of everyone within a temporality that we all share. We are unified, as members who are driven by this fierce spirit of life, by our movements towards life. The spirit of which we are all a part approximates Deleuze's notion of the event. In LOS, Deleuze describes the event as a "the paradox of infinite identity" where a pure becoming extends in "both directions or senses at the same time—of future and past" (2) without establishing a presence. The force of the Chariot, like the event, never establishes a presence which defines life, but rather escapes interrogative questions about life altogether; thus, the Chariot never directly answers the questions of what it signifies or why people are attracted to its movement. These movements are all different depending on the individual, but we are unified precisely because we are all moving towards life, however different our movements may appear to be. This fierce spirit that has moved, moves, and will move all of us is by no means a beneficent humanizing force that affirms our desires. As seen in the poem, old people "Limp in the dance and strain with limbs decayed / To reach the car of light which leaves them still / Far behind" (167-169), indicating that not everyone (with perhaps as much energy) can participate in the dance of life. The chariot is not a humanistic force that celebrates all life and will not hesitate to leave behind those who no longer have the strength to participate. While this is an impersonal, cruel depiction of life, it is one that is nonetheless driven by an intensity on the part of those willing or able to make movements towards life.

Something must be said about what it means to participate in a 'movement towards life,' and how this is fundamentally different from an interrogation of life's origin. A movement towards life is a gesture towards understanding what life could

possibly be—possibly, in Deleuze’s sense of the potential for simulacra to generate meaning without a fixed or absolute referent. As such, all attempts to generate meaning from simulation are only movements and approaches towards a possibility of life, rather than a transcendental path towards an absolute meaning. In contrast to a single answer to Rousseau’s question, “‘What is Life?’” (544), a movement towards life probes the possible (plural) origins that participate in a nexus of meanings, all equally valuable. Put differently, the movements towards life are experiments in how one can live rather than defining one particular way of living that would apply for all in all times and places within a unitary representation. These various movements are seen in the poem when the people following the chariot “[throw] as those before [them] threw,/ [Their] shadows on it as it past away” (250-251). The throwing of our shadows, as simulacra of possible meanings associated with life, is driven by a productive force that, while temporary in that the chariot will leave us all behind eventually, gives us the chance to partake in a movement towards life.

The creative “mischief” (146) of throwing possible meanings onto the chariot recalls the equally creative impulse of the Witch in “The Witch of Atlas,” who sends unborn visions not yet realized to sleeping humans. Besides the way the Witch’s existence is figured in the poem, the way in which she herself conceives ideas is another reason why she can be considered a simulacrum. Within her cave, the Witch figures “...Visions swift ... / Each in its thin sheath” (161-162) but not yet “...burst[ing] forth” (163). These visions do not have a subject to whom they are revealed because they are described as “...a chrysalis” (162) not fully realizing itself. It is also unclear from what they originate as they merely “Lay” (161) in the Witch’s cave, waiting to come into

being. This cave of unrealized visions is essentially the cave which Plato refuses to acknowledge. In Plato's cave, the shadows in the cave are products of light's interaction with "real" things outside the cave. The Witch's cave foregoes shadows altogether and is a site where visions with no reference to an outer reality exist. There may well be no outer reality, as the poem itself takes place when "Incestuous Change bore to her father Time, / Error and Truth" (50-51). The visions themselves are simulacra materially untied from any fixed meaning. Other elements within the Witch's cave include "odours ... / of everblooming Eden-trees" (169-170) which are "clipt" (171), perhaps from the Garden of Eden to which the Eden-trees may belong. What is significant is that the trees are clipped from that actual myth to create an independent meaning from it. The Witch's own thoughts are "...each a minister / Clothing themselves" (211-12) to work "...whatever purposes might come / Into her mind" (213-214), which implies that her thoughts necessarily function as a simulation which resists (via concealment) a stable and single material referent. The Witch may use her thoughts for whatever purpose she desires because, as simulacra, they are not fixed to any one meaning as signs but rather contain the possibility of always meaning otherwise or more than what is meant.

While a movement towards life allows us to contemplate what life could possibly mean, it does not imply a future state where this movement finally ends, thus answering Rousseau's unanswered questions. In "The Pathology of the Future, or Future Triumphs of Life," Lee Edelman is concerned with a "pathology that determines our investment in the promise of something that is always to come" (35). This logic of futurism, which he critiques, "assur[es] continuity by way of movement, survival by way of change ... [that determines] what's 'current'" (35). My use of movement towards life does not imply the

preservation of the status quo through the future that Edelman deconstructs in “No Future,” but rather the possibility to rethink life differently, albeit always as a simulation. Others, such as Joel Faflak in “Dancing in the Dark with Shelley,” have argued that Shelley was “forced to enter within an unsafe future the empty centre of the plague of fantasies” (171), although these fantasies—should we think them within the context of the simulacrum—have the potential to be immensely productive if we recognize them as creative meanings rather than absolute truths, trading uncertainties with possibilities.

The fierce spirit which impels a constant movement toward life is one justification for rethinking life, not just as cruel and impersonal and leading toward death, but as productive and creative of itself, of more life. Another reason for seeing a productivity in life, however impersonal, is the way in which repetition offers itself as a structure of revision rather than reproduction. According to De Man in “Shelley Disfigured,” “the structure of the text is not one of question and answer, but of a question whose meaning, as question, is effaced from the moment it is asked,” because “The answer to the question is another question, asking what and why one asked, and thus receding even further from the original query” (44). The inability to answer the narrator’s and Rousseau’s question fundamentally concerns the “Platonic” structure of the question which assumes a single, original question, in the same sense that De Man’s account of repetition implies an original question asked. While De Man believes that the repetitive questioning moves further away from the “original” question, we should recognize that his idea of repetition always reproduces the same identity of failure, the same inability to answer the meaning of self and of life.

Taking up Deleuze's notion of a productive repetition, there is an alternate way of reading the repetitive visions in this poem. As Tilottama Rajan notes in *The Supplement of Reading*, "we do not repeat something in different words if we mean to say exactly the same thing ... We repeat because there is still something more to be said" (328). For Deleuze, repetition is the eternal return of difference (DR 11). During the narrator's vision, Rousseau notes that he has no desire to worship the "new figures on [the chariot's] false and fragile glass / as the old faded" (247-248), implying that there are some people who have thrown their shadows onto the chariot with the intent of conferring a truth value on what are mere shadows. The shadows projected onto the chariot are deliberately presented or dissimulated as truthful. Joel Faflak notes that the drug that the Shape gives to Rousseau "acts as an antidepressant to make Rousseau forget rather than transform the things as they are" (168), but while this may be true in relation to the questions to which Rousseau seeks but never gets answers, there is something vitally transforming following the blotting out of his memory. After Rousseau's "brain [becomes] like sand" (405), in the wake of the Shape's ambiguous answer "Arise and quench thy thirst" (400), a "new Vision never seen before" (411) comes to him that fundamentally refigures the earlier image of the captives throwing their shadows of "truth" upon the chariot. When Rousseau recounts his own vision where the chariot is presented, he specifically notes the fact that people crowding the chariot are now referred to as "phantoms" (488) themselves, and they throw "shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves, / Behind them" (488-489), which take the form of "unimagined shapes" (491). These unimagined shadows, which become increasingly "distorted" (531) by time, eventually fall away as a mask to reveal an infinite number of further masks. The visions

of the narrator and Rousseau have been repeated, but these movements towards life that occur through the throwing of shadows onto it are profoundly and critically different. Where the narrator's vision still held onto some Platonic residue that had a will to confer a truth value on life, Rousseau's repetition of the shadow throwing is purely creative in that there is no implied truth, but rather imaginative (and creative) shadows of shadows thrown onto life that act as simulacra. Repetition is thus not merely the reproduction of a failure to trace an origin of life, but a creative tool used to prefigure generative meanings (plural is emphasized) concerning the possibility of life (or the movement towards life as I have called it).

Departing from De Man's assumption of a repetition that reproduces the identity of failure, Lee Edelman provides an alternate approach for the way in which repetition functions in the poem. Invoking Lacan, he argues that the gesture of futurity acts as a supplement like the *objet a* representing our imprisonment within the repetitions of the drive (35). Edelman reads the mystery of life in the poem as a "relation between repetition and undoing" (36), traced through the concept of the *sinthome*: that which represents a fixed substance of being that is "singular, irreducible, and beyond interpretation" (40). The repetition of the *sinthome* in this poem acts as a "resistance to the unquestioned assumption of life or viability as valuable" (40) because it resists a reproduction of meaning. While the *sinthome* is irreducible a creative repetition differs from an anterior identity that is repeated, rather than reproducing any quality of that same identity. My use of repetition is not one that Edelman can subsume as a "regression" (40) of any kind or a vain gesture of futurity, but it is rather the basis on which something is thought differently; this creative use of repetition is more akin to a digression than

regression in the sense that it facilitates a movement that is separated from an assumption of an origin associated with life. While Edelman sees repetition as the undoing of assumptions associated with the value of life, these specific assumptions are related to a value dependent on an unpredictable futurity. A repetition of creative difference does not depend on futurity to reproduce a (singular emphasized) possible value of life that is forever to come, but embodies possibility in each repetition marked by a difference from that which has been repeated. Edelman critiques the way in which repetition perpetuates an inherent or natural value in what is repeated; however, the chariot, as a *sinthome*, does not seem to reproduce an inherent value in its repetition. The perpetual shadows thrown onto the chariot do not confirm any “natural” value of life because “Shelley” views life “as one sad thought” (299), suggesting that there is nothing necessarily affirming or productive about the repetition of life expressed through different simulacra. Thus, I argue that if repetition in this poem is supposed to “undo” (40) anything, it is Edelman’s assumption that the repetition of life blindly justifies its inherent value and perpetuates it in the same (underlying, if not surface) form. On the contrary, my use of repetition sees life as fundamentally productive by the way in which it repeats itself differently than the ways it has previously been depicted.

As I have noted in the previous chapter, Deleuze’s repetition is also associated with the infinite movements of the plane of immanence. No one movement on the plane is the same in the sense that no one repetition of the origin stories within the poem is the same. In addition, the procession of the chariot figures Deleuze’s plane of immanence. As noted in *WIP*, concepts that populate the plane of immanence are not “calm determinations” (54) and do not “refer to spatiotemporal coordinates that define the

successive positions of a moving object” (37). The people following the chariot are described as “hastening onward” without knowledge of “Whither [they] went, or whence [they] came, or why” (47-48), and these people mirror the plane which does not track a definitive and pre-planned path of an object as part of a successive movement. The chariot itself is also introduced by simply appearing from no one direction (91) from and to its destination with its trace “as of foam after the Oceans wrath” (163). The plane is also never static in the sense of instantiating one unchanging plane. The history of philosophy involves newer thinkers responding to and revising older philosophers, and this response results in “the original plane [gaining] ... new curves” and “different plane[s] ... woven into the mesh of the first one” (WIP 57). The chariot contains “figures ever new / Ris[ing] on the bubble” (248-49) which are part of many other figures of the past that have “been thrown before us” (250). The chariot, far from stably representing certain figures, always contains changing figures similar to the changing curves on a plane of immanence. These figures also represent what Deleuze identifies as “readymade thoughts” which do not recognize problem spaces but rather try to solve or foreclose them. These thoughts would be akin to Rousseau’s identification of figures that are “false” (247) and unworthy of worship. These thoughts are also characterized as modern images of thoughts that are “triumphalist” (WIP 54) in nature, similar to the figures chained to the chariot whose thoughts “battle[d] Life” (239) in an attempt to establish “thought’s empire over thought” (211).⁵⁷ Deleuze also notes that there is a precarity of

⁵⁷ Kant is included as one of these figures chained to the Chariot and is accused of waging war with Life. This accusation itself is somewhat confirmed by Deleuze in that he notes that Kant “ascribes immanence to the Subject” (WIP 46) in an attempt to save the transcendent as a presupposition of the Self capable of experience. Kant’s assurance in the Self and thus is establishing of “thought’s empire over thought” (211) might offer a reason as to why he is chained to the Chariot.

the changing plane which is “holed” (51) so as to allow a surrounding fog which obfuscates an intended direction of the plane. This fog also seems to be present in the poem where the Chariot is surrounded by “a cold glare” (76) obscured by a “blinding light” (78), or in the figure of the Shape who “blot[s] / the thoughts” (383-84) of those who gaze on her. The blinding light, like the fog, obscures the stability of thought when laying out a plane of immanence. Thus, there are several details in the poem which have affinities with a Deleuzian plane of immanence.

The reading of *The Triumph of Life* that establishes different spaces of the simulacrum, and draws an affinity between the plane of immanence and the Chariot’s seemingly infinite movement, allows us to reflect on the relation between the commentary on the poem and the poem itself. As I have mentioned in the last chapter when theorizing deconstructive commentary, the commentary is not separable from the text but rather arises alongside and from it. While thus far it seems that my deconstructive commentary has clearly established itself as separate from the poem, there are several considerations which collapse the distance between commentary and text worth mentioning. First, let us revisit some of the features of deconstructive commentary. The commentary is concerned with tracking different movements of the plane of immanence aside from solely focusing on the limitations of the Hegelian concept. The phantasm of Rousseau similarly explores the changing figures throughout history that are created on the Chariot’s bubble, careful to refuse the ‘false’ figures, or what Deleuze would call the illusions of ready-made images of thought. He also explores the changing form of the Shape as it initially appears as “a shape all light” (352), then as a shape that “waned in the coming light” (412), and finally as the shape whose presence haunts Rousseau (433).

Rousseau's tracking of the Shape figures the tracking of concepts on a plane of immanence which alter the movement of the plane. My deconstructive commentary on the poem functions in the same way as Rousseau's observations on the figures on the Chariot's surface: I track different instances of the simulacrum and different movements of the planes that the poem erects. In a sense, my commentary is part of the "perpetual flow / Of people" (398-99) responsible for creating "Figures ever new" (248) which eventually pass away. My probing of the question "'What is Life?'" (544), is the same question that the figure of Rousseau contends with in the poem.⁵⁸ The progressive becoming of these simulacra produced by the "creative ray" (533) of the Chariot is the same becoming I experience in tracking different simulacra in the poem. Aside from my commentary, my lived experience of getting older, changing, and watching those around me change has affinities with Rousseau's observation of aging people who become lost and pass from the Chariot. So, my deconstructive commentary, far from being removed or 'outside' the poem, is produced from the poem.

One aspect of my commentary that seems limited is the possibility of a space outside the simulacrum. This space initially seems to critique my commentary of the poem and even my theorizing of deconstructive commentary in that I have not explicitly dealt with the 'real' or any possible phenomena outside of simulacra. However, Deleuze does mention something akin to the real. In *WIP*, Deleuze notes the existence of *the* plane of immanence which is "the nonthought within thought" (59); he also similarly describes this outside space as the prephilosophical. Rather than thinking the nonthought or

⁵⁸ Tilottama Rajan picks up on the affinitive function of the critic and the phantasm of Rousseau in *The Supplement of Reading* when she notes that if we try to create meaning from the poem we will be turned into the endless simulacrum of substitutable figures (325).

prephilosophical, Deleuze believes that the “supreme act of philosophy” (59) is to “show that it is there” (59). And, indeed, there are some spaces which show themselves rather than being represented as images of thought. While the most negative depictions of life are represented by a Baudrillardian simulacrum no longer signifying a reality, there are hidden threads of productivity associated with the simulacrum’s possibility of meaning(s) toward life.

There are at least two images in this poem which seem to evade an economy of pure simulation by occupying a place outside. Even the suggestion that something can occupy a space outside the simulation calls the very structure of that simulation into question. The Shape is said to have come “from the realm with no name” (396), suggesting that she cannot be pinned down or signified by any one conventional name. Thus far, the violence associated with the Shape relates to her hyperreality, but the way in which she is figured complicates this relatively simple interpretation. Her description as “a shape all light” (352) is paradoxical in that light cannot be figured as an object. Still, the effect of a permanent source of light (which of course morphs into another simulated shape) hints at the desire for a Platonic original—itsself a changing philosophical concept—that survives the simulation, even if it is an illusion. Even after Rousseau touches her cup and erases thoughts from his mind, the “fair shape wane[s] in the coming light” (412) but is still present. The earlier Shape keeps its “obscure tenour” “beside [Rousseau’s] path, as silent as a ghost” (432-3), refusing to be forgotten on the sand of Rousseau’s brain. The Shape is able to assume the different forms in each vision, suggesting that her presence may constitute a Platonic residue that the simulation produces. Iris is merely one of many dissimulations of the Shape; the fact that the Shape

cannot be grounded by one simulated form suggests that there is a residue of Plato's original for which neither Baudrillard's nor Deleuze's simulacrum can account.

Similarly, the chariot's guiding of Dante "from the lowest depths of Hell / Through every Paradise and through all glory" (472-473) implies a simulated movement toward some destination that resembles a Platonic heaven.

These two images suggest that there are elements of the poem which cannot be categorized under any orientation of the simulacrum precisely because they resist the structure of the simulacrum itself. If there is some aspect of the poem that evades simulation, then there is the possibility for a successful symbolic exchange between life and death—an exchange not possible with a simulation. Because there is no death involved in simulation (e.g. the settings in the poem are not an afterlife and there is no threat of death), there is no symbolic exchange between life and death, but merely changes in the forms of simulacra which comprise life itself. The fact that the Shape is described as a ghost (433), yet is vitally present in a spectral form alongside Rousseau as he enters his second vision, suggests that the dead may symbolically exchange value with life. It is the Shape, as a ghost, who penetrates vision within vision seemingly asserting a "light from heaven" (429) that fixates on the chariot. Therefore, she is not merely a Platonic residue of Rousseau's own subjectivity, but influences other people who follow the chariot of life. While people, as simulacra, grow old and eventually die, it seems that the Shape persists in some obscure way in the traces of herself that remain, temporarily making the followers of the chariot "forgetful of the chariot's swift advance" (450). Thus, there is a possible way in which the Shape, deconstructing the simulacrum, symbolically exchanges life with death. Another intimation of a space outside the simulacrum is hinted

at earlier in the poem. The narrator notes that there exist “the sacred few who could not tame / Their spirits to the Conqueror” (128-29) which results in the sacred few flying “back like eagles to their native noon” (131) without being held captive by the Chariot. This native noon seems to be a place outside of the confines of the Chariot and thus also serves as a place outside simulacra.

Insofar as the Shape deconstructs the simulacrum and opens the possibility for life to be symbolically exchanged with death, she is a markedly different figure from earlier formations of this figure in other poems by Shelley, such as the dream-woman (and Poet) and the Hermaphrodite.⁵⁹ The dream-woman and Poet represent a specific counterfeit that still dissimulates a relationship with reality. This dissimulation is an anxious response to the growing disjunction between signifier and signified. An exchange between life and death is attempted by the Narrator in *Alastor*; however it is not successful as the poem already enters within an early form of the simulacrum. In *The Witch of Atlas*, the Hermaphrodite, as a purely creative and uncontrollable expression of the Witch’s capabilities, severs any relationship with reality. It seems that an exchange between life and death is not even attempted because there is no benefit from doing so. The Narrator in *Alastor* is trying to uncover the secrets of nature which naturally concern the relationship between life and death; the Witch, being immortal, does not need to exchange life with death because she does not personally benefit from it—she is concerned with creative possibilities of the simulacrum, but not the possibility of threading life with death. The Shape in *The Triumph of Life*, unlike those I have just mentioned, seems to express Baudrillard’s precession of the simulacrum, violently

⁵⁹ Both figures are represented in earlier Shelley poems of *Alastor* and the *The Witch of Atlas* respectively.

rejecting any meaning attributed to her; however she can be rethought as a powerful presence akin to a Platonic residue who offers a way out of the simulation—specifically the hyperreality—altogether. Yet insofar as *The Triumph of Life* unfolds in a hyperreality, one cannot easily “deconstruct” or “escape” the economy of simulation without oneself performing an act of interpretive violence. Similarly, one cannot think the Deleuzian prephilosophical or *the* plane of immanence without resorting back to the transcendental. After *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard sees the only escape from hyperreality as an implosion of the simulation: implosion, he believes, “is inevitable, and every effort to save the principles of reality ... is archaic” (*Shadow of the Silent Majorities* 59) without recognizing a violence associated with that desire (i.e. with the recovering or saving of reality). In developing the simulacrum as an eventual departure from the simulacrum, there must be an “implosion,” possibly referring to the way in which the Shape defiantly erases Rousseau’s thoughts when he gazes at her. The gaze of Rousseau may signify a desire to uncover something “real” as a way out of the hyperreality, but that results in the effect of an implosion as the Shape erases his thoughts. The physical poem itself may represent an implosion as it is left unfinished as a result of Shelley’s early death. Or put differently, the prephilosophical, in the form of a non-simulacrum, is hinted at but never thought itself.

Yet the Shape should not be merely associated with the remnants of a Platonic desire for presence which complicates a reading of the poem focused on the simulacrum. The Shape ultimately leads to an infinite form of a questioning from Rousseau in that it is she who beckons him to drink Nepenthe, which leads to a different vision within his relayed vision to the initial narrator. As noted, the Shape does not properly have a form

since it is made of light. Observers cannot see her because their thoughts are trampled as soon as they try to form her. Yet, the metaphor also suggests that something, a new or different form—perhaps not directly of her—is created out of her initial rejection of representation. The thoughts, like embers, of those who look at her are stamped out “until the breath / of darkness reillumines even the least / Of Heaven’s living eyes” (388-90), such that there is a partial remnant left behind even though thought itself appears to be negated. The Shape also serves as a simulacrum of a guide-figure responsible for the production of visions throughout the poem. Even though the Rousseau figure asks the Shape “whence [he] came, and where [he is]” (398), the Shape produces a vision that does not necessarily answer his question in a straightforward way: her offer to “quench [his] thirst” (400) results in a vision that is not trying to answer his question about the origin but resorts to a more affective space of simulacra actively changing its form⁶⁰. Thus, the Shape does not need to be read solely as some notion of the ‘real’ which complicates a reading of simulacra in the poem, but can act as a *différance* or the free-play of simulacra actively changing.

To summarize, in this chapter I have offered a reading of *The Triumph of Life* which focuses on different formations of the simulacrum that are crossed between Baudrillard’s third order of the simulacrum and Deleuze’s more creative understanding of the simulacrum. Even while there may be an aporia within my reading of simulacra in the poem, as evidenced by the remnants of a Platonic presence, my reading is not solely

⁶⁰ Important to note is that the simulacrum of the guide who appears as the narrator first, then Rousseau, then the Shape, all serve different functions. For example, when the narrator asks the Rousseau figure where he came from, Rousseau promises to relay “The progress of the pageant [Chariot]” (202). However, the Shape in response to Rousseau’s desire to know where he came from does not make any such promises. In fact, she never speaks after initiating the new vision for Rousseau.

focused on this aporia within the context of the simulacrum. To suggest so would return my reading to a kind of deconstructive criticism that I originally aimed to abandon. Far from reducing the poem to a deconstructed binary within deconstructive criticism (see Figure 1 in chapter 2), my aim has been to track the simulacra in this poem as figures on a plane of immanence. By tracking simulacra on a plane of immanence, I have also tried to demonstrate how my commentary has not been separated from the poem to serve a prepositional act *on* the poem itself; rather, it has arisen outside of the poem which figures the process of a deconstructive commentary thus effacing the difference between the poem and my commentary on the poem (or *with* the poem). In theory, this interpretation of the poem does not significantly diverge from other scholars' interpretations. Tilottama Rajan argues that her reading, much like my own, "elides the fragmentary status of the poem" in an attempt to provide "a hermeneutic completion for it" (325) through a necessary supplement of reading.⁶¹ My reading, or deconstructive commentary, is in agreement with this necessary supplement of reading; however, the impetus for this supplement does not presuppose that the poem is necessarily disfigured or incomplete, but rather that the poem's plane of immanence produces the condition of a commentary which traces the formation of different concepts.

One final consideration in ending this chapter is a possible objection that I treat the poem as a Deleuzian philosophy of created concepts rather than as an artwork. Deleuze draws a distinction between philosophy as the creation of concepts and art as "a

⁶¹ Further resemblances of my reading with Rajan's include the fact that despite her chapter involving the deconstruction of certain concepts, there are several moments where she is not overtly preoccupied with deconstructing concepts. For example, she will speak of repetition both as a process which thematizes the failure of an origin *and* its more generative potential as a production of difference. Thus, her reading contains aspects of what I identify as a deconstructive commentary.

bloc of sensations ... a compound of percepts and affects" (WIP 164). If Deleuze means to distance art from philosophy, it is not clear how he stably maintains this difference throughout WIP. When describing the plane of immanence, he often uses metaphors that resemble tropes that could comfortably exist in works of literature. Many of these tropes have already been discussed in this chapter which include the planes as interleaved with holes so as to let a mysterious hermeneutical fog through them, the planes as series of different fabrics weaved together, and the plane as a breath suffused throughout a body. In addition, the plane's movements are also described by the conceptual personae which are represented by different figures such as friends or rivalries. There is something aesthetic and artistic about the way in which Deleuze theorizes philosophy, and this tendency towards aesthetics is the grounds for which his project of philosophy is also a project of art. However, this project of art would not be recognized as a "a bloc of sensation" (164), as Deleuze and Guattari mention, but this non-recognition is hardly the point. If we are willing to concede that there is something aesthetic and artistic about Deleuze's formulation of philosophy, then there must also be something philosophical about the way in which this poem lays out a series of different concepts on a plane of immanence. This is not to say that philosophy and art mirror one another in an identical function, but rather that Shelley's poem produces a philosophical function and D&G's theorizing of philosophy is aesthetically framed. In an interview, Félix Guattari responds to a question inquiring about his (and Deleuze's) definition of art. He states that WIP is primarily a work "on philosophy and not on art" (*The Guattari Effect* 42). What interests him is "defining the distinctive features that separate the concept, the scientific function

and affects and percepts” (42).⁶² However, this admission does not mean that the concept must be attributed to philosophy or that percepts and affects cannot be produced from philosophy. As demonstrated in my reading of Shelley’s poem, there is another way of “reground[ing] the specificity of the philosophical concept” (42) without making the concept essentially derivative of philosophy.

⁶² What is interesting to note is that Guattari speaks of an “us” in relation to the intention of WIP to suggest that both he and Deleuze are in agreement. It remains unclear whether or not Deleuze thought of the project in WIP, i.e. “reground[ing] the specificity of the concept in relation to philosophy” (42) in the same way as Guattari. Because WIP was published a year after this interview and because Guattari constantly refers throughout the interview to the intentions of the project in the past tense, it is unclear whether Guattari and Deleuze changed their ideas after having written the book. In addition, Guattari in same interview notes that different works they wrote together involved different functions of art, and this multi-varied function of art suggests that there is no unified function of art and that art is instead much more eclectic than alluded to in WIP.

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