Introduction: The Argument So Far

The first problem of poststructuralism, then, is how to evade a Hegelian foundation. (Hardt 1993, x)

In the corpus of Louis Althusser, the metaphor of the ‘cut’ works at several levels. Before anything, it signals a definite change of terrain in the thought organized under a specific signature, Althusser’s privileged example being: ‘Karl Marx’. Here, the Althusserian ‘cut’ comes up in its epistemological dimensions. As a metaphor it gets a wide extension of meaning in the Althusserian corpus. Other than indicating an act of ‘breaking’ or ‘severing’ it also means a work of ‘extraction’, or of ‘distillation’. This work separates ‘science’ from ‘ideology’, where the former has a precarious claim to truth and materiality. Therefore, at some points, the cut works as if like a truth-machine. But as delineated in the previous chapter, it is not the extracted product but the very act of extraction, distillation, or, to use the privileged metaphor, the ‘work of the cut’ which sets itself apart decisively from the object it works upon. It is not merely a truth-claim that informs Althusser’s notion of a Marxian science but rather its ability to meditate on the limits of philosophical reason at a distance. This ability is not just another thesis, but is materialised in action. This ‘action’ is typically a work of ‘thought’, which constitutes the Marxian break. It invariably propels one to the Marxian ‘eleventh
thesis on Feuerbach\textsuperscript{1}, where a program of ‘change’ is demanded, rather than mere contemplation. But does the Althusserian work of the ‘cut’ make the work of science decisively leave the closure of the philosophical? It is through an examination of this problematic that the most central manifestation of the metaphor of the cut is encountered. At this level, the metaphor takes the field it works on, as a delimited, demarked area, and works at its margins, incessantly cutting away from its inside.

But cutting what away, if the cut is itself not placed in the outside? Althusser’s answers are not unambiguous here. It seems that he has at least three different approaches to this quandary. At the register of the philosophical, he does not think that the cut can ever leave the field, what’s more, the work of the cut itself is a philosophical operation, the very crux of the ‘being of philosophy’. In yet another register, the cut can be a carefully constructed critical tool which reconfigures the ‘real’ through an epistemological method, which consists in analytically re-configuring ‘knowledge’. It is a three step method which first abstracts from the given, reads the dispersion through a weave (may we call it ‘textuality’?) and takes it to the level of thought, then in a re-turn, re-inscribes the real, this time as \textit{concrete in thought}, and finally tries to intervene in this new configuration. Althusser’s ingenuous reading is able to read this method in the texts of Marx, specifically in \textit{Grundrisse}, a method that he rechristens “Generalities”. This naming is to be noted, for it will recur in the course of our discussion throughout this dissertation. It indicates that at no level of the epistemological method, can one really encounter the ‘singular’, if singular is the instant, the ‘event’, that which really happens in the ‘real’. Epistemology is an exercise in generalities only, and it cannot do without making generalities. Marxism acknowledges this, a gesture that anticipates responsible manipulation and intervention. The last crucial approach that Althusser sets in thinking the ‘cut’ is the one of politics. It is again, another face of the problematic of ‘cut’ similar and yet different from the epistemological cut we have just mentioned. It is a renewal of the thesis on Feuerbach as well, for it is about intervention. It is here that Althusser stages the ‘cut’ as the ‘correct’ intervention of science into the putative passivity of philosophical reason. But we immediately understand ‘passivity’ is the wrong word,

\textsuperscript{1} See note 6 below.
the philosophical field is neutral (and not non-true) to ‘truth’ or ‘non-truth’, it can side with either. It has an indifference to the question of truth as long as it propels one to a groundlessness. Therefore, political intervention does not simply extract but does produce the truth (as true politics) through its intervention in the given (which in turn, cannot be thought without the inscription of this intervention). These moves are made apropos Althusser’s reading of Lenin. This ‘true politics’, or as Althusser calls it, the ‘correct’ one, is a curious happening, because it is as much a product of its own, as it is an act prompted by a prior machine-like reason (in the case of Lenin, Marx’s analysis of class). But Lenin’s insistence on its arbitrary nature (philosophically, Marx’s analysis of class is not ‘true’ in itself, it is rather a ‘correct’ intervention2), makes one think of it also as a decision, and therefore, different from a machine-like production3. But how can both ‘work’ at the same time: the ‘machine’ and the ‘decision’, and who is responsible for both? This is a question that remains unanswered in Althusser, but not entirely unattended. It also lets one a glimpse of the subject of politics (or of correctness/justice), from one possible standpoint. In fact, if I may already pre-empt the shape of this dissertation, each of the initial chapters tries to examine the notion of agency, therefore the notion of the ‘subject’. To put it differently, each chapter tests a certain notion of a ‘subject of the work (of the ‘cut’)’ and tries to confront the limits and openings of such an endeavour. The point is to foreground this temptation of fixing on a subject-predication that the theoretical discourse cannot ignore. In the argument of Althusser for example, we might see an opening to the cryptic question, ‘who works (as the cut, for the cut etc)?’

In the previous chapter, I have tried to discuss the possible answers to such a question in the context of the corpus of Louis Althusser. In the present chapter, I venture into a different take into the same problematic, this time through a reading of some texts by Jacques Derrida. This, I contend, would help us further formulate the questions about the event and the machine among other things. Without making further conjectures on an argument that lie ahead, let us work at an entry into it.

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2 See previous chapter.

3 Althusser refers to Lenin’s Materialism and Empirio-criticism (1909; in Lenin 1977) chiefly.
Openings to Derrida: Metaphor at the Margin

In this chapter I mainly focus on Jacques Derrida’s “White Mythology” first published in 1974 and a continuation of the same arguments in “The Retrait of Metaphor” first delivered as a lecture in 1978 addressing Paul Ricoeur’s criticism of Derrida’s reading of Heidegger in “White Mythology”⁴. The basic argument in “White Mythology” chalks out how philosophy tries to re-cover an earlier loss of originary philosophems through a repetitive deliberation on the nature of the ‘metaphorical’, which works through a distancing of ‘meaning’, a longing that can also be mapped as a longing for a lost ‘sensuous’ origin. But the itinerary of this longing, which philosophy tries to feign through the metaphorical is ‘graphed’ ironically in writing, a sensuous inscription itself. Consequently this desire can never master the metaphorical slide completely, always missing one extra metaphor that reserves a “blow”⁵ to the closure of philosophy as writing, Derrida proposes. I argue for an understanding of this extra or surplus at the margins of the text of philosophy as also an intervention of the ‘ethical’. The argument goes like this, any attempt to fix or stratify the surplus playing at the limit of the text involves a decision which would entail immense responsibility, a decision that has to go through the staging of an im-possible aporia, which also includes calculation up to a point. A deconstructive work stops short of that decision, and yet, the very staging of the aporia involves a decision that stays with the interminable calculation and work of the extra metaphor itself. But deconstruction does not simply celebrate the incalculability of the ‘metaphorical’ that plays at the limit. On the contrary, in thinking the representation of the incalculable as an interminable work, deconstruction stages the very desire of both ‘staying with’ and ‘giving into’ the incalculable. This whole movement, as Derrida never tires to point out, happens at a very close range of the Hegelian dialectic, a closeness which is also a ‘distance’. I

⁴ Published in the collection Ricoeur, Paul, The Rule of Metaphor The creation of meaning in language, chiefly in the “Study 8: Metaphor and philosophical discourse” (Ricoeur 2004).
⁵ Derrida 1982, xi.
foreground this ‘distance’ through a reading of the aforementioned texts as well as other related texts by Derrida. I also take a look at that specific point in the Hegelian textuality where the concept of ‘limit’ is dealt with, the (Hegelian) limit that stays between ‘something’ and ‘other’ determining both at the same time. As I have already suggested, this path takes us to an alternative understanding of the post-structuralist drift. The ‘structure’ comes to be by being not fully present at any given instant, both spatially and temporally, which is another way of saying it comes to be by re-presenting itself in time and in effect getting also a spatial extension, as if by sending itself off. This chapter follows that drift as seen through the deconstructive notion of a difference-deferral.

Louis Althusser, in PSPS says that philosophers go in circles, they are a ridiculous lot, and that “at some point they will fall flat on their faces” (Althusser 1990, 76). What’s more, the philosopher, “realizing that he is falling [...] attempts to ‘catch’ his balance in a theory of falling”, a dialectic of descend, but, “falls just the same” (emphasis added, Althusser, 76). Consequently, the philosopher, a ‘he’, “falls twice. Twice as funny” (76). “It is well worth” Althusser writes, “going out of your way to have a close look at such a spectacle”, philosophy as the work of the philosopher turned into “slapstick” (76). This is not merely said in jest, Althusser then puts forward his thesis, that the philosophical is nothing but philosophy’s perseverance in staying within itself, subjecting itself to enquiry, working at the margin of itself, that the “practice of philosophy consists in this demarcation, in this distinction [...] in this drawing of a line” (75). He insists that the moment one says it, thinks it, thinks philosophy funny (and philosophers do it only “rarely”), one starts to “transform” philosophy (75). Another thesis, that of Marx on Feuerbach looms large, “the point is, to change it”6. Marx used the German expression “zu verändern”, literally: ‘to make other’ (emphasis in original quote, quoted in Keenan 1997, 99). But how exactly to make fun of philosophy, in the process ‘making it other’? What is it for the philosophical to think of itself, think of its margin from the

6 Karl Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. “The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently; the point is, to change it” (“Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt darauf an, sie zu verändern”)” (emphasis in original, quoted in Keenan 1997, 99).
margin, or, as Althusser would have it, thinking a dialectic of falling while falling just the same? The previous chapter discussed Althusser’s ways of thinking ‘change’ into the structural closure of philosophy. The philosophical discourse, as if, guards this closure through self-representation, a machine meant to repeat itself inwardly as the same. But this very repetition makes it possible to think of a decisive intervention which Althusser thinks within what he calls Marxist philosophy or science.

In this chapter, I first discuss how philosophy’s margin-thinking is constituted by a myth of its origin as well as a desire for an outside. Following Jacques Derrida, the aim here would be to pose the philosophical discourse as metaphorical, like any other discourse. Philosophy tries to get rid of the metaphorical, which is figurative, and re-appropriate what is proper to it, the sensual originary investment. But in the process, it always misses one extra metaphor. We follow that missed metaphor at the limit, and see how it “always reserve(s) one more blow for philosophical knowledge” (Derrida 1982, xi). A reading of a specific moment in Hegel’s *Science of Logic* (1812-1816), where he talks about the philosophical problem of ‘limit-thinking’, becomes crucial at this point. Philosophy cannot pose full presence without sublating the ‘limit’ (its own constitutive limit as well as the notion ‘limit’). It, to revert back to Althusser, tries to make a theory of falling while falling. But if the limit cannot be sublated, does that remain outside the philosophical? Can one think of an-other discourse, which is not merely the other of philosophy but transforms philosophy from its limit?

White Mythology: Desire for Originary Difference

Oh Aristotle! If you had had the advantage of being “the freshest modern” instead of the greatest ancient, would you not have mingled your praise of metaphorical speech, as a sign of high intelligence, with a lamentation that intelligence so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor.—that we can

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7 Hegel 2010.
so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else? (The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot)\(^8\)

In *The Principle of Reason* Heidegger notes that it is only within ‘metaphysics’ that the ‘metaphorical’ dwells (Heidegger 1991, 48). It is so because metaphysics, as the normative mode of thinking in the “West”\(^9\) has relied on a division of the sensible and the non-sensible, a division Heidegger seems to think as worth retaining. Put roughly, the non-sensible is that faculty of thinking which accompanies human sense-perception but also does go beyond it. By going beyond, this faculty of the non-sensible makes human beings not only creatures with senses but “thinking creatures” (Heidegger 1991, 48). Heidegger sometimes calls thinking “nonsensible perception” (Heidegger, 47). For the human, Heidegger seems to say, sense-perception is not only a matter of receiving, but also at the same time, of responding. And thus the ‘sensible’ and the ‘non-sensible’ are not “completely separable”, even if the separation is important in thinking the human, or reason (Heidegger 1991, 48)\(^10\). Metaphor is a mark which both retains and blurs this separation, since it also works through both withdrawal and affirmation of meaning. Derrida picks up this thread and proposes that ‘philosophy’ is a kind of ‘writing’ which, like any other, cannot do without metaphors, even if it tries to pose itself as non-metaphorical. As he explains in “White Mythology” the use of metaphors in the texts of “western philosophy”\(^11\) is necessary rather than accidental (Derrida 1982, 209). We follow Derrida’s clues within the limits of our discussion, but that is not to suggest there is no other important work done in these lines. For example, Sarah

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\(^{8}\) Quoted in Young 1981, 24. In this aside on the “astonishing” power of metaphors in bringing forth different ideas, George Eliot likens the learning of language as well as learning to judge, with the ability to use metaphors. That way it gets inextricably linked with the education (*The Mill on the Floss* is a Bildungsroman) of both man and woman (*The Mill On the Floss*, first published in 1860, is the story of the Tulliver siblings). It is important to note here that ‘George Eliot’ is the pen-name of Mary Anne, another displacement.

\(^{9}\) Heidegger 1991, 4.

\(^{10}\) This argument has a reference to the Kantian and Hegelian notion of time. Derrida would read it in the textuality of Marx to astonishing effect, see next chapter.

\(^{11}\) Derrida 1982, 102.
Kofman, in *Freud and Fiction* writes, “philosophical thought had to begin by stammering a metaphorical language” even if this only meant that the metaphorical is relegated to an inferior position to the “conceptual” (Kofman 1991, 11). If the former only retains a potentiality to truth, the latter as if expresses truth itself (Kofman, 11)\(^{12}\). For Derrida, a thirst for some originary truth is “the philosopher’s great and only theme”, a search for the ‘proper’ in short (Derrida 1982, 291)\(^{13}\).

Philosophy thinks of some originary ‘philosophems’ which are the basic building blocks, the initial investment of philosophy, but which have circulated themselves henceforth as metaphors. Then on philosophy’s task has become one of retrieval, of that original capital, looking through the ruse of the circulating metaphors. By ‘remembering’ that it had forgotten, philosophy thinks its origin. Derrida’s analysis puts this anamnesis\(^{14}\) at the very heart of philosophy’s claim of being the meta-narrative. But these metaphors in circulation, with every turn, gather new meanings on their body, much like metal coins in the market, gathering rust, carrying value, but as concrete representations waiting to be replaced. To save the propriety of its

\(^{12}\) Kofman goes on to say that metaphor is “proper to the man” by which she indicates a certain priority given to metaphorical speech in patriarchal discourse (Kofman 1991, 11).

\(^{13}\) See next chapter for a deconstructive critique of the itinerary of the ‘proper’.

\(^{14}\) About ‘anamnesis’, Derrida says in an interview, “Yes, if there is anamnesis, it is not just a movement of memory to find again finally what has been an interpretation of anamnesis. The Platonic discourse is essentially anabasis or anamnesis, that is, a going back toward the intelligible place of ideas. The conversion in speleology, the Platonic cave, is an anamnesis. The Hegelian discourse is an anamnesis. The Nietzschean genealogy is an anamnesis. Repetition in the Heideggerian style is an anamnesis. Today, to want to remember philosophy is already to enter into an interpretive memory of all that has happened to memory, of all that has happened to anamnesis, of all the amnesiac temptations of philosophy. It is naturally a very complicated operation since these amnases are enveloped in each other. But it is also an interminable operation [...] it is because the memory in question is not turned toward the past, so to speak, it is not a memory that, at the end of a return across all the other amnases, would finally reach an originary place of philosophy that would have been forgotten. The relation between forgetting and memory is much more disturbing. Memory is not just the opposite of forgetting” (Derrida 1982, 382). It is curious to note that this description of anamnesis is only a later addition to the printed interview, as if remembered as forgotten at the moment, so added later (Krapp 2004, 138).
knowledge-capital, philosophy must posit an originary, natural wealth, a “primitive sense”\(^\text{15}\); and yet philosophy must work only with the ‘figurative’\(^\text{16}\), i.e. with metaphors. Even if philosophy mourns its “degradation”\(^\text{17}\) from the physical to the metaphysical, this very opposition works within philosophy, that is, within the ‘metaphysical’. At the same time this ‘myth’ of the origin also proposes that the originary ‘physical’ truth is accessible more through speech than ‘writing’, for writing is tilted more to the side of the metaphorical. Interestingly, speech is supposed to be nearer to truth as physicality and not writing, which, in commonsensical terms would seem more material. This apparent contradiction can be explained by Derrida’s proposition in *Of Grammatology* of two kinds of writing. As Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology* (1967, Tr. by Spivak 1974), the originary truth might very well be represented as physical, or even as writing, but that writing would be a different writing, a ‘true’ writing in the sense of the ‘Word’ or the writing of god, fully present, and incorruptibly material\(^\text{18}\). That true writing is accessible more through speech, repetition and memory. A memory of a lost past that is doubly lost when rendered in ‘writing’, this time the ‘this-worldly’, ‘trivializing’ writing, further removed from the true writing. The internal transaction of these two kinds of writing is beautifully put by Derrida in the following quote:

> the philosopher writes against writing [corrupted writing], writes in order to make good the loss of writing [the true originary writing], and by this very gesture forgets and denies what occurs by his hand. (Derrida 1994, 291)

The philosopher tries to bridge the gap between an internal speech and writing, through writing, in effect trying to account for the loss caused by writing’s deviation by the help of writing itself, stepping into a vicious circle. The myth of the loss is only available through the supposed erasure of a primal scene, an erasure which is revealed only as an inscription, and therefore precisely in the form of a writing. This is the circularity which the philosopher is prompted into. Deconstruction tries to

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\(^{15}\) Derrida 1982, 256n60.

\(^{16}\) Derrida 1982, 209, 255-256, 256n60, 312.


\(^{18}\) See for example, Derrida 1997, 174.
stage the same scene albeit with a crucial reshuffle. Deconstruction reads in the inscriptions of metaphysics, marks of an erasure which is available always already as inscription. As Derrida writes, “metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink” (Derrida 1982, 213). The originary capital that metaphysics has re-membered only to cover over another loss, what would be the story of that other (repressed) scene/sin? Derrida calls this white man’s mythology:

Metaphysics – the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason. (Derrida 1982, 213)

The white man takes his myth to be true, and the only form representing universal reason. The work of deconstruction does not merely consist in re-constructing the panorama of an original crime, rather it follows what happens in philosophy’s

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19 We have been using the term ‘metaphysics’ a lot, following Heidegger and Derrida. A gloss on this might be needed. The term undoubtedly is too broad and too sweeping which seems like a weakness, for is it possible to take the whole of the ‘history of the west’ or ‘metaphysical closure’ as a whole? Within the Derridian scheme of things, this general term (‘metaphysical closure’) would mean a certain thought-closure informed by primarily an insistence on a series of binary oppositions (e.g. absence/presence, speech/writing etc). This is described by Derrida in some places as a typically western thought-closure, also referred to as a ‘white mythology’ tied to the history of the ‘west’. But by yet another path the deconstructive approach also typically indicates this closure as the closure of human thought as such. In this second meaning, it is not anymore a historical object, but a structure which is thought to be the closure within which the trace of the anthropos works. This is a basic theoretical move typical of post-structuralism, to start off by proposing a horizon which conditions each and every production of thought. Spivak identifies this when she says in an interview, “it [such a name as ‘history of metaphysics] applies not just to deconstruction but to post-structuralists generally. They need a name for the general principle which seems to them to define things, though they keep changing the name” (Spivak 1990, 136).
routine life. This routine however, is also the mundane of the philosophical, where philosophy loses its specificity and overflows its boundaries.

Philosophy’s detour to truth through the metaphorical is not exclusive to philosophy, but it is the general condition of any language that tries to talk in terms of prioritising ‘speech’ over ‘writing’, even if the ‘philosophical’ remains an exemplary situation of this logocentric structure, for more than any other discourse, it forgets that it’s “source” is, after all, writing. This proposition goes against philosophy’s internal insistence of being that exclusive reserve which is upstream from the metaphorical. Derrida, in his turn, shows that even to start this escape from the metaphorical, philosophy must first exhaust its slide through the chain of metaphors, a slide that is in itself interminable. If this slide is the basic movement of philosophy, then it would seem that it is not philosophy that masters the metaphorical within its closures, but rather the spacing of the metaphorical overrides the limits of the philosophical. Extending this logic, we might come to a point where the limit of the metaphorical would be the limit of thought within language as such.

Metaphor and Being: Derrida Answering Ricoeur

For Paul Ricoeur however, Derrida only extends what is a very specific critique already articulated by Martin Heidegger which Heidegger limits only to the

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20 A shadow of the Marxian critique of the ‘primitive accumulation’ of capital is unmistakable here. But two things to be aware of: 1. Much like the Marxian proposition of the “So-Called Primitive Accumulation” (which has a function in “political economy” similar to one of the “legend” of “original sin” in “theology”, Marx 1982, 873), if the work of deconstruction posits an alternative to the While Mythology, it does it as a counter-myth, like a ridiculing double of the origin which is always already divided. 2. The connection to Marxian critique is analogical, and not a mirror reflection of the deconstruction of metaphysics, I tentatively think that the most striking similarity between the two lies in the fact that both plays with the Hegelian dialectic.

21 Derrida calls a section of “White Mythology”, ‘Point de philosophie’ which can both mean the point of philosophy and the source of philosophy/non-philosophy. See Derrida, 290tn16 (translators note).
discourse of philosophy. Ricoeur thinks that this restraint is an essential part of Heidegger’s argument, which loses its precision in Derrida’s “unbounded deconstruction” (Ricoeur 2004, 336). For Ricoeur, a more amplified version of the Heidegerrian critique should mean an increased suspicion of the working of the ‘metaphorical’ itself. Instead, what Derrida does in effect (Ricoeur thinks) is to celebrate the metaphorical withdrawal. This makes Derrida’s text a mere study of what metaphors seem to do best, endless displacement. Derrida is accused of not disturbing the metaphysical binary of the ‘proper’ and the ‘figurative’ and its parallel in the metaphorical couple of the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’. Ironically therefore, Ricoeur as if chides Derrida for both having too much and too little regard for the Heideggerian critique (of the metaphorical-metaphysical transaction). Derrida’s reply in “The Retrait of Metaphor” might also be taken as an exercise in how to read a deconstructive text. The Heideggerian propositions are re-performed in “White Mythology”, Derrida points out, only to follow their logic beyond the Heideggerian text. “Retrait” takes the very objects of the Heideggerian probe, ‘metaphysical language’ and ‘metaphor’, as yet another couple which mirrors the same sensible/intelligible binary with which they themselves work. But if one mistakes the first re-staging of the Heideggerian trust in the sensible/ non-sensible division as the intention of Derrida’s argument, then it would be easy to miss the ultimate overturning of that division. And yet, it would also be wrong to think that Derrida simply negates the whole argument woven around this division that Heidegger offers, that he sublates Heidegger’s thesis after taking an account of it, sublates it totally, completely. Total sublation would have been possible if the text of metaphysics was a simple closure. But as Derrida points out, there cannot be any “existence” or “consistency” of “something “like” the metaphysical” (Derrida 2007, 57). And still, it is a “more twisted, wily structure” which one is “tempted to call invaginated” (Derrida, 57). Metaphysics is never just a space shut off by a circular limit bordering a homogeneous field, nevertheless, that is the only way it might represent itself to itself. This circularity is an “ontoencyclopediac logic” (57) which the Derridian text follows. This trailing or stalking of the logic of metaphysics, always works perilously close to its pray, and yet at a crucial distance. The

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performance of this distance is as much part of the work of deconstruction, Derrida seems to say, as it is the very re-enactment of the object it tries to distance itself from. Deconstruction therefore is at the same time, a description of what is, and by the dint of articulating that description, also an effort at making an impossible distance from the object it works on. It is for this reason that the key question of deconstruction arranges itself as the following: does deconstruction just happen in a text, or an agent must intend it from the outside? Can there be an outside to the text in this sense? These problems are intertwined with the question of subjectivity and agency and are taken up in more detail in the next chapter. In the context of the present discussion, one notes that the Derridian text both follows the logic of the metaphorical slide which is interminable, and itself performs the failure of the metaphorical in circumscribing that very logic, in fully articulating the meaning which always remains a step away, invested in the additional metaphor or in the excess metaphorical. Does the Derridian text become party to the metaphysical notion of the ‘metaphor’ in following that logic affirmatively?

The surplus of the metaphorical, that always plays at the limit, never letting the drift of meaning to stabilize, is indeed part of the metaphysical concept of metaphor through which it gains both its continuity and closure. But at the same time, this self-representation cannot fully account for the ‘surplus’ which corrupts it at both ends, marking a limit undaunted by the sublating work of the ‘inside’. The ‘excess’ of the metaphorical slide, therefore, arrests the self-perpetuation of metaphysics, and, by that same gesture breaches that very closure. Put simply, if the ‘surplus metaphor’ is something like an ‘Archimedean outside’, then this expression-in-words (‘Archimedean outside’) is the metaphor which points to the ‘concept’ of that ‘outside’, albeit from the ‘inside’ of language and consequently working as that metaphor which represents the (notion of an) extra-metaphor. This metaphor which stands in for the ‘outside’ or for the excess metaphor, in effect both opens and closes the text of metaphysics. Derrida’s move away from Heidegger’s text is crucial and yet plays at a close range. This proximity becomes more clear if one notes how Derrida connects the metaphorical with the Heideggerian notion of the ‘Being’.
For Heidegger the problematic of ‘Being’ has a crucial centrality. As explained in the opening pages of *Being and Time* (1927), the point is to retrieve the question of ‘Being’ otherwise taken for granted to the point of forgetting in the history of western philosophy. The sarcastic note in opening sentence of *Being and Time* is not to be missed,

The question has today been forgotten – although our time considers itself progressive in again affirming “metaphysics”. (Heidegger 1991, 3)

For Heidegger the crux of the ‘metaphysical’ lies in this delay, or as he expresses it, in the withdrawal (*Entziehun*) of Being. The meaning of Being cannot be fixed as such, it delays and withdraws from presence. This spacing can only be graphed in metaphorical language and therefore the equivalence between the trajectories of the metaphysical and the metaphorical. ‘Metaphor’ traces this withdrawal of Being, its flight from coming into full presence, but this ‘tracing’ can never reveal any truth about the Being, endlessly caught in tracing the trace, refolding the fold. It rather produces a discourse whose borders can never be “determinable according to a simple and indivisible line” (Derrida 2007, 66). ‘Retrait’ is Derrida’s preferred word for *Entziehung* (commonly translated as ‘withdrawal’). According to Derrida, it is “neither a translation nor a nontranslation” (Derrida 2007, 67). ‘Retrait’ (or re-trait) stands for the persistent folding of the metaphorical as well as for the inexhaustible meaning of Being or its ‘being in-withdrawal’, its slide through incessant re-turns. Deconstruction, however, trails only the logic of this incessant folding, or interminable weave of representation and is not propelled by the nostalgia of any lost origin, or original meaning of the Being itself. Here lies Derrida’s move which runs along with but beyond the text of Heidegger. This understanding of the trailing of the logic of the re-presentation as trace, or of the materiality which makes presence sur-vive, as the object of the work of deconstruction might become clear if one separates the different registers of argument working here. We do this

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23 In this chapter, I follow the English translation of the “Retrait” in using capital ‘B’ to write ‘Being’ in either paraphrasing Heidegger or Derrida’s reading of Heidegger. Subsequently in later chapters I have used ‘Being’ whenever I have referred to this specific argument.

delineation somewhat in the spirit of Derrida’s answer to Ricoeur in “Retrait” where his expressed intention is to point out his difference from Heidegger\(^{25}\). Here are the three separable trajectories working in the Heidegger-Derrida mishmash:

A. Heidegger: The meaning of Being is inaccessible. “Being proffers itself to us, but in such a way that at the same time it, in its essence, already withdraws [...] to the very extent it is not present” (Heidegger quoted in Malabou and Derrida 2004, 126). What is given (to Dasein as a question) is only the withdrawal (Entziehung) of that meaning. The metaphorical as such goes through the same movement in relation to ‘meaning’ as such.

B. Derrida reading Heidegger: But this withdrawal itself cannot be accessed, followed, or conceived other than as ‘writing’. Much like the writing of the waves on the sea-shore, marking, re-marking the supplementary returns. Metaphor is one such ‘writing’, it is also the privileged ‘metaphor’ of the ontological writing (Being being always in-withdrawal).

C. Derrida\(^{26}\): Consequently that metaphor, which stands for the withdrawal of Being, itself cannot be fixed, cannot be decided upon (in naming this movement as ‘Entziehung/withdrawal/retrait’ Heidegger has already named it, nailed it, but still it is just another word, another metaphor). But if there cannot be any stoppage, even provisional, then one runs the risk of getting trapped in the never ending play of the metaphorical, in the movement of being-in-withdrawal which itself can be a metaphysical concept, desiring boundless space and drift anchoring itself only in the very question of ‘Being’ (as that which gives endless space and indeterminate time). In short, like any metaphor, Heidegger’s privileged concept-metaphor ‘Being’ too, runs the risk of ontologization in reverse. Derrida in turn, also has to underline that deconstruction is not merely an ontology, neither it is a method of acquiring knowledge (epistemology), it works at a clear distance from any such claim, dealing

\(^{25}\) One should assume here the statutory warning that any clear-cut analytic separation of this kind would have to go through fair amount of simplification of the given argumentative rigour.

\(^{26}\) The reading-marks of the author of this dissertation is hidden in the apparently self-standing headings ‘Heidegger’ or ‘Derrida’.
only with representations. It is for this reason, that deconstruction can also be said to ‘affirm’ the metaphorical. There however comes a moment of a stoppage. This stoppage, Derrida reminds, marks the *aporía* that comes with the question of Being, in the form of the word *Entziehung*. Derrida singles out *Entziehung* or ‘retrait’ as the crux of the Heideggerian narrative. Crucially, Derrida defines the concept-metaphor ‘retrait’ as neither translation nor non-translation functioning “neither literally nor by metaphor” (Derrida 2007, 67). If it is at all a metaphor much like the other Derridian terms (e.g. pharmakon, gift, justice etc), then “it would be a curious, overturning metaphor” even “catastrophic” (Derrida 2007, 67). It would then signal the end of circulation of the meaning (of Being), which is, otherwise, impossible. The ‘stoppage’ signalled by the metaphor ‘retrait’ therefore, is both inside and outside of the text of philosophy as well as of the Heideggerian text. I contend that this idea of an ‘impossible foothold’ of the ‘outside’ which can never stabilize the drift of the ‘inside’ and yet can be a persistent labour, undoing the closure of the inside, is the basic move of ethical deconstruction. I will come back to this idea later, in the course of our discussion.

In “*Retrait*” Derrida himself goes further in meticulously reading Heidegger’s notion of Being. But for our present purpose I extract just the following two steps from that discussion. Firstly, Deconstruction takes representation as a kind of ‘writing’, as a mark or trail of a previous presence, both unfinished and material. Secondly, Deconstruction both limits and de-limits the text, especially the text of metaphysics. Derrida reminds his readers that he has always been concerned with the limits of metaphysics-as-a-text, “as far back as” in the seminal essay “*Différence*”, where he had written, “the text of metaphysics [is] not surrounded but *traversed* by its limit [...] *marked* on its inside by the *multiple track* of its margins” (emphasis added, Derrida, 58)\(^{27}\). The use of words like ‘mark’ or ‘track’, metaphors related to ‘grammatology’ in other words, insistently point to the ‘distance’ deconstruction works from, the distance of re-presentation that somehow hesitates between ontology and epistemology. Therefore, we must be careful here to note that for Derrida, the spacing or the drift of the metaphorical is not only connected to the question of Being, but is also one way of investigating how knowledge is produced.

\(^{27}\) Derrida quoting himself from “*Différence*” (Derrida 1982, 24) adding the stress.
as inscription. The spacing or the deferring of meaning is only available through its tracing. Which is why ‘writing’ becomes such an important category for the work of deconstruction. Therefore, one is to be attentive here to the fact that Derrida reads the scheme of philosophy as a textuality. Textuality is the Derridian name for any structure which can be read only as represented. This view of the structure is radically different from the concept of structure in ‘structuralism’, or any earlier philosophical view of a structural closure. A Deconstructive notion of textuality lets one deal only with marks, or traces, and not with any ‘present’ object. For the work of deconstruction it does not suffice to propose that the structure is incomplete, or imaginary, but deconstruction also takes the extra caution of thinking each element of a given structure as unstable, incomplete, not fully present but only available in the process of ‘incomplete mattering’ or, if we might put it this way: ‘presencing’. This notion of a thing as always involved in the process of coming to presence, and therefore persisting as deferred (full) presence, is expressed through the (inadequate) metaphor of ‘writing’. One only accesses an object textually because the object is always already differed and deferred creating a slit which can never be fully overcome by the observing subject. Moreover, this insurmountable distance itself comes typically ‘before’ any notion of the ‘thing-in-itself’, the ‘object’ re-presented being nothing more than an afterthought, like a memory which the representation invents to validate itself. Within the deconstructive matrix, representation comes before the thing represented, it comes always already inscribed as a textuality. In this specific sense deconstruction works somewhere between ontology and epistemology. It can never think of the being of an object without first asking in the process the question relating to its textual conception. Let me now recapitulate the arguments covered in this chapter so far:

I. The discourse of philosophy proposes that there is a “stratum” of founding “tropes”, the bedrock of “primary “philosophems”” (Derrida 1982, 219), which are sensory, material.

II. But this foundation cannot meditate on itself, cannot “dominate” itself other than from a distance. It must “whisper its name” to itself from very close, and yet at a distance. Close-ness, is measured after all, by distance (the Latin of ‘Proper’,
“prope”, also does mean the ‘nearest’, see Derrida 1982, 133). Retrieving the proper calls for an ‘extra metaphor’, at a distance.

III. This extra metaphor represents a vanishing presence, a mythical originary distance of philosophy from itself. It is used here, as a supplement. In the Deconstructive parlance, the ‘supplement’ has this crucial double meaning, in a structure, it is the missing thing, it is also the extra thing. Deconstruction thinks the ‘trace’ in its place, which is a counter myth. Trace, a fake origin that plays with the origin, breaks the myth, it is always already metaphorical, its own double.

IV. Therefore, if one wants to conceive “all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy” there would always be a metaphor remaining out of that calculation, a metaphor that takes place each time at the margin, “without which the concept of the metaphor” cannot be “constructed” (Derrida 1982, 220). It “gets carried away” each time it is meditated upon (Derrida, 220). With each turn, the discourse of philosophy tries to re-gain itself, only to desire one more turn.

V. This circulation (of metaphors) apparently makes a profit, sublating (Hegelian Aufhebung, both overcoming and conserving) the extra metaphor, but the Derridian rejoinder would be this: the extra metaphor always remains un-accounted for, that which keeps the machine turning. Consequently “the extra turn of speech becomes the missing turn of speech”, and “the field is never saturated” (220).

VI. But, crucially, the work of deconstruction would be careful not to ontologize this ‘extra metaphor’ or the trace that plays at the limit. The deconstructive trace is unanticipatable, but is not purely indeterminate, it still does need representation.

The initial distance that philosophy desires from itself is like a “bridge” that stays between “two moments of full presence” (Derrida 1982, 71). Philosophy, as if, lingers “between [the myth of] an original presence and [a desire for] its circular re-appropriation in a final presence” (71), tarrying in this passage that it thinks for itself. Derrida curiously writes that this “bridge can be lifted [relevé]” (71). But one may ask here: what does Derrida mean by the ‘lifting’ of the bridge? How can it be lifted once and for all? Does Derrida think that the ‘bridge’ between the ‘original presence’ and ‘final reappropriated presence’ can be fully lifted? One needs here to
be attentive to the words used. In the French text, the word used for the verb ‘to lift’ by Derrida is: ‘relevé’\(^{28}\), which is also the French word for the Hegelian concept-metaphor: sublation or Aufhebung. ‘Relevé’ in fact is a term that Derrida himself proposed in translating ‘Aufhebung’ and its popularity owes much to Derrida’s use of it in French\(^ {29}\). Therefore, when Derrida writes that the bridge between the object and its re-turn to full presence can be ‘lifted’, then he means that the distance (‘bridge’) between two moments of full presence can be ‘sublated’, but does not mean it can ever be fully lifted. In fact Derrida’s critique the Hegelian sublation would imply that any such fusion of the ‘originary’ and ‘final’ presence would pose an eruption of the ‘event’ in its full terrible presence. In such an eruption of the ‘event’, can there be any time left for philosophy?

Limit Thinking: A Point of Absolute Proximity to Hegel

What would be the relationship between the ‘originary difference’ that philosophy desires and the ‘Deconstructive difference’ or différance? Derrida emphasises that the key concept of ‘différance’ is thought “[at a] point of absolute proximity to Hegel”, and goes on to add that everything is “played out”\(^ {30}\) in this nuanced closeness which places the deconstructive “différance” close enough but at a certain remove from the Hegelian ‘contradiction’. The Hegelian impulse, Derrida opines, would be to “determine” difference, “in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up” through “speculative dialectics” into the “self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis” (Derrida, 44). Deconstruction plays the same trick of closeness that philosophy plays on itself. Derrida adds,

The Hegelian concept of contradiction (Widerspruch) [...] is constructed in such a way as to permit its resolution within dialectical discourse, in the

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\(^{28}\) Carefully kept within brackets by the translator Alan Bass in this case (Derrida 1982, 71).

See Derrida, 19-20n23 (Translator’s note) for a detailed discussion of the translation of Aufhebung as relevé.

\(^{29}\) Derrida himself points this out in “What Is a “Relevant” Translation?” (see Derrida 2001a).

\(^{30}\) Derrida 1981, 44.
immanence of a concept capable of its own exteriority, capable of maintaining what is outside it right next to it. (Derrida 1981, 101n13)

But between the two, remains the limit, a vanishing presence, neither full presence nor the abyss of absence. It is in the gap of that limit, we are proposing, that the discourse of philosophy turns, as if on its hinge. Without the supplement of the ‘limit’, presence cannot do its subtle work. Presence both needs it and tries to get rid of it. The question of limit, question of margin, therefore becomes central to philosophy. But why the Derridian concept of différance is said to be very near to a Hegelian frame, and how is ‘limit-thinking’ related to both? We turn to these problems now.

In 1980, when Derrida did a sensational “thesis-defence” based on his whole work, he insisted on the following:

My interest [...] for these limits, these effects of the margin, or these paradoxes of borders continued to respond to the same question: how is it that philosophy finds itself inscribed, rather than itself inscribing itself, within a space which it seeks but is unable to order, a space that opens out onto another that is no longer even its other, as I have tried to make apparent in a tympanum as little Hegelian as possible. (Derrida 2004, 123)

The allusion here is to “Tympan” (in Derrida 1982), which is also the very first piece in the English collection of essays, Margins of Philosophy. “Tympaniser” is an archaic French verb, meaning: to ridicule in public. It can also refer to the ‘sheet’ which is used in the hand-operated letterpress printing, that stays between the paper to be printed on and the pressure of the ‘platen’ that impresses on it. May be most crucially, ‘Tympan’ is also the name of the diaphragm which controls the outside’s impression onto its ‘inside’, like in the case of the ‘ear’, commonly known as the “eardrum”31.

But is it possible to ridicule philosophy from that divide, from that space in-between which stays between philosophy and its own re-presentation, its inscription and the scene onto which it is inscribed? It is a negation of this divide that the logos

31 See Derrida 1982, xn1 (Translator’s note).
of philosophy desires. It tries to hear itself in a dramatic staging of an auto-affection. Derrida’s “Tympan” starts with three quotes from Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. One of them is about the philosophical problem of the ‘limit’, and other two, about the ‘need’ and ‘essence’ of philosophy respectively. The connection between these two sets of quotes is not to be missed. Philosophy thinks about its object, but in the process thinks about itself, and its limit. In his early and widely read “Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1966)\(^{32}\), Derrida already mentions this curious feature of the “mythological discourse”, that such a discourse “must have the form of that of which it speaks” (Derrida 2001, 362). Let us trail the traces of the Derridian (ridiculing) *tympaniser*, let us follow these clues in the text of Hegel, to which the quotes lead the reader, to that very moment in *The Science of Logic*, where speculative reason unfolds a talk about the philosophical problem of the limit, in the process unfolding itself. Thinking of limit, it thinks its own limit. Here is the quote on the notion of the ‘limit’ from Hegel’s *Science of Logic* with which “Tympan” starts:

> The thesis and antithesis and their proofs therefore represent nothing but the opposite assertions, that a *limit* is (*eine Grenze ist*), and that the limit equally is only a sublated (*aufgehobene [relevé]*) one; that the limit has a beyond with which however it stands in relation (*in Beziehung steht*), and beyond which it must pass, but that in doing so there arises another such limit, which is no limit. The *solution* of these antinomies, as of those previously mentioned, is transcendental, that is. (Emphasis in original quote, from Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, quoted in Derrida 2001, ix)

This is at a point where Hegel has just embarked on making a separation between ‘spurious’ or ‘bad infinity’ and ‘true infinity’\(^{33}\). Those who have read Partha Chatterjee’s rejoinder to Benedict Anderson’s ‘logic of sereality’ in “Anderson’s

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\(^{32}\) Included in Derrida 2001. It should be noted however that in certain parts of this essay, Derrida seems to give the ‘philosophical’ some privilege which does not fit with his later writings on the issue, like for example, “White Mythology”.

\(^{33}\) The standard translation of Hegel’s German expressions, ‘*wahre Unendlichkeit*’ is, ‘true infinity’, but its counterpart, ‘*schlechte Unendlichkeit*’ is translated both as ‘bad’ and ‘spurious’ infinity.
Utopia” would be familiar with this Hegelian separation from Chatterjee’s brief summery. Bad infinity, for Hegel, is the additive model, the mere addition of identical and finite units ad-infinitum. Hegel calls that “bad infinity” because the “progress” it shows is nothing but “the perpetual repetition” that “remains burdened with the finite as such” (Hegel quoted in Houlgate 2006, 247). Hegel shows this schematically by speculative thinking. The thought experiment starts with a finite thing. Every finite thing, by its very definition, longs to transcend its own ‘limit’, the very limit that constitutes it. This longing to go beyond that which “constitutes” it, is in the very being of every finite thing, so much so that Hegel says that “the hour of their birth is the hour of their death” (Hegel 2010, 101). The finite spills over its edge, transgresses its limit and “looses itself”, but in this “emptiness beyond the finite”, asks Hegel, “what arises?” The answer is: the “infinite” (Hegel, 112). But this infinite is only a moment, i.e. a logical moment, for the instant it shows its glimpse, “there arises only another limit”, and subsequently the infinite gets bounded into being finite again, it “vanishes” (112). Then one is back to the initial stage. There is immediately a “relapse” into the very “previous determination which has been sublated” but only “in vein” (113). Then again, the same rhythm is repeated, and the new limit is transcended once more to re-gain the emptiness of infinite, and like this, the “progress to infinity” (113). Hegel thinks this is bad (Schlechte) infinity because: 1. the limit as such is never transcended, and, 2. this model creates a notion of the ‘infinite’ which has no direct connection to the finite, it just stays separate as an unrealizable “beyond”:

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34 Chatterjee thinks “Hegel’s idea of the true infinity is an example of the kind of universalist critical thought characteristic of the Enlightenment that Anderson is keen to preserve” (Chatterjee 1999, 129-30). I am not sure if this specific argument of Hegel can be relegated to the very general shorthand “characteristic of Enlightenment” without drastically losing its nuances.

35 To quote from Hegel, I am using three texts: a. part of Hegel’s Logic as given in Houlgate 2006, b. Hegel Reader (Hegel 2005) and c. complete translation of Hegel’s Logic (Hegel 2010). The translation of ‘a’ and ‘b’ are the same, but for our purpose ‘a’ has the complete text of the part we are focusing on, whereas ‘c’ is a separate translation but a complete one.
Only the bad infinite is the beyond [...]. However, to be thus unattainable is not its grandeur but rather its defect. (Hegel 2010, 119)

Against this bad infinite, Hegel proposes the true one. But at this point ‘language’ seems to strain, and Hegel has to make a point about articulation and style. He opines, that to make the in-finite conceptually graspable, it must be named, the trick lies in its articulation itself,

In *saying* what the infinite is, namely the negation of the *finite*, the latter is itself included in what is *said*. [...] One only needs to *be aware of what one is saying* in order to find the determination of the finite in the infinite. (Emphasis in original, Hegel in Houlgate 2006, 249).

Philosophy therefore, needs to spill over to language in the process of straining its own limit. Hegel is fully aware, “of the necessary reliance” of reason on the “finite capacities of natural language”, and “yet, on the other hand, also realizes the need of transcending the finitude of language” (Lau 2006, 55). In fact, “one might even consider the motto “to know what one is saying (*Wissen, was man sagt*)” as the general guiding principle of the dialectical analysis of categories in Hegel’s Logic” (Lau 2006, 69n16). An-other sublation is at work, not only ‘finite the concept’ but the very finitude of language is to be sublated by the philosopher, it seems. ‘True infinity’ Hegel tells us, is not to be reached in merely alternating the finite and the (bad) infinite, one after the other, but instead, by sublating this very play of substitutions, the very process. In other words, it is not achieved through a mere negation of the finite, but through the negation of this very negation that stays between the finite and the ‘bad infinity’. This second order sublation does not involve “otherness as such”, it is not “a sublation of something”, instead, sublation here takes itself as its object. The repeated sublation of the recurring limit is sublated, and thus limit as such is sublated and raised to a higher level of reason. True infinite, declares Hegel, is a chilling image of full presence:

> It *is* and *is there*, present before us. It is *only* the spurious infinite which is the *beyond*, because it is only the negation of the finite posited as *real* [...]. It is what is untrue that is unattainable, and such an infinite must be seen as a falsity. The image of the progress to infinity is the *straight*
line, at the two limits of which alone the infinite is [...] the image of true infinity, bent back into itself, becomes the circle, the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without beginning and end. (Emphasis in original, Hegel 2005, 209)

In short, in the case of ‘bad infinite’, there is an endless alternation of finite and infinite. The moment the finite spills over the limit and strives to become infinite, there comes an-other limit, and makes it finite again. But in the case of ‘true infinite’, these many limits are not sublated one by one to infinity, but limit as such is sublated. It should be noted though, that the true infinite needs the mediation of limit, this difference-within, the middle term, as if made of its own body, to sublate (cancel and preserve at the same gesture), to achieve itself. But for this return it first posit a difference from itself. That difference is conceived by Hegel in the form of the concept-metaphor: ‘limit’. True infinity needs the mediation of this difference-within, the middle term, the limit. The significance of this middle term which is also a ‘third’ that the Hegelian sublation uses without acknowledging any trace of materiality, is the theme that is taken up in the latter chapters. ‘Limit’ is such a ‘third’. Limit provides the infinite with that necessary proximity to itself which is crucial for a re-appropriation of self.

But what is the function of this metaphor ‘limit’ within the Hegelian weave? Before the explication of the true and spurious infinite Hegel elaborates on the limit (Grenze). It is an intercession that stays between a basic being: ‘something’ (Etwas) and its ‘other’, a point where both cease to be, and which is in itself neither something or the other. Limit is the middle between the two of them, where they cease to be. “They”, writes Hegel, “have their determinate being beyond each other and beyond their limit; the limit as the non-being of each is the other of both” (Hegel 2005, 203). But if limit is the non-being of both something and other, then how can anything take place there, is limit a third thing with a positive determination? Hegel

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36 For the deconstructive notion of the ‘third’ as the work of the witness, see Chapter Five. A curious parallel can be found in the Biblical allegory of creation in which Eve, the first woman is created out of a body-part of Adam, the first man (and therefore one gets a clue toward an originary ‘man’-ness before sexual difference, see Chapter Five and Six).
writes that the “limit is the mediation through which something and other each as well is, as is not” (Hegel in Houlgate 2006, 227). Mediation, or “Vermittlung” Hegel’s translator tells us, can also mean “agency” (227). As if the limit takes over at the limit, authorises, not merely the non-being of the finite, but its difference and deferral. It takes over the trace, wielding it, shielding it. It is where the “finite”, and this is Hegel in his more poetic, “separates itself from itself and points beyond itself to its non-being, declaring this to be its being and thus passing over into it” (Hegel in Houlgate 2006, 229). The whole movement unfolds itself, like a dramatic scene, there is a walk toward the wings, a gesturing to the beyond and at that very instant, an exit, a ceasing to be, non-being, abyss, until a new limit takes over. At yet at another level, at the register of language, speculative reason uses this scene to go beyond mere ‘understanding’, in chronicling ‘change’. Hegel’s prose is well aware of it. We should remember that the very position of one ‘something’ as ‘something’ and the another as its ‘other’ requires comparison “by a third”, without the middle, there would not be any ‘other’. Put simply, in speculative reason, thought reflects on its own product, the product of its earlier moment, it mirrors itself. One notes here that the word ‘speculate’ is “derived from the Latin speculum, mirror” (John Burbridge quoted in Lau 2006, 159).

To digress a bit, one finds a similar moment in the corpus of Sigmund Freud37. In the short piece “Negation” (1925) Freud writes, “With the help of the symbol of negation, thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression” (quoted in Laplanche and Pontalis 1988, 263). This English translation misses the German word “vermittelt” which literally means “mediated by” but translated here as “with the help of” (pointed out by Spivak in Holland 1997, 57-58)38. Through the middle

37 Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).
38 André Green has commented on this textual moment: “According to the text, it is reasonable to suppose that Freud is alluding to the relationship between the thing-presentations — specific to the unconscious, where no negation takes place — and word-presentations, which include the use of negation. Thinking, therefore, depends on the relationship between thing-presentations and word-presentations. We then have to make it clear what qualities the representational system, beyond the difference between the two
term, ‘thinking’ not only produces a measure of freedom, it also “enriches itself” with that “material” which is “indispensable” for its “proper” ‘performance’” (‘Leistung’ is the word Freud uses, Spivak, 58). An initial distance, that works between the double-meaning of negation, ‘disavowal’ and ‘denial’. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay has noted how Jean Hyppolite thought of that distance, as “a margin of thought, and every symbol of negation [as] materialisation of that ‘margin’”39. Limit, as I have tried to show, works by creating such a distance which resists sublation. One might compare the Heideggerian concept of an initial distance, “Entfernung” through which Dasein both encounters others in the world and strives to separate a positioning of its own40, with this ‘distance’ through which speculative reason recoils on itself in producing knowledge. This underlines the convergence between the question of knowledge and question of ‘Being’, which is best represented by the concept-metaphor ‘writing’. I make this digression to stress the fact that the story of the ‘limit’ is by no way limited to a privileged representation of the philosophical. Derrida makes this point most forcefully when he indicates that the Heideggerian scheme of the metaphorical as representation of the ontological question of ‘Being’ is as valid as its opposite. Indeed, within deconstruction, the matrix of ‘writing’ is given a preponderance even over the question of Being, a move that questions the Heideggerian depiction of philosophy as the most privileged site from where the question of meaning and of ontology can be raised. This distance likewise is also of a repeating ‘thought’ which turns on itself. Zizek is not far off the mark when he sums up deconstruction’s ‘difference’ from the Hegelian Aufhebung in the following way:

According to Derrida, the difference between the Hegelian Aufhebung and his own notion of différance is barely perceptible, almost indistinguishable, the difference between Hegel and what Hegel misses (cannot think) is barely

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40 See Heidegger 1962, 138-139. Also see ‘Chapter Three’ for a detailed discussion of the notion ‘Entfernung’.
perceptible: not a positive difference (where we could clearly identify what is missing), but just a “pure” difference, a barely perceptible shift in the virtual or spectral accent of what Hegel actually says. To produce this difference then, one need only repeat Hegel. (Zizek 2012)

The interesting thing here is that Zizek is compelled to take recourse to another point of distinction to spell out the “barely perceptible difference” in question. The distinction between what Hegel “actually says” and the “virtual or spectral accent” of his statement. It is this latter that Derrida tries to work out in the prose of his text, careful of the limits of such an effort. Zizek’s try at an articulation of deconstruction’s distance from the Hegelian texture shows how it is impossible to cannily articulate such a distance without reducing it to a difference between an ‘actuality’ (therefore Zizek has to fix on what “Hegel actually says”) and something that apparently goes beyond it or stops just short.

To run through our moves once more, the argument woven around the texts of Derrida has the following chief points. The philosophical always ‘misses’ one extra metaphor, trying to find that ‘space outside’ from where to talk about/to itself. But that supplementary metaphor works at the ‘limit’, resisting every other turn. This metaphor cannot be represented by itself at any point and therefore, the discourse of philosophy incessantly requires one extra metaphor to work with. In a particular Hegelian text, in thinking about the philosophical problem of limit, speculative reason thinks of its own limit. Philosophy tries to sublate the limit/extra metaphor to produce full presence. The two, language pursuing philosophy’s limit and philosophical language (in Hegel’s particular text) trying to catch up with its own limit, have the same rhythm.

A corollary thread indicates a third line which might connect the Heideggerian question of ‘Being’ with these two movements, since in the same rhythmic logic, ‘Being’ is a ‘sending’ that never arrives at full presence. Heidegger thinks this problem is to be placed at the very constitutive heart of philosophy. This in effect forces philosophy to work with the metaphorical, which also is shaped by such an ‘withdrawal’ of meaning. Derrida thinks that this whole scheme of likeness which connects the metaphorical withdrawal of meaning with the question of
‘Being’, giving the latter a certain privilege is also just yet another turn of the metaphorical. According to Derrida, not only the philosophical, but every discourse which tries to take a distance from philosophy is shot with this deferral of meaning. Subsequently, the Heideggerian resolution that the question of Being is to be the most primary question which is only corrupted by the metaphorical, cannot be valid. Instead, it is the analytic of that very metaphorical ‘corruption’ which claims such a priority: of being the more important question to be persisted with. The table is turned, and it is the ‘metaphorical’, re-presented by ontology, or in other words ‘language’ as straining philosophy which seems to claim the scene of philosophy as its key-problematic, setting itself even before the question of Being.

For Heidegger, a leap which might take one outside of the reliance of the philosophical on the metaphorical seems possible (and Ricoeur’s argument is shot with the assumption of this possibility). But deconstruction sides neither with a notion of full closure nor with any positive possibility of an outside. Derrida stresses the work of the supplementary metaphor in conceptualising both ‘being’ and event. This thought, again, is given to the slide of the metaphor, to which deconstruction is also subjected. Spivak is attentive to this limit (before which deconstruction takes place) when she writes, “the “trace” is not sufficient for the full transgression of thinking an effect without a cause that is necessary to fulfil the desire to philosophize” (Spivak in MacCannell and Zakarin 1994, 38). Deconstructive articulation does not pass over but persistently tries to account for the ‘limit’ or the ‘logic of the third’, before (the law of) which it works, and tries to affirm it by giving the inscription or the graphematic structure of the supplementary metaphor the name of: ‘writing’. The Althusserian ‘cut’ discussed in the previous chapter would be one such ‘writing’ which is definitionally of such a margin, of such a supplement. The following crucial distinction between Althusser and Derrida however surfaces. In the case of Althusser, even if an internal difference within the system (/structure) is recognized, through which the system may think of a ‘change’ and a ‘move away from self’, that does not presume a critique either of the ‘presence’ of the system (or its constituent parts) or of the itinerary of properness working through that ‘internal difference’. In the case of Derridian deconstruction however, an attention toward such a critique and a persistent undermining of
‘presence’ becomes the crux. It is this component which becomes clear in the Derridian reading of Hegel and Heidegger.

In these juxtapositions, I want also to show Derrida’s insistence in unravelling the nearness between not only deconstruction and the Heideggerian notion of ‘Being’, but also a recurrence of that narrow strait in which philosophy works in producing the im-possible nearness to itself. This operation of philosophy, which in turn also indicates a nearness of Hegel and Heidegger (through the readings performed by Derrida), becomes the vantage point through which I argue my case further.

But how does the figure of the ‘cut’ feature in the Derridian corpus? This is a question that we ask from a position which is already a bit distanced, not an ‘insider’s view’ so to say, because the Derridian texts are read in this discussion only in their (English) translated versions. But can one not get a very unique and different handle on the Derridian concept-metaphors prompted and enabled by the friction which only translation may produce? I add the following note not in claiming any priority for the translated text, but simply in acknowledgement of the necessary distance which a translation creates, a distance which can also be enabling in understanding the inherent foreignness of the concept-metaphors used in the ‘source’ texts41.

The Deconstructive ‘Cut’

In our examination of the Derridian corpus then, it is the concept metaphor (also) translated in English as ‘cut’ that we are after. We have the English translations of the Derridian texts in front of us, where many differing French words are translated as ‘cut’ at different textual and argumentative moments. This actually provides one with a point of convergence (in the English word ‘cut’) which I am going to use here as a point of departure for a discussion of what we may call the ‘deconstructive cut’. One might question the wisdom in following just one word or

41 For a general overview of the Derridian notion of ‘translation’ see “Jacques Derrida and the Gift of Translation” (Kargupta 2011).
concept-term in the oeuvre of a thinker. Also, there can be the corollary objection, how can ‘cut’ be differentiated from other crucial deconstructive terms like ‘trace’, ‘gift’, ‘writing’ etc? Why this specific metaphor ‘cut’ and no other? At this point I have the following excuse to keep the word ‘cut’ along with words like ‘trace’, ‘gift’ etc. Unlike ‘trace’, ‘cut’ has an added sense of a violence recorded in its paleonymy. These diverging trajectories of meaning (of different concept-metaphors) make a difference in their articulations, if naming as such makes a difference (see also next chapter). This dissimilarity in the case of any two words of apparently same nature (e.g. two deconstructive terms, say, ‘cut’ and ‘gift’) comes up in the diverse appearances of these terms in the relevant texts. I believe this is the primary reason behind the chain of different terms that one finds doing almost similar kind of ‘work’, taking up similar kind of ‘place’ in the Derridian corpus. They are similar, yet not quite. Therefore the point is still to show those divergences in the production of thought, dissimilar trajectories that these different terms prompt along with similarities. I have tried to do so till now in the case of the ‘cut’. Spivak makes a similar point, when she writes:

The movement of “difference-itself,” precariously saved by its resident “contradiction,” has many nicknames: trace, differance, reserve, supplement, dissemination, hymen, greffe, pharmakon, parergon, and so on. They form a chain where each may be substituted for the other, but not exactly ....

(Emphasis added, Spivak in Derrida 1997, lx)

Having taken these preliminary precautions, I will now follow the trail of the ‘deconstructive cut’ in the corpus of Jacques Derrida.

The figure of the ‘cut’ has its own place in the textuality of deconstruction. But here we have to deal with at least two different uses of it, or, to be more precise, with two French words, both of which might be translated as: ‘cut’. The first and probably the more important word is ‘entamer’ which has been translated by Samuel Weber as breaching/broaching in Limited Inc (Derrida 1988), a translation that has earned general praise among the Derrida scholarship. The other word is the one we
are already familiar with through our discussion of Althusser, ‘coupure’. Weber’s translation is understandably influenced by the Derridian reading of Sigmund Freud in “Freud and the Scene of Writing” (in Derrida 2001), even if in that text, ‘breaching’ is adopted by the translator Alan Bass for the German word (used originally by Freud) Bahung which can literally mean “pathbreaking”, and for which Derrida’s French word was: frayage (See Derrida 2001, 426n2). In this text, Derrida likens ‘breaching’ quite explicitly with the deconstructive concept of ‘writing’. For him, the Freudian description of memory-traces working as inscriptions both wiped off and retained at the same instant (a logic allegorized by Freud by the working of the instrument, ‘mystic writing pad’) matches a more general concept of writing:

Although “breaching” is not named writing at any time in the Project, the contradictory requirements which the Mystic Writing Pad will fulfil are already formulated in terms which are literally identical “an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces”. (Derrida 2001, 256)

Derrida then elaborates more on how Freud “invites” one to think “writing” through the work of “breaching” (Derrida, 268). To put it otherwise, Freud invites one to deconstruction. This intricate and rapid formulation, at Freud’s invitation, shot with surprising use of words and metaphors goes like the following.

Language, or what we call language is a production. This production would never have taken place if a certain field of “force” (256) would have retained a perfect stability, being present at each of its node in the same way, or, in other words, being present without space or time, concentrated and folded upon itself, with no time and space. But “meaning” and “space” are produced only through the “power” (256) of repetition alone. Repetition on its turn is produced through a “lack of power” at many nodes of the force-field, which, as Derrida puts it “opens and limits the labour of force” (268) as if enticing it to go beyond itself by putting a limit to it and also opening that very limit up, creating meaning (which is space itself, and time, we might assume) in the process. There cannot be an originary breach, the

42 A quick look into a standard French-English dictionary tells me that both can be translated as ‘cut’ or ‘break’ even if coupure is the more usual word for ‘cut’. Entamer on the other hand, predominantly mean ‘commencement’ and thus also ‘the first cut’.
very originary difference in power which makes meaning possible, the limit is always already breached, there is no first time “repetition always already divides the point of departure of the first time” (268). Therefore Derrida’s object here becomes the ‘act breaching’ itself, in effect: that lack of power or the ‘difference in power’, and not a simple distinction between force and meaning, between origin and repetition. The ‘limit’ as if, is placed in the place of the origin, at the very moment when a path is opened, when a rupture takes place. This however is a rupture which is always already there in the first place, force being never fully present without weakness. I will now look into a corresponding notion of the ‘initial cut’ in another place in the Derridian oeuvre.

We have tried to understand the post-structuralist shift in terms of the ‘self-iterating structure’ already. For Geoffrey Bennington, the notion of (what he calls) the “self-interrupting structure” is a recurring theme in Derrida’s corpus (Bennington 2002, 147-51). In Of Grammatology, this comes to the fore as the much discussed distinction between the book and the text. But even before that, the dynamic is set to work through the foreclosure of writing from the scientific analysis of language. Derrida starts to read Ferdinand de Saussure and finds that the French linguist has made a decision of keeping ‘writing’ at bay while talking about the limits of language. According to Saussure “scientific exactitude” should not hinder the “natural life” of writing in different languages and thus it is not very desirable to adopt a system of phonological writing (Derrida 1997, 38). Derrida agrees, but only “at the level” (38) where Saussure is pitching his argument, the presuppositions of the argument though, is not beyond question: “Why does a project of general linguistics, concerning the internal system in general of language in general, outline the limits of its field by excluding, as exteriority in general, a particular system of writing…?” (emphasis in original, 39). The field is thus already furrowed by its exclusionary logic which then comes to haunt it. This exclusion, Derrida shows in a broader philosophical argument, is an offshoot of the desire of spoken language to be “its own father” (39), to be self-present as ‘logos’ itself. But being one’s own father also means one must have a gap from oneself, that it must be “born out of a primary gap and a primary expatriation” (emphasis in original, 39). This is the self-

43 See ‘Chapter Three’.
interrupting (or, as we have called it, ‘self-iterating’) structure at its very basic. A structure that desires to pose itself both as its own origin and own production must always live by the way of a gap from itself. It is also a division that strives for infinite sur-vival, trying to relegate its own death to an outside, but in the process making itself finite. Derrida writes, “Self-proclaimed language but actually speech, deluded into believing itself completely alive, [defends itself from the other] and especially its own other, throwing it outside and below, under the name of writing” (emphasis in original, 39). Sean Gaston tries to put a gloss on Spivak’s translation here, indicating that in French the expression used by Derrida was “une coupure...premieres”, which, he thinks could also be translated as “a first cut” (Gaston 2006, 6). But I do not think Spivak is inattentive to the specific point of the argument here by translating it as “primary gap” (39). ‘Primary’ seems in fact better than ‘first’ here, because deconstruction resists the firstness of any gesture. Indeed in her “Translator’s Preface” Spivak does take considerable pain in elucidating the recurring Derridian argument which tries to figure the desire of a structure of going beyond itself, in the process thinking a primary opening through which it can access itself. For our purpose it is relevant to point out that she concentrates on the word ‘entame’ which is the other name for spacing. Spivak quotes Derrida from Positions, where ‘spacing’ is defined as “the index of an irreducible out-side, and at the same time the index of a movement, of a displacement which indicates an irreducible alterity” (quoted in “Translator’s Preface”, Derrida 1997, lxxi). ‘Entame’ is a word that is in sync with this “movement”, Spivak acutely observes, signifying both “beginning something and breaking into some-thing, both origin and trace” (lxxi). This is possible, we may add, because it cuts the origin, or the origin is cut by its very desire of being self-sufficient. Later, Spivak likens it with a series of Derridian concept-metaphors like the ‘pharmakon’, the ‘hymen’, the supplement, the ‘gramme’ etc, all of which are “neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, […] neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation, etc” (Derrida quoted in

44 See the note on the translation of ‘Entamer’ above.
“Translator’s Preface”, lxxii). Entame is also added to this list, which Derrida says, “is neither the [marred] integrity of a beginning or of a simple cut nor simply the secondary state” (emphasis in original, lxxii).

And yet, along with the consistency of the Derridian oeuvre and the similar functions of its central concept-metaphors, one must also be attentive to their specificities. One must remember that deconstruction does not only try to dig out the inner working of structures, or underlying meanings of metaphors, but also follows the work of each metaphor in its singularity, or in the singularity locked in struggle with the wondering, shifting metaphoricity. It is in this spirit that I want to further trace the specificity of the concept metaphor ‘cut’ in the Derridian oeuvre which takes us to Limited Inc, where, one might contend, deconstruction is at work in its most systematic. Limited Inc as a text is also important because it is here that Derrida discusses the question of self-iterating structures with reference to language in its day-to-day usage most explicitly. Even if this has always been one of the main threads in his corpus, the question of language occurs mostly more as a phenomenological argument before Limited Inc. Sean Gaston has however compared the Derridian use of ‘coupure’ in Of Grammatology with his treatment of the concept of gap (ecart) in his earlier essay “Speech and Phenomena” (Gaston 2006, 5). Let me first take up the thread in this earlier text before proceeding to read Limited Inc.

In “Speech and Phenomena”, Derrida analyses the Husserlian division between ‘sense’ (Sinn) and ‘meaning’ (Bedeutung), a division Husserl adopts in Ideas I. ‘Meaning’ or ‘logical meaning’ (Bedeutung) specially signifies meaning produced in language among all other meanings which can be generally grouped under ‘sense’ (Sinn). Derrida reads Husserl closely here, who, in his next step further elaborates on logical meaning, contending that it always remains “caught up in an indicative system”, an entanglement that resists the Husserlian intention of extracting meaning in its purity, meaning alone as “possibility of logos” (Derrida

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45 This is my excuse for clearing a separate place for the concept-metaphor ‘cut’, see above.
46 Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).
The ‘scene’ of the production of language, therefore, always comes in the way as ‘contamination’ (22). The indicative function of language overrides the purity of its expressive element, and ironically it remains impossible to get rid of intentionality altogether. Even if for Husserl, as Derrida shows, the possibility of a rigorous distinction of the essential meaning, which is also the possibility of phenomenology as such, still remains, but only “de jure” and not “de facto” (Derrida, 20-1). For Derrida, this possibility of a ‘gap’ (ecart)\(^{48}\) which “defines the very space of phenomenology, does not exist prior to the question of language”, furthermore “it opens up only and through the possibility of language” (21). But if here Derrida’s aim is to show that Husserl cannot extract meaning in its essence/proper separated from its ‘scene of production’ or ‘context’ and therefore also from a structure of intentionality, in Limited Inc, he nullifies the other extreme in delineating why intentionality cannot exist fully in its essence by highlighting the ‘scene’ yet again\(^{49}\).

Limited Inc, as is well known, is a compilation of several texts, among them “Limited Inc a b c...” which is a long reply to John R. Searle’s rejoinder to Derrida’s article “Signature, Event, Context” (1971, Searle replies to the English version published in Glyph, 1977) with which the collection starts. Searle’s critique “Reiterating the Difference: A Reply to Derrida” is published in Glyph 2 along with Derrida’s reply, main point of disagreement being Derrida’s reading of J. L. Austin in “Signature, Event, Context” which Derrida mentions as “Sec” in his reply to Searle. The peculiar articulation of “Limited Inc a b c...” has been the topic of much discussion. I prefer this extended quote from Spivak in lieu of a summary:

“But am I serious here?” Within the disciplines of philosophy and literary criticism, that is the question that many readers of Derrida have not been able to answer. Yes, Derrida is “making fun of” Searle; and “one does not write

\(^{48}\) I am using “gap” in place of “separation” in the standard translation after Sean Gaston (Gaston 2006, 5).

\(^{49}\) About this moment in Derrida’s reading of Husserl, Leonard Lawlor has this to say: “Derrida is presenting a paradoxical structure. [...] The condition for the possibility depends on the very thing it is conditioning. Thus, the condition for the possibility is at the same time the condition for its impossibility. This paradox or aporia is différance” (Lawlor 2002, 203).
philosophy like that.” But also, [...] the charge is precisely against that seemingly impenetrable but ultimately perhaps even stupid seriousness of the academic intellectual; that is the “condition or effect-take your pick” of ethico-political repression. [...] Apart from these, one of the most noticeable items of non-seriousness in Limited Inc is that its sections are alphabetized. Its subtitle is “abc,” [...] The implications are obvious. “ABC” might also mean a primer, [...] what we read might be intended as a primer of how to bring down the incorporation of the copyrighted liability organization that is the philosophical establishment. Further, the masquerading of the authority of the alphabet, the representative of phonographic writing in the narrow sense, might be to polarize the absurdity of accepting the authority of the “representative” of speech as the generative moment of voice-consciousness, as the explanatory speech-act convention, or yet as the determining sovereign intention. (Spivak 1980, 44-5)

Derrida therefore, as Spivak lays out in her sharp reading, reserves more than one blow at the philosophical discourse even if he was putatively settling a point about a canonical text of modern linguistics. Having thus rehashed the background, I focus now only on a regional argument of this extremely rich and treasure trove of a text.

In “Limited Inc a b c...” Derrida is reading his own text (“Signature, Event, Context”, ‘Sec’ in short) both showing what he intended in that earlier text in the first place, and underlining the point that there is no need for the second elaboration since everything is already there, “Sec” stages its own intention already. His reply to Searle hence plays both at the specific and the general. Specifically it raises counter-

50 It is hard to resist the temptation of making an unconnected (but rather dramatic) point here. If we only concentrate on the tone of Derrida (if one believes Spivak, that is of no less importance), the making fun of the sombre tone of the philosophising voice might remind us of the Althusserian description of the philosopher as the one with comic steps (see ‘Chapter one’). Derrida’s brilliant gesture, faced with the sombre, self-important reading the Austin by one of his (self-proclaimed) stake-holders, a reading that tries to uphold the full presence of both meaning and intention, makes fun of patrimony. This in effect becomes a critique also of full presence, of complete transference of meaning (just like patrimony transfers ‘possession’ from one proper name to another with no loss).
points to Searle’s points and in general it tries to say that like any ‘fresh’ statement of a case, it is both new and a repetition. Repetition is required also because communication is ever incomplete. This is the general structure of iteration which plays on “both identity and difference” (emphasis in original, Derrida 1988, 53). In this case, lack of ‘full’ communication becomes crucial because: A. The point of contention is Austin’s theory of communication, and, B. Searle (Derrida thinks) has failed to read Derrida’s text which is not an example of the inevitability of incomplete communication. That deconstruction preaches ‘no communication is complete’ and therefore there is no point in trying to make sense of anything, is only a well-circulated misconception. Derrida underlines that point here, implying that an academic debate can go on relying on the traces of the author’s signature. The stress here is on meaning and not on meaninglessness. This is precisely why Derrida manages to stealthily cite almost the entire text of ‘Sec’ in his reply. The second point is not only of comical significance. Canned in it, lies the whole argument Derrida wants to make about his specific critique of full presence as it crops up in Austin’s text. The always already incomplete nature of any communication does not simply imply a total lack of communication, just like the possibility of ‘writing’ in the absence of its sender or receiver, indeed it’s necessary occurrence in the ‘gap’ (ecart, coupure etc) between the sender and the receiver does not imply a sweeping denial of all intentionality inscribed in the structure of writing. This is a point we must attend to. This is also the place, where the ‘cut’ appears in the scene.

What is at stake in the structure of iteration, is it the trace of the former that lingers and affirms an origin or is it the trace that evades and declares the latter? Derrida’s answer is crucially: both. Iteration stages a double-bind:

For the structure of iteration – and this is another of its decisive traits – implies both identity and difference. Iteration in its “purest” form – and it is always impure – contains in itself the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration. (Emphasis in original, Derrida, 53)

Iteration therefore can be seen through the metaphor of the ‘cut’ as well, the cut that both affirms and denies the origin. Derrida poses the problem thus,
Where does this break [coupure] take place? To situate it, it is not necessary […] to imagine the death of the sender or of the receiver […]. The break intervenes from the moment that there is a mark, at once […]. And it is not negative, but rather the positive condition of the emergence of the mark. (53)

The cut works on itself as long as “it cuts across [recoup] iterability at once, recovering it as though it were merging with it, cutting the cut or break once again in the remark” (53). In this way, the ‘cut’ also indicates a machine-like cutting, which repeats and also produces the ‘new’ (therefore, machination of the ‘event’) as if in the same instant. How is it possible that the ‘machine’ and the ‘event’ come together in the cut? We will stay with this question in the course of this dissertation.

Iteration also provides a connection between ‘writing’ and the cut. Searle tries to correct Derrida by pointing out that writing is always the product of an intentionality, implying that Derrida has claimed it to be radically ‘cut off’ from any such origin. Derrida however points out that it is this assumed fullness of such a notion of a “radical break” that deconstruction cuts to size. The work of deconstruction stays with the ‘work of the cut’ which does not only separate but also ground any graphematic structure in some matrix of intentionality. The deconstructive cut sides with both presence and absence, or, to be more precise, with a presence-absence continuity. One might propose that it is in this sense that the Freudian memory-traces too, are not totally free from a call to responsibility. The work of the ‘cut’ might be said to tie a knot between the textual and the ‘human’ (as an analytic capable of working like an intention and therefore tied to responsibility). But crucially the cut also evades “absolute responsibility” which a supposed “consciousness as the ultimate authority” (emphasis in original, Derrida 1988, 8)

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51 Derrida, 55. We might read ‘radical cut’ here, since Weber translates coupure both as ‘break’ and ‘cut’ in this text.

52 This figure will return as a notion of the sensuous nonsensuous body in our discussion later, see ‘Chapter Three’.

53 See above for the connections between the Freudian scene of memory and the ‘cut’.

54 The quote is from “Sec”. This self validating total affirmation of absolute authority and responsibility might result in a typical manifestation of distributive justice, exemplified by
may entail. Searle only reads this latter half and misconstrues the ‘work of the cut’ as radically and wholly non-intentional, whereas Derrida meant it to be only part intentional and part non-intentional. In the next chapter we take up this double-bind of the cut, tracking it also in its groundedness, in its ontologically tamed figuration and interrogate how a certain trace of ontologization always remains in the ‘cut’.

Conclusion: Threshold of the Ethical

But who or what is it that works? (Althusser 1969, 184)

The opening contention of this chapter (in connection to the previous) can be summarised as follows. In searching for the desire that is of the ‘man’ one confronts a structure that tries to take a step away from itself, to affirm itself and yet denying that step in a gesture of self-adequation. We call this the self-iterating structure shot with a desire for full self-adequation. This itinerary is typically produced through a denial of representation even if this production itself works as a re-presentation. In the first two chapters, I have especially focused on the figure of the self-iterating structure in uniting the two formidable and many-voiced signatures: Althusser and Derrida, as well as to focus on one of the central themes of this thesis: representation. It is to think of a common thread around which the joint signature (Althusser-Derrida) can be organised and read. It also comes out as a common factor, that both are interested about the textual closure of the philosophical, especially the logic through which its margins are both marked and effaced. And yet, Althusser and Derrida have followed different trajectories in approaching this problematic. One major difference seems to be the fact that for Derrida, ultimately the philosophical does not enjoy any privileged position and remains only an example of the general working of ‘being’ and its inscriptions represented by the deconstructive shorthand ‘writing’. For Althusser though, even after many catachreses, ‘(Marxist) philosophy’ or ‘science’ remains the privileged space for broaching questions of the political or of ‘correct’ interventions. At the same time,
there are some crucial points of convergence. If Althusser highlights the interminable nature of the epistemological ‘cut’ that the limit of the philosophical entails, Derrida emphasizes the surplus metaphor which both plugs and opens the margins of the (philosophical) text to its outside, always both desiring the outside or the wholly other and also guarding it from view. From this discussion it can be concluded that this work of demarcation, intervention, or incision goes on not fully by the logic of a machine (where the machine works by tirelessly reproducing the same) but that it also involves the decisive insertion of the ‘ethical’ in perpetually reproducing the given as event. Derrida remains sceptical of such an intervention and production, but still he stresses the importance of working or calculating for the ‘ethical’.

As I have tried to discuss in the present chapter, the Derridian strategy is one of following the slow grinding work of reason trying to circumscribe itself, a reason not satisfied with itself, but one which cannot work without itself either. If one calls this a kind of ‘calculation’, then one reaches a point where the ‘cut’ comes up both as a production (of something new, a glimpse of the logic of the ‘event’) and as a sur-vivial (of an earlier inscription). But whether the two can coincide is a question that would need more patient consideration. Therefore, the ‘ethical’ is not yet in view, even if we have argued how the cut cannot radically break away from a thought of intentionality and responsibility. The ethical can come as a “challenge [...] to acknowledge the limit of the imagination and its inability to accommodate the material difference that lies beyond it” (Kirby 1997, 91).

It is also possible to read the position of the ‘cut’ as an exercise in thinking how epistemology works, how knowledge is produced. In that limited sense it is a meta-discourse of the theory of knowledge itself, or, as Althusser would have it, theory of theoretical practice. But would this not also involve certain very basic propositions about the analytic of ‘being’? In other words, does it also not ask the

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55 See ‘Chapter Three’ for a discussion of the ethical in conjunction with a machine-event continuum.

56 Vicki Kirby is summarising Drucilla Cornell’s position who makes this point from an admittedly deconstructive framework.
ontological question, how the determination of the being of a textuality is constituted at its margins, as well as how Being itself is interrogated along the line of that cut which stays between ‘Being’ and ‘non-Being’, but is neither? Althusser does not explicitly take up this ontological question\(^57\). In Deconstruction however, this blurring of division between epistemology and ontology is more palpable. For Derrida, as we have tried to show, the philosophical tries to regain a lost sensual origin through circulation of metaphors, metaphor being primarily a representation of ‘distance’. But the very work of the metaphorical does also involve the production of meaning by this same movement of difference-deferral. Therefore the ‘being’ of the ‘metaphorical’ is constituted by its ‘work’, it is all the materiality it can have, and neither (being or work) can be thought without the other. In putting the metaphorical to work, in trying to exorcise the metaphorical once and for all, fully, philosophy tries to purify itself, in effect stepping into a vicious circle. Derrida thinks that this ever returning/retrating circularity works with the supplement which is not reducible to any presence or full representation. This argument is clearly pitched at a register where ontology and epistemology cannot be clearly separated. As Derrida puts it,

“Thinking” requires both the principle of reason and what is beyond the principle of reason, the *arche* and an-archy. Between the two, the difference of a breath or an accent, only the *enactment* of this “thinking” can decide. That decision is always risky; it always risks the worst. (Derrida 2004, 153)\(^58\)

But who enacts the difference? It seems that at the level of ontology deconstruction runs the risk of assuming that the withdrawal of ‘Being’ (Being’s play of absence/presence) is a show which runs all by itself, that this play might not have an origin but nevertheless is mechanically self-propelling. But as is indicated by

\(^57\) For an explicit Althusserian account of ‘Being’ one might have to turn to his later writings, especially “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter” (Althusser 2006a), which is said to be close to a Deconstructive argument (see Balibar 2009).

\(^58\) Derrida is talking about thinking within/without the institution (University of reason) here, but it is also in general about thinking as such in/out-side philosophy. Spivak reads this part in that sense in her “Response to Jean Luc Nancy” (in MacCannell and Zakarin 1994).
Derrida in the quote above, it is here that deconstruction takes that extra step of folding onto itself, proposing that the dissemination of being cannot be a centrum in itself, that it works through the insertion of a thought, a thought which Derrida is careful almost always to call a ‘work’, of deconstruction. For Spivak, it is an “irreducible work of the trace” that “not only produces an unrestricted economy of same and other, rather than a relatively restricted dialectic of negation and sublation” (Spivak 1999, 424). As I have mentioned, deconstruction’s taking part in and going beyond of the (Hegelian) dialectic is crucial to its work. As Derrida writes, “If there were a definition of différance, it would be precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian [Aufhebung] wherever it operates” (Derrida 1981, 40). We will see in the next chapter, how, if deconstruction blurs the division between the ontological and the epistemological, it also indicates a complicity between the two.

But who wields the supplement? If it cannot let go off a trace of intentionality and therefore is always implicated in a knit of responsibility, then how to think of that lingering survival of a locus of intentionality that persists in the work of the ‘cut’? This survival, this tension that grounds the cut, is this also not the memory of a certain subjective intentionality, and if so, can that subjectivity be fully devoid of the ‘machine’? These crucial questions are addressed in the next chapter. But for now, the following can be said. The work of deconstruction is inscribed neither on the side of the subject nor on the side of the object, but it is revealed as if as membrane of intentionality which labours in-between the two. This labour involves a certain thought of justice and of the ethical in the sense of foundational ethics. I have already indicated that one might compare the ethical in deconstruction with what Althusser calls ‘juste’ or ‘correct’ (interventions). It might be important here to note, that in his late writings Althusser seems to have recognised this point. Althusser, for example, writes that to produce philosophy as “void” one needs to go through an “immense amount of labour [...] performed on the concepts”, and that this “‘critical labour’” is spurred by an interest in “Ethics”, which is also “a labour of ‘deconstruction’, as Derrida would say following Heidegger” (emphasis in original, Althusser 2006a, 178).
If we now re-pose the question, ‘who/what works’, then it takes a more complicated shape. It seems that the question ‘who works?’, consists in the ‘difference’ between the given and its own repetition. In short, the crucial question now becomes: **how to reproduce the given as ‘event’**. If one answers by citing the very ‘work’ of ‘difference’ in producing temporal distance (deferral), then one comes close to a deconstructive way of thinking. At this point, one might enigmatically reply: ‘the work works’, and indeed this is one way Derrida articulates this *aporia*⁵⁹. This might sound like a tautology, but if one thinks, it is the very crux of re-presentation that it is based on the impossibility of a *true tautology*. Therefore the problem is very much: **how not to produce the given as given**. We subsequently have two problems that actually go together: A. How to re-produce the given as an event, and, B. how not to produce the given as given.

A predication of the subject entails the impossibility of *re-presentation without variation*. Clearly, what the subject may never choose is to re-present (a previous moment or state) without any displacement, to re-present in the ‘same time’ and in the ‘same space’. Whether the fact that one must always re-present by differing-deferring, limits one’s subjectivity or not, is indeed one important problem for deconstruction. The deconstructive code-word ‘gift’ is a name for the impossibility of the event both as ‘totally new’ (fully other time and space) and ‘exactly the same’ (as an earlier time and space)⁶⁰. Nonetheless, as Spivak points out, one remains “bound by the conviction that subject-predication is methodologically necessary”⁶¹, however with the deconstructive proviso about the contaminated nature of any stencil of necessity. This is the thread I want to pick up

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⁵⁹ See Derrida 2002, xxiii, 151, also see ‘Chapter Three’ for details.

⁶⁰ ‘Iterability’ is another such code for the im-possible, which we have sought to stage with reference to the ‘structure’. The structure, within this matrix, never returns to itself, but likewise one can also propose that it has never left.

⁶¹ In “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value”. This is at a point when she forwards a critique of an “anti-Oedipal argument in France” that “seems to assume a certain body without [subject] predication or without predication-function.” For Spivak, value is a coding which exemplifies a “‘materialist” subject-predication such as Marx’s” (See Spivak 1987, 154).
in the next chapter in which the im-possibility of the re-presentation of self without any temporal distance is taken up. We go on therefore, to a closer examination of that notion of ‘distance’ which congeals also as the work of the ‘cut’ between self and the other. But if this distance is always measured in terms of time or space (i.e. a measurable distance), then is the ‘cut’ also an entity with a certain materiality? Is the cut embodied then? Does it have an ontology like any other? How then to think the cut which takes place as neither time nor space? A discussion is attempted in the chapters that follow.