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## **Derrida's Open and Its Closure: The Aporia of Différance and the Only Logic of Thinking**

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“...for an opening is relative to a ‘surrounding plenitude.’”<sup>1</sup>  
“The gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits: we have never come upon it as upon a particular *case* of experience—that which Husserl believes he is describing.”<sup>2</sup>

Metaphysics—the entire history of metaphysics has been considered as the metaphysics of presence—is closed; it is closed like a dead end. In its “surrounding plenitude” no exit can be found and it is meeting its own death. Though a system of philosophy with incompleteness is not a perfect theory, but the rebuke of how comprehensive and close a philosophy is and the demand of that philosophy to open its house to the alien and the ungraspable would be a preposterous importunity. However, upon the stage where the entire history of Western philosophy has been played, “...nothing is staged or displayed theatrically. Rather, the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought” (Heidegger 22). This battle, between the new gods and the old, between the new thoughts and the old, is a battle of breaking into new ruptures and finding new openings in the old thoughts. At the moment when traditional philosophy has become a closure of the metaphysics of presence, even those streams of thought that already broke new phenomenological grounds in the beginning of twentieth century and Levinas’s ethical breaking are closed “as the self-presence in absolute knowledge” (Derrida 102, SP). Derrida states that we need an “un-heard-of” thought, far away from the system of presence and meaning, called “trace,” “différance” by Derrida. It is the movement before the formation of meaning that is continuously differing and deferring before the formation of presence. It is a perception that cannot be sensed (seen, heard, and touched) by oneself

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 106; hereafter WD.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 104; hereafter SP.

in consciousness—it is un-seen, un-heard, and un-touched. Therefore, it “indicates *a way out* of the closure” (141, *italics mine*)—the closed circle of auto-affection of sensing (hearing) oneself and presentation. However can this “un-heard-of” thought indicate a way out? Can this thought open the closure of metaphysics? Is this thought of openness a different mode of thinking, pointing towards “...possibilities for a new kind of meditation?”<sup>3</sup>

To discuss these issues in Derrida’s writings, a close reading of the following texts is proposed—*Speech and Phenomena* (1973), “Violence and Metaphysics” (1964) in *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Of Grammatology* (1976), and “Différance” (1968) in *Speech and Phenomena*. The “difference,” the movement of traces, and the play of differences, for their structural commonality in endless references, will be provisionally called “open structure.”<sup>4</sup>

The way in which an open structure operates is through trace, writing, différance, and supplement. They are open to the difference with another trace, to another supplement, to the substitution, to the effacement of every trace and supplement, and to the postponement of deferral. The tracing/erasing of traces and the seeking of the next

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<sup>3</sup>David B. Allison in his “Translator’s Introduction” of *Speech and Phenomena* writes that deconstruction is not as negative as “destruction” in the context of Nietzsche or Heidegger. Deconstruction has no intention to overthrow or overcome metaphysics, instead, it sets its task to “...set forth the possibilities for a new kind of meditation, one no longer founded on the metaphysics of presence” (See page xxxiii footnote).

However, it is always necessary to remember to switch one’s perspectives. From one perspective, deconstruction indeed presents us a possibility to think differently other than the metaphysics of presence. From the other perspective, however, this different thinking, this is to say, trace, différance, writing, and supplement, with its powerless “power” of spreading everywhere and encompassing everything, including the possibility of thinking differently other than deconstruction, itself has no possibility for “a new kind of meditation,” one is no longer on the structure of deconstruction.

<sup>4</sup>Open is questioned in several ways. First, the question “How does différance open words, concepts, and categories?” concerns the opening of the horizon of metaphysics, the reduced pure expression, and ideal meaning, as Derrida discussed in *Speech and Phenomena*, essays on Husserl and phenomenology. Secondly, we might ask, “Do ‘open,’ ‘outside,’ and ‘the way out’ remain on the metaphysical level and upon that level, are they the ‘absolute, ideal, and perfect open?’” This question without doubt takes the same position with Derrida’s critique of Levinas in the essay “Violence and Metaphysics,” in which Derrida emphasizes that the other must not be an absolute and conceptual “other,” rather, it is before every concept, and thereby it is before the level of metaphysics. Without a doubt, for Derrida, open is not a “solid” open—it is not solid as Husserl’s perfect ideality and Levinas’s absolute open; on the contrary, Derrida will never speak of this “open” “the perfect open,” “the pure open,” “the absolute open,” or “the totally-open.”

supplement for the current one are the structures of open. We could say a trace traces and erases/effaces itself: trace traces and writes with erasing and effacing and at the same time, it erases and effaces with tracing and writing. Open lies in the very erasing, writing, and deferring. In other words, open lies in the very moment—let us still use “moment” as an expedient—that is *about* to remove, to write, and to defer. This “moment” of “about,” is always deferring, about to defer, or about to defer the deferring. Open happens at the very moment when the trace is going to disorder the common time and the deferral is going to defer between traces and during the movement of supplements. In this sense, open means “allowing,” “permitting,” and “promise.” It allows and promises *différance*, the play of traces, and vice versa. From one supplement to another, open promises the freedom of substituting, erasing, and moving thus, endowing the openness of what is erasable and replaceable. Only in this condition, a supplement could be replaced by another supplement, and therefore, a chain of supplements becomes possible. On the one hand, in the circumstance of open traces, *différance*, and supplements happen, and vice versa. On the other hand, in the chain of supplements and the play between traces, open happens. It is this process of open that makes trace and supplement not stop at their own and become determinate and certain concept. Open maintains that trace is an interruption and a disorder of metaphysical order. By being always able to differing and deferring itself, open prevents the risk of being petrified and beingfixed into one certain trace or supplement.

When open occurs between traces and supplements, it naturally means it is in certain limit. When open has the meaning of “unfolding,” it first means “folding” and “close.” A metaphor of an onion would help us. Imagine peeling an onion. To open and unfold an onion means to peel the onion. When we peel an onion’s layers, we see that inside a layer, there is another layer. We differentiate layers by other nearby layers. The process of erasing and detaching layers is the process of opening and unfolding an onion. By the same token, supplying is always substituting one for another, playing is always one playing with others. This inter-trace, inter-supplement implies a finite opening and a certain close. Open is from one supplement to another assupplement can never occur without the other supplement. Thus, open cannot only mean pure, absolute, and infinite open, rather it is finite—it is in certain closure. Open is at work where and when traces trace and efface, supplements substitute, and both meaning in language and Being in beings arise and arrive at their limitation.

Though trace, *différance*, and supplement condition words, concepts, and categories, they themselves are neither words nor concepts. They do not even cause words. They have no power to control, govern, or manage words. However, to say that trace is a “common root” for words, concepts, and categories does not mean that trace is a “root,” a substantial root, or an origin. Open and the openness of trace, too, are not a substantial root or origin. In the metaphor of peeling an onion, there is a notable and interesting fact: when one finishes peeling, the center of an onion is nothing. On facing the nothingness of the center, the metaphysical assertions on “concept,” “essence,” and its related question (“What is open?”) will turn out to be untenable to hold, for how can one give a “concept” before the formation of a concept, that is, before the play of traces? Prior to predicates, trace and *différance* escape the fate of being presence and metaphysics.

However, words and concepts are possible only by inscribing them into the movement of traces and differences. There are no words outside this structure of trace. As Derrida himself always states, “...there is nothing outside of the text,” and “...the gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits” (Derrida 104). This open structure of *différance* is endless like the fabric of text and the labyrinth of the gallery. This structure of open spreads over everything, in other words, it includes all.

No-thing can be outside of this structure—in this sense the open structure is closed. But at the same time, it is not closed because the structure of *différance* always expands everywhere. There is no “bound” of this structure and there is no frontier for *différance*. It never closes. But—again—it is never open. It is both open and closure; but at the same time, it is neither open nor closure. Moreover, it includes its own “exit,” includes the “outside,” therefore, “the outside is the inside,” and as a whole where there is no “outside” or “inside,” thus, “the outside is (with cross) the inside.” Is not this all-including structure another kind of closure? Speaking from the perspective of the history of philosophy, does this structure not share the same essence of metaphysics with other (metaphysical) categories like Being and idea which attempt to grasp everything?

Moreover, if the risk of misunderstanding arises, ask a question in Saussurean way: what makes trace a trace, temporization a temporization, and supplement a supplement? What are we talking about when we talk about trace, temporization, and Derrida’s other terms? When we are talking about trace and temporization, are we

really speaking of trace and temporization? Though from Derrida's perspective, these questions would be nonsense, because there is no need to recognize them, no need to "be" trace, différance, and supplement. As Derrida writes, "The Being of the existent is not the absolute existent, nor the infinite existent, nor even the foundation of the existent in general" (WD 143). When trace disorders and deferral defers, trace and temporization enter into an unstable, uncertain, and disordered status. This status of instability, uncertainty, and disorder—just as trace, différance, and supplement are endless—is endless. The web of différance maintains itself and prevails endlessly; accordingly, the status of this instability, uncertainty, and disorder maintains itself and prevails endlessly. Therefore, is this "disorder" another order of metaphysics, an order of disorder, an order as disorder, a disordered order—in one word, an order?, Though everything is tracing and erasing and is in an unstable condition in Derrida's structure of différance, this structure as a whole, by maintaining and prevailing itself, achieves a stable and even a static status. From this holistic view, due to the unstable stability, deconstruction is never destruction.<sup>5</sup>

The first point for Derrida's open—that it implies the dissolution of the center, of the central ideal, and positive meaning—is inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure. Derrida draws upon the key Saussurean insight, "...in language there are only differences." Each word must refer to other words. The only connection in language system is the differential connection between words and it is "*Arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified*" (Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 68-69; italics mine). Saussure writes,

Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor

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<sup>5</sup>Many scholars have come up with the same conclusion: "Deconstruction is never destruction." David B. Allison in his "Translator's Introduction" of *Speech and Phenomena* states the similar idea. Cf. *Speech and Phenomena* xxxii and see my footnote 3. However, one must also notice that this same conclusion comes from different reasons. Behind the surface of same conclusion, my argument is distinctly different from other scholars' arguments. In this paper, from a macroscopic point of view, deconstruction is found to have provided "supports" and "grounds" to metaphysics by removing its ground, and this move is another kind of protection for metaphysics, far from destroying it. Therefore, this is the reason behind my concluding that "deconstruction is never destruction."

sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea of phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it. (120)

There is no such thing called “the positive meaning” of each word. A word does not have a meaning of its own, rather, only through the differences between this word and other surrounding words is a word’s meaning determined. Referring to others, depending on others, and differing with others, make the word open to the “outside” of itself. The “outside” of a word is relative to this word itself; the “outside” here means other words.

Derrida in his “Différance” after citing Saussure points out,

The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present in itself...Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. (SP 140)

It is the *différance* that operates in language and makes language possible, rather than positive meaning, the determined sound, or the absolute idea. However, difference itself is neither a word, nor concept, nor meaning; or to put it in the language of metaphysics, it is neither a substance, nor a subject, nor a predicate, nor being. Difference is not a concept, it is the condition for conceptuality; it is not even a “principle” as Saussure names his “differentiation principle.” It is just a “play” which Derrida names—the play of differences—différance.

Are difference and différence, by putting “positive meaning” in question and “indicating *a way out* (141, italics mine),” opening a certain closure? At this point, the answer is certainly yes. For the differences between words as well as différence—the play of differences—indicate an open place where one word can have meaning only via opening it and relating it with other words. The frontiers between allword disperse. A word cannot self-sufficiently own its plentitude of meaning. Counter to classical linguists’ assumption, there is neither presence of any signified “true” thing nor any natural connection between a word and its “ideal meaning.” There are only differences and references between words as well as rupture between word and its meaning. Among references and differences of words, open is shown as differences and ruptures. Beneath these

demonstrations of differences and ruptures, open implies an incomplete and deficient “self-sufficiency.” In other words, open implies a disillusion of “self-sufficiency,” a disillusion of an ideal status not only for the signified present of classical linguistics, but also for Husserl’s “ideal meaning.”

Instead of speaking of complete and perfect “self-sufficiency,” Derrida comes up with “insufficient” to designate a fundamental lack that he also identifies as the original supplement. This fundamental lack of positive center accordingly means that the supplement to what was a lack is as fundamental as lack. With the lack of origin, or with the supplement of origin, Derrida can firstly, avoid asserting any full presence of a signified “positive meaning”—for once, if one only speaks the certain and determinate “positive meaning,” one actually says nothing but nonsense—“Différance is the non-full, non-simple ‘origin’” (SP 141). Secondly, guided by this “non-full,” “non-simple origin,” the lack and consequently the supplement to the lack, he can avoid speaking of a plentitude, the plentitude as the ideal meaning in the Husserlian sense, or the plentitude in the sense of the “anti-metaphysical” Other and exteriority in Levinas’s philosophy.

The breaking of the centric and positive meaning is the first step to open. This is the departure point from closure: not only the departure point for linguistic meaning, but for meaning in general, especially, ideal meaning and pure expression as they are understood in Husserl’s theory of ideal meaning. Husserl clearly indicates that the ideal meaning intention is indifferent to the fulfillment of the meaning intuition because whether or not there is any possible intuition is not the criteria for judging an assertion and the meaning intuition qua empirical experience is already reduced. He arrived at the conclusion that “truth is lacking.” Husserl notices two levels in expression which he distinguishes as “presentation of words” and “sense-giving act” (*Logical Investigations* 193). The former i.e. the presentation of expression, which is also called “appearance” of empirical expression, must be reduced; no one really cares about the presentation of the expression, what sound it likes, when and where it is expressed, and who expresses it—all these acts of expressing are vanishing. All of these belong to the domain of indication that must be bracketed and put aside. As Husserl writes, “My act of judging is a transient experience: it arises and passes away” (195). The opposite side of this transient experience, that is to say, what people really care about, is the meaning of the assertion: “But what my assertion asserts, the content *that the three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point*, neither arises nor passes away. It is an identity in the strict sense, one and the

same geometrical truth” (195). It is easy to understand by using a self-evident geometrical truth as an example. Moreover, the sentence will be understandable when this geometrical assertion is false, say, “...that the three perpendiculars of a triangle do not intersect in a point.” This apparently false and absurd assertion still makes sense, and its meaning, too, is still repeatable.

In this situation, that is, in a false or absurd assertion its “truth” is lost. Putting this to the system of object-subject and *a priori* knowledge and logic, the wrong meaning can never be fulfilled and the false assertion can never be fulfilled with its correlative object. Meaning-intention here works empty. Truth is lacking:

If “possibility” or “truth” is lacking, an assertion’s intention can only be carried out symbolically: it cannot derive any “fullness” from intuition or from the categorical functions performed on the latter, in which “fullness” value for knowledge consists. It then lacks, as one says, a “true,” a “genuine” meaning.<sup>6</sup> (196)

“Truth is lacking” because the content as truth is not necessary for expression, and the objectivity that is based on any real object is replaced by any ideal objectivity. Yet this “ideal” does not mean correctness and truth of expression; it does not correspond to true or false knowledge.

There emerges an essential problem of phenomenology from “...the false assertion can express objectively.” Husserl can naturally and easily get the conclusion that “truth is lacking” in order to show and prove that phenomenology is indifferent to the real object, however, he unwittingly admits another presupposition: even though the content is false, there is no possible object to fulfill the intention of assertions, the objectivity of false expressions is always valid by judging according to our *a priori* knowledge and logic—sense. It is not only the lack of truth, but also the lack of sense; in fact, the place of truth—a place of a self-evident foundation—is merely replaced by sense: here, sense supplies truth. Whether or not having sense is the presupposition for phenomenological judgments—judgments such as “it is evident true,” or “it is false and absurd,” or “it is nonsense at all.” Beyond truth, Husserl finds sense as his foundation. In other words, in

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<sup>6</sup>Edmund Husserl, “First Investigation,” in *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Routledge, 2001), 196; Derrida also cited this passage in *Speech and Phenomena*, 97, however, to use for his own idea.



this lack of truth, there arises another foundation and presupposition: sense that is always there and is already in expressions, without any doubt. Because sense can traverse “sense-only” and “sense-related-objects” it may or may not be fulfilled by real and possible objects but in fact, it does not care about this fulfillment. At the same time when Husserl abandons truth, which “is lacking,” Derrida, standing on the opposite and using the same words, would argue the same conclusion to prove his idea by using the very same words from Husserl: the lack of the ultimate and the lack of the absolute presence. In addition, after the abandonment of truth, Husserl finds another presupposition regarding sense, and Derrida, again, would hold his position that sense qua truth, likewise truth, is lost. As Derrida says, “There is already sense in the first proposition...it only precedes truth as its anticipation” (SP 98). Truth is promised but it has not come yet.

Now, this radical lack of sense, from which results the lack of foundation and origin, tears, ruptures, and holes open in the solid ground of phenomenology. To say it more radically, an assertion is judged by the relationship between sense and the object. By judging whether it is true or false one judges sense’s relationship with the object. For Derrida, no matter how radically Husserl denies assertion’s relation with the object, he is still using the criterion of the object, which, according to Derrida, is the norm of knowledge. The whole explanation of Husserl, though it touched on “truth is lacking,” seemingly steps backward to the object-subject relationship, and thereby, the whole analysis is still stuck in the domain of metaphysics.

Thus, according to Derrida, sense relates to words in exactly the same way in which object relates to words. The difference between the real object and sense is not as sharp as Husserl’s thought. If the intuition/corresponding object is lacking so is sense and vice versa, while if one fulfills intuition, one can also fulfill sense. By assessing whether an assertion has truth or not, one already relies on the criteria of the object and knowledge. As Derrida confirms, “Apparently independent from fulfilling intuitions, the ‘pure’ forms of signification, as ‘empty’ or cancelled sense, are always governed by the epistemological criterion of the relation with objects” (98). Therefore, without such a radical distinction between truth and sense, if truth is not necessary for phenomenological assertions, then sense, according to Derrida, is also not necessary either. Depending heavily upon knowledge or logic, sense can be lacking. Therefore, sense is lacking in the very beginning. And because sense is lacking, what is shown in speech is lacking; only the sign is left with its relation/reference/difference with other signs. When the foundation

qua sense is lacking fundamentally, the so called “secondary and derivative” sign, originally belonging to sense, comes to the place. If we understand by “outside” that a sign is not something that is added to the “insufficient,” then we can say more precisely that the sign taking the place of sense does not come from outside. The sufficient sense due to some reasons becomes insufficient. Sense is always something other than sense.

In this understanding, sense and the sign are no longer distinguishable. This is why when sense is lacking, the sign can supply it immediately. To understand this as correctly as possible, one must try to accept that the integrity of sense is lacking and thus, sense is no longer sense, rather, it is sense in a supplementary way. What does this mean? Let us relate this to Derrida’s analysis of Rousseau’s *Confession* in *Of Grammatology*. When speaking of the issue of masturbation—Rousseau thinks it is a “model of vice habit”—Derrida and Rousseau have totally different ideas regarding the same. Compared to the “normal” sexual activity, Rousseau thinks masturbation is just a special case, just an assistant, and that the imagined presence of beauties is only an addition to the real presence. He will never think that this “harmless” “assistant” is rather “original,” more original so that it is in itself the subject, “corrupting” the integrity of the subject fundamentally. Derrida writes,

Affecting oneself by another presence, one corrupts oneself [makes oneself other] by oneself [*on s’altèresoi-même*]. Rousseau neither wishes to think nor can think that this alteration does not simply happen to the self, that it is the self’s very origin. He must consider it a contingent evil coming from without to affect the integrity of the subject. (*Of Grammatology* 153, hereafter OG)

For Derrida, the integrity of the subject and the ideality of sense are now put into question. Masturbation comes immediately because it is in the beginning of the so-called “Nature” and “origin.” This “evil habit” merges into, and then breaks the integrity of the subject and becomes a part of the subject in the very beginning, just as the sign mingles with and adulterates the ideality of sense. Sense itself makes it other, that is, the sign. Under this circumstance, auto-affection—both in the case of Rousseau and the case of speaking to oneself in solitary mental life—is not pure and perfect as Husserl and Rousseau would wish; it functions rather by the substitutive symbol of the presence. The presence presents itself as an illusion, a symbol for substituting the presence itself. In the process of auto-affection, pleasure is

satisfied immediately by imagining the absent present, because it is nothing but symbolic present, a substitution for the real presence.

On one hand the auto-affection could be possible and pleasure, could be immediate because of the substitution, but on the other hand, the coming of the immediate satisfaction implies the deferral of the true pleasure. For Derrida deferral means that pleasure is never coming. The never-coming pleasure is but the lack of pleasure. Therefore, pleasure, or sense, or presence, or “truth,” “is lacking.”

The enjoyment of the thing itself is thus undermined, in its act and in its essence, by frustration. One cannot therefore say that it has an essence or an act (*eidōs, ousia, energeia*, etc.). Something promises itself as it escapes, gives itself as it moves away, and strictly speaking it cannot even be called presence. (*Of Grammatology* 154)

The essence is the center, and the center (if there is such a thing) is non-center. To play with the thing itself is to play with its symbol, illusion, and the supplement. In other words, one plays with symbol, illusion, and substitution from the outset. The so-called “that dangerous supplement” is not dangerous at all; on the contrary, what is really “dangerous” is the presence, the thing itself, the pleasure in the full plenitude, the purest ideality, and the most perfect meaning, in which the true menace—death—is dwelling. Supplements protect people from the danger of exposure to the too-strong light of purity and plenitude and from the menace of death. According to Derrida, there must be no center, no pure meaning/sense; otherwise it would be death. By the same reason, Derrida writes, “Pleasure *itself*, without symbol or suppletory, that which would accord us (to) pure presence itself, if such a thing were possible, would be only another name for death” (155). Then he cites from Rousseau himself: “Enjoyment! Is such a thing made for man? Ah! If I had ever in my life tasted the delights of love even once in their plenitude, I do not imagine that my frail existence would have been sufficient for them, I would have been dead in the act” (155).

Once there is a thing that is in its plenitude, it would be death. And once there is a thing that is in its purity and absoluteness, it would be a dead thing. In order to endow the ideal and full meaning of “the I,” “I” have to be dead and in order to speak well the expression “I am alive,” I have to be dead because the pure-self-presence is the announcement for death. Therefore, I present, I die. This is why the beginning question “what is the sign” must be lacking, for the

sense/meaning is lacking and for the sign already substituted for sense. This metaphysical mode of questioning “what is x” has no answer but one, which is deludedly answered in Husserl’s pursuit of absolute and ideal knowledge. Under this circumstance, a closest closure occurs:

In this sense, *within* the metaphysics of presence, within philosophy as knowledge of the presence of the object, as the being-before-oneself of knowledge in consciousness, we believe, quite simply and literally, in absolute knowledge as the *closure* if not the end of history. And we believe *that such a closure has taken place*. (SP 102)

A bit further, Derrida writes, “This history is closed when this infinite absolute appears to itself as its own death” (102).

In this way, sense—rather than the object—is asserted as a starting point of phenomenology. This foundation of phenomenology is taken away in Derrida’s interpretation of “sense is lacking.” To say that “truth is lacking” shows Husserl’s confidence in how phenomenology keeps away from empirical “blood and flesh” and only keeps its ideal unity of meaning. However, at the same time, Husserl also shows how heavily he depends on sense. Once Derrida takes away sense from phenomenology, he takes away the foundation of phenomenology. Sense, and other synonyms of it: meaning, purity, ideality, universality, the absolute, the ultimate, and the full-presence, are closed. They are as closed as death.

Derrida in the end of *Speech and Phenomena* comes up with an “un-heard-of” thought. The openness of this “un-heard-of” thought concerns something beyond knowledge and beyond presence—knowledge and presence are lack in the very beginning. When full-presence dies—it dies “in the act”—supplements come.<sup>7</sup> Supplement replacing sense/meaning/center/truth and thus breaking the foundation of metaphysics—the pure and full presence, ideal, and ultimate absoluteness—is Derrida’s open.

Lacking happens originally and the supplement is in the origin. If one denies the perfection of the purity, one can naturally avoid saying such as “the absolute open,” or “the absoluteness of the open.” These latter expressions are quite Levinasian. Therefore, the open, in this sense, by taking a lesson from Levinas, must be non-open.

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<sup>7</sup>In Derrida’s corpus, Supplement has several names: “sign,” “trace,” “writing,” and “différance.”

In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Levinas’s presupposition is, as Derrida claims, that “there would be no interior difference, fundamental and autochthonous alterity within the ego” (WD 109). When Levinas does not want to accept the “inner-difference,” he naturally imagines a “pure ethics” that avoids violence. Derrida analyzes, “It is true that Ethics, in Levinas’s sense, is an Ethics without law and without concept, which maintains its non-violent purity only before being determined as concepts and laws” (111). The “purity” of something—this “something” could be “Ethics,” “exteriority,” “alterity,” as well as the “other”—and the rejection of the inner-difference, inner-other, share the same logic as in Rousseau’s “problem” of masturbation: both neither wish “to think nor can think that this alternation does not simply happen to the self, that is the self’s very origin” (OG 153).

Derrida concludes that phenomenology is the metaphysics of presence in which a closure takes place. Levinas’s way, by announcing an opening from totality (the synonym of closure for Levinas) via the absolute other and infinity, however, cannot be taken either.

The open that Derrida seeks must occur at a more “original” level where there is no “transcendence” or “beyond of,” where this open must be open within itself and so must confront its own closure. Open does not transcend closure, but rather, being closed itself is a way of being open. Therefore, Derrida seeks an open in a more “fundamental” way—“older”: older than categories and predicates, thus and accordingly, older than the concepts such as “pure open,” “closure,” “same,” “other,” etc. Derrida writes,

Either there is only the same, which can no longer even appear and be said, nor even exercise violence (pure infinity or finitude); or indeed there is the same *and* the other, and then the other cannot be the other—of the same—except by being the same (as itself: ego), and the same cannot be the same (as itself: ego) except by being the other’s other: alter ego. (WD 128)

The same and the other, in fact, transcend and are beyond their own categories. To be precise about it, the same and the other diffuse in each other, thus there is no “pure same” against the other or “pure other” against the same, and thus you can no longer point out distinctly the boundary between “pure same” and “pure other.” The play of this dissemination of the same and the other is performed secretly behind

the stage, before they walk into stage lights and transform into clear shapes of concepts and categories. “Behind the stage” is not a stage, nor a ground at all, to use Derrida’s own words. It is in such a stage that the open has to be rooted and inscribed, so deeply, originally, and “fundamentally,” thus, open and the play between open and closure, cannot be open except by open qua closure, otherwise open cannot be open if there is nothing but openness, without the limit of the closure. Open, by taking this logic, has already undermined every concept and category. It is open qua closure, as well as closure qua open. This open takes place so deeply and so fundamentally that nothing can escape its open range, which is also as known as “closed” range.

Because open is not simply the opposite of Husserl’s closure, it is one that does not simply follow Levinas’s “absolute totality-absolute other” logic. As Derrida argues, the other must happen before being a concept, it must happen on the stage of pre-concepts, the stage of the verb “to be,” of the phrase “let it be,” and the stage of Being with its dissimulation, which in this context, the other and its dissimulation, the same. Open acts as closure and vice versa. For this dissimulation of open, it is but that of closure. Being, before concepts and categories, is itself just a play of differences from which concepts and categories arise. Derrida writes,

Now, Being is not simply a predicate of the existent, no more than it is the existent’s subject. If it is taken as essence or as existence (as Being-such or Being-there), if it is taken as copula or as position of existence, or, more profoundly and more originally, if it is taken as the unitary focal point of all these possibilities, then the Being of the existent does not belong to the realm of predication, because it is already implied in all predication in general, and makes predication possible. And it makes every synthetic or analytic judgment possible. It is beyond genre and categories... (136)

Being itself just “lets be.” One may wish to think that judgment is power and concepts and categories are powers to grasp things. Even though Being lets the concept remain a concept and the category be a category, and the judgment be a judgment, it itself has no power. Because it is before concept, the effort of trying to understand Being by concepts would be a vain attempt, and for the same reason, saying and asking the question “What is Being/différance?” would amount to “nonsense.” On this understanding, we can say that the same, open, and closure are neither concepts, nor categories, or judgments. The play of Being is the play of the other and the same, the play of open

and closure. How do they play? The other hides itself with the mask of the same; the open covers itself with the appearance of closure. They dissemble themselves.

Being lets it be, lets it be such and such things; because it is nothing. This is to say, it is never such and such a thing according to their preset categories and concepts in plenitude. Being is not the absoluteness of something. From the very “beginning”, non-plenitude, not perfect, and not absolute entail difference—different from itself and being the other of itself. :

If to understand Being is to be able to let be (that is, to respect Being in essence and existence, and to be responsible for one’s respect), then the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality: one can have to let be only that which one is not.(141)

To be different from itself or to be the other of itself is the structure of open. Difference is open, open to difference, to the alterity and the other within something itself, to the uncertainty and in determination. Open and closure have to be mingled and this mixing in certain sense is Heideggerian, having Heideggerian names like dissimulation, concealment, and the “very veiling of Being.” Being is open to itself that is different from itself; in other words, Being is open to itself that it is not itself: Being is against itself. As Derrida writes,

Therefore, the thought of Being, in its unveiling, is never foreign to a certain violence. That this thought always appears in difference, and that the same—thought (and) (of) Being—is never the identical, means first that Being is history, that Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence, and originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear.(147)

The absolute Being or the thought of Being as concept in its own plenitude is nothing but death. “A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing, nonhistory, nonoccurrence, nonphenomenality” (147). This “outside the existent,” is the stage of pre-concept and pre-category, a stage where the open, the closure, the same, and the other occur. On this stage, open is originally open to differences.

Up till now, in order to dislodge Derrida's open, we have examined Derrida's thoughts step by step from different perspectives. We started from Saussure then stopped by Husserl and Levinas. What can we know from the above discussion? When the infinite and repeatable ideality must be dissolved in differences, in both perspectives of logic and time, Husserl's "ideal-meaning-truth" freedom for true or false assertions finds itself in the closures of knowledge. And by the same token, Levinas, though took the totally opposite track from Husserl, emphasizes on the absolute other that takes the same form of fatal "perfectionism." In the perfect and pure Other there is no other but the same; in the motto "open to the other," there is no open but only closure.

On the way to open, this dead and petrified perfectionism must be cleared up. Or we can choose another logic by asking: Is there any perfection, absoluteness, or plenitude? If there is any "open" in Derrida's thought—first let us assume there is—then what does this open mean? Perhaps the thought of plenitude can tell us.

Derrida uses trace—neither substance nor concept—to counter the perfect "open." This is to say, he uses more "fundamental" difference—différance—against absoluteness. In this "strange" structure of différance what should be present is always *on its way* "about to present." By "on this way" I mean that it is always and never arrive sat completion, determination, and perfection. Perfect presence is always deferring its own arrival; once it arrives, it would be something other than itself like the imagined beauty in Rousseau's *Confession* where the presence is the imagination of the presence of beauties. This open of différance, as both the temporal deferral and the logical difference, compose the general structure of the Human Being. This "defectiveness of oneself" gives us time and the possibility to live. One must not be totally identical with oneself (to avoid being dead) rather one must be the other of oneself, open to the difference of oneself. Moreover, one is always living in the deferral of death, and by this postponement, one can have time. Not only death, pleasure shares the same logic. The incomplete and defective pleasure keeps one alive; otherwise pleasure in plenitude belongs to the domain of death—"I would have been dead in the act."

One is same, but not identical with oneself; completely identical is plenitude. Derrida clearly writes in "Violence and Metaphysics" that "...an opening is relative to a 'surrounding plenitude'" (WD 106). This "never in plenitude," "undecided," which is différance that is always already in the structure of other-than-itself



and in the structure of alterity, is open. Alterity is always already included: “If to understand Being is to be able to let be... then the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality: one can have to let be only that which one is not” (141).

For Derrida, the open is trace tracing, writing, and erasing, that is to say, trace opening to all other “things” other than itself. Open is also *différance* differing and deferring to the “thing” that is not itself. Thus, one can easily get to the “conclusion” that, for Derrida, open is just and exactly trace, *différance*, writing, and supplement. Is this true? Trace, *différance*, and writing, are never beings, concepts, and categories. Therefore, they do not exist; they are not. Because they are not beings, concepts, or categories, they have no power to control or govern beings, therefore they are not any totality or supreme form of beings. Because the pure and absolute other would be nothing but the same, the same logic works here: The mirroring or imaginary “pure” open would be nothing but closure. Therefore, our discussion about “Derrida’s open” is never an absolute open.

Upon consideration of the above, the question arises that how did trace, *différance*, and writing work in order to be open? Trace, *différance*, and writing are the condition for words; and furthermore, the condition for consciousness, concepts as well as beings. And only upon this huge web of *différance* (and trace, writing), which indeed opens to differences and in determinations, beings are possible. There is no being outside of the web of differentiation. This web becomes all-including for it is the only possibility and condition for words, concepts, beings, as well as consciousness. An extraordinary metaphor in Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena*, “The gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits” (SP 104). Does not this mean that there is no way out of this “gallery”? Is that to say that there is no way out of this web? This is perhaps true, for Derrida clearly says this in *Of Grammatology*, “*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *iln’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (OG 158). Text is a web of *différance* or play of differences, a web so secure that nothing can be possible without it. But at bottom it can provide nothing “secure” for it is groundless. Therefore, in this all-including web there is no way out. Moreover, we already know the reason; the exit is in itself. In this boundless web there is no outside—in this sense, it is not only “there is not outside of the text” but rather “there is no outside,” or in more precise words, in this boundless web, there is no possibility for the “outside.” To put it in Heideggerian expression is to say that it itself *conceals* the outside but here the implied meaning is rather the ordinary

meaning of the word. In this sense, this web—the structure of *différance*—is neither open or closed, for it is both open and closed.

And this all-including web extends even beyond the field of signified presence of linguistic (differential) to the presence in general. This web becomes so protective because every presence in general in our every consciousness is involved and thus appears as substitution. How does Derrida make this transition? A passage in “*Différance*” cannot be ignored. At the beginning of his argument, Derrida indeed prudently limits his discussion to linguistics, where he talks about the signified presence. After engaging with Saussure’s principle of differentiation, Derrida draws his first consequence, “...that the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself” (SP 140). A little further, we can see that Derrida expands this to all signs in general: “As there is no presence before the semiological difference or outside it, we can extend what Saussure writes about language in sign in general” (141). “Signs in general” is involved into the web of *différance*: “...we shall designate by the term *différance* the movement by which language, or only code, any system, of reference in general, becomes ‘historically’ constituted as a fabric of differences” (141). In this web of linguistic differences, questions that have the syntax “what?” “what is,” “who is,” are not valid independently because the speaking subject is already inscribed in the differences of language.

However, this web is not just the web of language it is also a web for the presence in general. The passage that follows the analysis of language is very important for this expansion. What we discussed above—the signified presence and the presence in general—remain in the domain of language and the sign. Then what about the presence that is not in this domain? Does it still belong to presence and in turn, the structure of *différance*? Or the question would be precise if one asks it in a different way: Is this system of *différance* still suitable for other fields beyond language, for example, consciousness prior to language? Derrida has anticipated this sort of question. He writes,

We might be tempted by an objection: to be sure, the subject becomes a *speaking* subject only by dealing with the system of linguistic differences, or again, he becomes a *signified* subject (generally by speech or other signs) only by entering into the system of differences. In this sense, certainly, the speaking or signifying subject would not be self-present, insofar as he speaks or signifies, except for the play of linguistic or semiological difference. But can we not conceive of a presence

and self-presence of the subject before speech or its signs, a subject's self-presence in a silent and intuitive consciousness? (146)

An answer to this question allows Derrida to expand the presence from the signified and concept to the presence in general. Thus, he expands the web of linguistic differences into *différance*, an all-including system and a condition for all presence, a gallery that has no bound and no outside, for it "...includes in itself its own exits." This question shows itself as a question concerning consciousness: consciousness that is "before" language. As Derrida writes, "...such a question therefore supposes that prior to signs and outside them, and excluding every trace and *différance*, something such as consciousness is possible" (146-7). The question now is focused on whether or not consciousness can be presented by itself without referring to others. For Derrida, consciousness is always the consciousness of a "subjective existence in general,"(147)and since the subjective existence is involved in the question of the presence in general, and particularly, in the self-presence, so does consciousness. "Just as the category of subject is not and never has been conceivable without reference to presence as *hypokeimenonorousia*, etc., so the subject as consciousness has never been able to be evinced otherwise than as self-presence" (147). Consciousness, shown as self-presence, returns to Derrida's discussion of presence and therefore, belongs to the web of *différance*, trace, that is, "the text."

The process of Derrida's analysis, from linguistic signs, presence in general, and consciousness as self-presence, to "the text" of trace/*différance*, is the process of the expansion of the domain of "the text." "*There is nothing outside of the text*" (OG 158). This strong statement concludes that all kinds of presence, signified, concepts, the self-presence of consciousness, in one word, presence in general, have to be involved in "the text," the strange structure of *différance* and supplement. In that the web of *différance* and the knots on the web—the supplements—are all-including and boundless, this web is spreading endlessly so that everything is engaged in *différance* as the substitution of *différance*. Therefore, according to this logic, what we get is because *différance* does not exist, and it just sends its relegates/representatives/proxies; there is nothing but supplements; there is nothing but text. The text itself is closed even though inside the text there are possibilities and necessities of opening onto

différance; and this closedness is not simply because of Derrida's logic of open—logically defined by closedness.<sup>8</sup>

It is closed because "...there is nothing outside of the text." In this specific example of Rousseau, Derrida defends this nothing-but-text and the absence of the Nature and "real mother," which is the natural consequence of nothing-but-text. He says:

*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *iln'y a pas de hors-texte*]. And that is neither because Jean-Jacques' life, or the existence of Mamma or Thérèse *themselves*, is not of prime interest to us, nor because we have access to their so-called "real" existence only in the text and we have neither any means of altering this, nor any right to neglect this limitation. All reasons of this type would already be sufficient, to be sure, but there are more radical reasons. What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of the "dangerous supplement," is that in what one calls the real life of these existences "of flesh and bone," beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the text*, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence.(OG 158-9)

In this passage, what we can see is that there is nothing outside of the text because the real mother of Nature does not exist and also because, what we have is just supplement. Nature and "real mother" are purely absent, also, différance—the movement of traces—does not exist; what we have is just the supplement—the addition of what is absent. Because the absence is abyss and différance is groundlessness, supplements thus are a chain with infinite supplements.

This "adding" movement is the structure of différance, which it is always differing and deferring, and which it is always tracing,

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," the analysis concerning the other and the same.

writing, and erasing. Everything is in the difference and deferral. From *différance* not only rises the unstable surface—supplement, word, the text, the “delegate, representative, and proxy,” (SP 152) but also rises the meaning of language by the adroit and clever balance game of *différance*. Therefore, what should be “abnormal” becomes “normal”; what is differed and deferred becomes substitution; disorder becomes an order as disorder, a disordered order, or to put it in one word, order. Supplement, trace, and the text, as difference and deferral between words, though unstable and disordered, fill the dictionary in complete and platitude. Derrida’s open and its closure are like a dictionary, being opened, and after it has been read, closed.

As Derrida emphasizes several times, “There is nothing outside of the text”; “The gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exit”; and in “Violence and Metaphysics,” he comments on Husserl, “Nothing can appear outside, the appurtenance to ‘my world’ for an ‘I am’” (WD 131). There is no outside. And thus, there is no “overcoming” of metaphysics” (*Heidegger, the Question of Being and History* 63). Derrida cannot agree with Heidegger who tries to use “dissemblance” and “disguise” as the concealment of the truth of Being and thus let the truth of Being be. Derrida calls this belief “Heideggerean *hope*” (SP 159). For Derrida, however, there is no such hope. He writes in *Heidegger, the Question of Being and History*,

...that there is no chance, that there will never be any chance for those who might think of metaphor as a disguise of thought or of the truth of being. There will never be any chance of undressing or stripping down this naked thinking of being which was never naked and never will be. (62)

If one really “undresses” the thinking of Being, according to Derrida, one will find nothing. Because this Being, as well as “real mother” and Nature for Rousseau, as well as the “truth of Being” for Heidegger, are from the outset absent, like the center of an onion.

This is quite a sad news for there is no hope, no outside, and no possibility of going out of this web. One might object this “impossibility of going to the outside” by taking up Derrida’s position of “*aporia*”—the relationship between possibility and impossibility. In this position, as Derrida addresses, the only possibility is nothing but impossibility. You can only forgive someone when this person is unforgivable; otherwise, when the misdeed is minor and this person is easily forgiven, you are forgiving nothing. “Forgiving, if it is possible,

can only come to be as impossible” (“A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event” 449).

The impossibility of forgiving is the possibility of it. Thereby the impossibility of going to the outside is exactly the possibility to go to the outside. This objection by using the logic of *aporia* flips over the possibility and impossibility of going to the outside: if one can get to the outside so easily, it is even not “getting out”, on the contrary, if it is an impossibility to get to the exit, then this is the possibility of going to the outside. Is not this logic the only logic: the logic of *différance*, the only logic of thinking? Via this logic, even the thinking of “the impossibility of going to the outside” involves in the web of *différance*. In the web of *différance*, any raised question or objection will just be a “part” of *différance*, a possibility of the impossibility. Therefore, in this structure of *différance*, there is no open.

Indeed, deconstruction is not destruction. It is just an inner “explosion” on the “root,” under the surface. Though the root and its stability are undermined by differing, deferring, tracing, and supplying, the surface is well-maintained. This is the strategy of deconstruction: digging deeply. Speaking metaphorically, this strategy jeopardizes the root of the tree of Western philosophy. However, the tree is still blooming, rather, this tree is even more flowery just because the root is removed by deconstruction so that no one can hurt its root fundamentally. By the name of deconstruction, metaphysics can never and will never be overcome or overthrown. In the huge and bottomless chess game, everything seems open and chaotic, in fact, it obeys the “rule” of trace. This web is boundless and groundless, needless to say, it does not exist and has no power and governs nothing. However, all things are all in it and cannot escape it. It is powerless but also powerful. No one can deny it and no one can resist it. There is no resistance for it because it will engulf resistance in its web and its game by revealing that there is no “enemy” to begin with. This web takes metaphysics apart not to destroy it but to protect it, therefore, no one can destroy it from its foundation. This is because of nothing but the fact that there is no foundation at all.

We must *affirm* it [*différance*]*—*in the sense that Nietzsche brings affirmation into play*—*with a certain laughter and with a certain dance (SP 159). This is true. For this *aporia*’s play of *différance*, boundless, and groundless, no outside and no overcoming, when it comes to denial, resistance, and objection, the play will laugh secretly and mock at any rejections, at their energy and impetuosity.

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