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DECONSTRUCTING DERRIDA: BELOW THE SURFACE OF *DIFFERENCE*

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There is perhaps a deeper difference of opinion about Derrida than about most contemporary philosophers. Consider, for instance, the following segment of Derridean text, which appears to be an answer of sorts to the question that many readers might want to ask, "To what does Derrida want to call attention by introducing the neologism *differance*"?

[T]his graphic difference (*a* instead of *e*), this marked difference between two apparently vocal notations, ... remains purely graphic: it is read, or it is written, but it cannot be heard. It cannot be apprehended in speech, and ... it also bypasses the order of apprehension in general. It is offered by a mute mark, by a tacit monument, I would even say by a pyramid, thinking not only of the form of the letter when it is printed as a capital. But also of the text in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, in which the body of the sign is compared to the Egyptian Pyramid. The *a* of *differance*, then, is not heard; it remains silent, secret, and discreet as a tomb...

What is going on here? There will not only be differences of opinion about what is going on -- differences in interpretation, that Derrida himself would of course welcome as confirmations of his thesis that all texts, including his own, can be variously and endlessly deconstructed. There will also be radically different opinions -- which will probably be rather less welcome -- about whether what is going on is profoundly significant or merely fancy verbal footwork.

I shall not take sides in this debate, for I do not believe it is possible for either party to make a case that will have the least validity for the other. Their underlying assumptions are so different that what is convincing evidence for the one, is either irrelevant or trivial for the other. In a word, the disagreement between Derrideans and anti-Derrideans is rooted in a deep difference in world view and, like all such bipolarizations of opinion, non-terminating¹

This being the case, instead of contributing one more item to a series of inconclusive exchanges, I shall take a wholly different tack; I shall describe what I believe are the central features of Derrida's world view. In particular, I hope to show, first, Derrida's world view is unusual in being marked by an internal conflict, and, second, that the tension generated by this conflict is responsible for those features of his view on which opinion is most deeply divided.

Those are the theses of this paper. I shall support them by doing what I call philosophical archaeology on *Differance*. That is, I shall look below the surface² of this text to uncover the conflicted metaphysical expectations that Derrida brought to the problem he set out to discuss.

The practice of philosophical archaeology, which I have discussed elsewhere in detail,³ can be re-described for the purposes of this paper within the framework of Derridian

deconstruction: Derrida himself, exploiting a metaphor of Levy-Strauss', describes a text as bricolage, an assembly of bits and pieces derived from other texts, which in their turn are assemblages of bricolage derived from still other texts. To deconstruct a text one disassembles it back into the bits of bricolage of which it is composed. And these into other bits, indefinitely. But Derridean deconstruction stops there, or rather, it continues indefinitely at this, always textual, level.

Philosophical archaeology focuses, instead, on the pattern of interests that led the author of the text being deconstructed to assemble just these bits of bricolage and no others into just this arrangement and no other. For instance, if one deconstructs descriptions of U.S. interventions in Libya, Grenada, and Panama, one finds that the bricolage assembled by most Third World writers differs systematically from the bricolage assembled by most First World writers: the former contain bits of bricolage -- "imperialism," for instance -- that do not appear in the latter, and the latter contains bits -- "terrorism," for instance -- omitted from the former. And it is natural, having noted these differences, to read back from them to the very different underlying political beliefs and, what are perhaps more important, the deep, inarticulate attitudes of the authors of those texts.

That political, religious and ethnic interests affect the ways in which authors assemble bricolage; that it is possible to "read back" from the text to the interests and biases that have organized the bricolage in just this rather than any other way; that readers have their own interests and that these may be either very similar to or markedly different from the author's interests; that, finally, such similarities and dissimilarities account for some disagreements amongst readers with regard to the value and importance of a text -- these are matters taken for granted by almost everybody, almost all the time. It would be hard to get through a single day without constantly trying to read back from what other people say to their interests and intentions, either conscious or unconscious.

But the interests to which most people read back are either fairly obvious psychological motivations (greed and vanity, for instance) or fairly glaring ethnic, racial and religious biases, like the political biases that are easily detected in Latin American and US press releases on the intervention in Panama. Philosophical archaeology assumes, as a working hypothesis, that there are metaphysical biases as well and that they function in much the same way that ethnic and religious biases function -- as Wittgensteinian lenses that bring into focus some features of the world whilst in effect filtering others out.

What are some of these metaphysical biases? Just as one can observe in the writing and discourse of some people an anti-Catholic bias, matched in the writings of others by a Catholic bias, so, one can observe a contrast between on the one hand an underlying presupposition that the world is best understood from outside, contemplated at a distance, and on the other hand, a presupposition that it is best understood from inside and by becoming actively involved in it. And one can observe a contrast between an underlying presupposition that the world is a well-ordered cosmos and the presupposition that, so far from being a cosmos, it is a jumble, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Again, as a third example of contrasting metaphysical biases, there is the contrast between an expectation that the world is fundamentally unproblematic and easily decoded and an expectation that it is deep and that because it is deep it can easily be misread. Each person's experience tends, on the whole, to confirm that person's

metaphysical expectations -- because, as with paranoia, what would disconfirm the expectation is simply not noticed.

Thus, metaphysical bias for the most part takes care of its own -- but at the cost, I remark in passing, of generating non-terminating disagreement with those who, because they have a different set of biases, encounter a different world. Nevertheless, there can be intra-personal, as well as interpersonal, conflict. There are, that is, individuals some of whose own biases conflict. Because such conflicted biases lead to disconfirming, and so disturbing, experiences of the world, such individuals have to find ways of dealing with the conflict. Derrida's way, I shall suggest, is to dance.

What, then, are the conflicted metaphysical expectations that give the bricolage assembled into *Differance* the curious shape (curious, that is, when compared with traditional philosophical discourse) that it well represented in the passage cited at the start of this paper?

I shall begin by saying what I take *Differance* to be "about" -- a hazardous, not to say foolhardy, undertaking with respect to any paper by Derrida. I shall do this by locating *Differance* within the framework of more familiar, but very different, approaches to the problem with which *Differance* is concerned. I shall then deconstruct Derrida's text by analyzing a number of phrases and words from his exposition -- from the bricolage he has assembled -- and trying to read back from Derrida's choice of just these, instead of other possible, bits of bricolage, to the metaphysical beliefs and attitudes that underlie these choices.

The topic discussed in *Differance* is, in the broadest sense, the topic that is the chief preoccupation of many contemporary philosophers: how to adjust to, how to live in, a world without foundations. This is an urgent problem for Derrida because of the solution he proposes for the problem of reference. Though there has always been disagreement about what exactly words refer to, it has been commonly assumed at least since Plato, that language is somehow related to a non-linguistic world, a world that is just whatever it is, independently of language. Though some philosophers have held that language is a veil that obscures, interferes with, one's access to that world, most have believed that, with practice and discipline, language can be improved, purified, so that it adequately reflects that world. Reference became a central, in distinction from a relatively peripheral, problem only when proved necessary to abandon all of the "easy" solutions, in terms either of transcendental forms or, alternatively, sense data. In this situation, deeper divisions amongst philosophers have emerged. Anglo-American philosophers still commonly assume that words refer -- they divide only on how, and how firmly language, is anchored to that non-linguistic world.

These Anglo-American preoccupations are by-passed by Derrida, since in his view, *il n'y a pas d' hors texte* -- there is nothing outside language. It does not follow, however, from the fact that nothing is outside language, that everything is inside language. At least, in Derrida's view this does not follow. For the kinds of disjunctions -- for instance, if not inside, then outside -- which have governed the thinking of Western philosophers since Plato and Aristotle, and which they one and all have regarded as outside language -- are, according to Derrida, inside language. That is to say, we are inevitably embedded in language. And not only this. Much more radically, the concept of "we" (alternatively, the concept of "self" or "subject"), and the contrasting concept of "world," are themselves examples of this embeddedness, elements in what Derrida calls the "logocentric" conceptual scheme that,

following Heidegger, he assumes "we" have inherited from the Greeks of Plato's day. It does not follow, therefore, that logocentrism and its basic metaphysical categories are "inevitable"; on the contrary, the notion of "inevitability," as contrasted with "mere chance," is but another part of the baggage of logocentrism. Just as there once was, long ago, a transformation of a non-logocentric language into a logocentric language, there may well occur some day a transformation of logocentrism -- the language in which reference is a problem, the language in which "language" and "we" and "world" are fundamental organizing concepts -- into "an entirely other language." If this happens it will be "a necessarily violent transformation" (p. 25).⁴

But whatever that language may be, it will still be a *language*; philosophers will therefore be as far as ever from "presence," that is, from contact with a world unmediated by language. From the fact we cannot escape language and that "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*." [p. 11; Derrida is quoting Saussure] What follows? I will first quote Derrida's answer and then try to deconstruct it into non-Derridian language.

The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. ... every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of a systematic play of differences. Such play, *differance*. is thus no longer simply a concept... [nor is it] simply a word, that is, what is generally represented as the calm, present, and self-referential unity of concept and phonic material. (p. 11)

To say that "in language there are only differences" is, more or less, to say that all terms refer, and inevitably refer, only ambiguously. A term's referent, no matter how skillfully one tries to bound and confine it, is an indefinitely expanding open set.

The opening moves (pp. 1-2) Derrida makes in *Truth in Painting* illustrate this thesis.

Someone, not me, comes and says the words: "I am interested in the idiom in painting." ... You are not completely in the dark, but what does he mean exactly?

Does he mean that he is interested in the idiom "in painting," in the idiom itself, for its own sake... but what is an idiom?

That he is interested in the idiomatic expression itself? ...

That he is interested in ... what pertains to the idiom, the idiomatic trait or style... in the domain of painting...? ...

Which makes, if you count them well, at least four hypotheses; but each one divides again, is grafted and contaminated by all the others, and you would never be finished translating them.

Nor will I.

Thus it is only a dream of foundationists that there are rigid designators (to misappropriate a term of Kripke's and, by doing so, to illustrate Derrida's thesis, inasmuch as I have just introduced a novel reference for "rigid designator," thereby demonstrating that "rigid designator" is not an unqualifiedly rigid designator.)

Without pausing to evaluate Derrida's account of reference as open-ended, I shall ask what stance Derrida adopts, and what stance he recommends that others adopt, toward his discovery that language floats -- his discovery that the terms in which metaphysicians since Plato have posed the questions they want to ask about the world -- is it one? is it many? is it mind-

dependent or mind-independent? and so on -- do not refer to the world but only to other terms, in an ever expanding circle of possible meanings.

Derrida's position seems to be this: We should cease looking for "the" meaning of a (any) term, for there is only a hole, an emptiness, where most people, including most scientists, expect to find a determinate meaning. Though this thesis apparently applies quite generally to all terms alike, Derrida concentrates on the alleged emptiness of metaphysical terms, Derrida does not conclude, as genuinely anti-foundationist philosophers have done, that one ought to abandon metaphysics and turn one's attention to other matters. Rather, we should endlessly track the endless, and ever expanding, circle of the referents of metaphysical terms. Alternatively put, we should continue metaphysical inquiry, but continue it as "play:" We should follow "the play of *differance*" through and around the bits of bricolage that survive from earlier attempts by metaphysicians to provide determinate answers to the traditional foundationist questions about the world.

Since "play" is a bit of bricolage that occurs repeatedly in *Differance*, I will in my turn introduce a bit of bricolage -- from "The End of Man," which is itself a bit of bricolage from *Zarathustra*. Nietzsche, Derrida says, distinguished between the merely superior man and the overman.

The first is abandoned to his distress in a last moment of pity. The latter... awakens and leaves without turning back to what he leaves behind him. He burns his text and erases the traces of his steps. His laughter will then burst out.... He will dance.... (pp. 135-6)

On my reading of Nietzsche, overman's laughter and dance reflect Nietzsche's own joyful response to his discovery that, because reference is open-ended, the pursuit of determinate meanings is futile. Nietzsche and his overman were exhilarated, liberated, when they came to realize that texts refer only to texts, not to a world beyond all texts.

I shall support this reading of Nietzsche by two more bits of bricolage, one from "The Vision of the Loneliest" in *Zarathustra*, the other from "Homer's Conquest." In the former, Zarathustra sees a young shepherd, who is "writhing, gagging, in spasms, his face distorted, and a heavy black snake hung out of his mouth." Zarathustra cries out to him, "Bite! Bite its head off! Bite!"

The shepherd... bit with a good bite. Far away he spewed the head of the snake -- and he jumped up. No longer shepherd, no longer human -- one changed, radiant, *laughing!*

In the latter, this metaphor is unpacked. The black snake is the recognition that God is dead, that the world has no goal and no direction, that everything eternally returns. Overman is simply

the truly exuberant, alive and world-affirming man who does not merely resign himself to and learn to get along with [this truth], but who wants *everything as it was and is* back again, back forever and ever, insatiably calling *da capo*, not only to himself but to the whole spectacle and performance....

I have introduced these bits of Nietzschean bricolage here in order to bring out, by way of contrast, how very differently play functions in Derrida's own response to what they both take

to be the inevitable indeterminacy of reference. Where Nietzsche is liberated by this discovery and "burns his text" as being a useless incumbrance, Derrida not only preserves it but endlessly re-reads it. Where Nietzsche "erases the traces of his steps," Derrida continuously tracks them.

Nietzsche and Derrida are both relativists; that they are follows, in the case of each of them, from the fact that the nature of language renders rigid designation impossible. Nietzsche would agree with Derrida that the "Being" endlessly debated by the traditional metaphysicians is only a hole. But Nietzsche does not notice the hole; he laughs and dances because he has been liberated from metaphysics. Derrida has not been liberated; he is still very much a metaphysician, aware, therefore, of the hole; he dances around it -- tracks the answers of earlier metaphysicians -- in order to avoid looking into the emptiness where, as he believes, Being ought to be but where, as he is convinced, it is not.

In a word, Nietzsche is a happy relativist; that is why his laughter, as I read it, is joyous. Derrida is an unhappy relativist, a relativist *malgré lui*, who wishes things were different but who is persuaded that they cannot be. That is why Derridean word-play, as I read it, is so very different from Nietzsche's. It is a form of therapy; it is designed to relieve people from the anxiety they feel whenever they attend to the fact that there is only a hole where rigid metaphysical designators ought to be. The therapy is in effect a dance around the hole -- a dance intended to be so entertaining, so light and swift, (the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper is a good example of a Derridean dance) that both Derrida and his readers alike are quite distracted from any desire to have any philosophical question -- for instance, the question, what is Derrida's theory of reference -- definitively answered. In a word, the text of *Differance* does not tackle -- does not try to solve, however indirectly, tangentially or allusively -- any philosophical problem; it illustrates how Derrida proposes that all philosophical problems be dealt with -- by assembling the failed answers of earlier philosophers and then dancing around them.

Is Derrida a foundationalist or an anti-foundationalist? If one reads the text of *Differance* at the surface level only, the answer is so obvious that it must seem silly to raise the question: he is a radical anti-foundationalist; that is the whole thrust of everything he says about the intrinsic indeterminacy of reference. However, if one looks below the surface -- if one reads sub-textually -- things look very different.

Foundationalist thinking has been dominated at least since Plato by an unconscious adoption of what I shall call the all-or-none rule, which excludes the possibility of there being anything, x , that is better than something else, y , unless there is something that is best, and excludes as well the possibility of any proposition being truer than any other proposition unless there is at least one proposition that is absolutely true.

The argument about measurement in *The Phaedo* has this all-or-none form: *either* there is an absolute criterion of equality *or* no comparative judgments of distance, size, or volume are possible; that being an absurd conclusion, it follows that there is an absolute criterion of equality. And it underlies the opening moves in *The Republic*, which sketch the overall strategy of the dialogue. The unstated assumption is the all-or-none rule: the only alternative to the use of force to control societies is rational persuasion, the possibility of which depends on the existence of forms. Since it is taken for granted that no one will opt for a society ruled by force, it follows that the forms exist.

Similarly with the Cartesians: *either* there is something (which turns out to be my own existence) that is indubitable *or* all is dubitable. So, too, with the Logical Positivists, who in other respects are unlikely bedfellows of the Platonists and Cartesians. Though sentences about the physical world are not anchored in the forms (which are dismissed as unverifiable) nor in self-evident rules (which are dismissed as tautologies), they *are* anchored -- in protocol sentences that report unit sensory experiences -- and just as firmly anchored as they are anchored for Platonists and Cartesians. That they might not be anchored was never seriously considered by the Positivists, who, like other foundationists, assume, by the all-or-none rule, that the alternative to being securely anchored is too dreadful to contemplate -- it is to be hopelessly adrift on the sea of scepticism.

Philosophers whose thought does not move along these lines who are anti-foundationists, are rare indeed. Hume, a professed "mitigated sceptic," is one of these exceptions, and an interesting one. For his "impressions," though they have a superficial family resemblance to the Positivists' protocol sentences, function very differently. He did not use them to try to anchor the sciences; he was quite content if the sciences floated, because he thought of them as being "human," and having "a direct reference to action and society" (*Enquiry*. xii, pt. iii).

I believe that, in these terms, Derrida is neither a foundationist nor yet an anti-foundationist. He is conflicted about, radically ambivalent to, the all-or-none rule. He alternates between adopting the "all", or foundationist, option and the "none", or unmitigated sceptical, option.

That this is the case with Derrida is perhaps not immediately obvious from the text of *Differance*. A clearer -- indeed, a paradigmatic -- example is the three-paper exchange with Searle. It consists of (1) Derrida's "Signature Event Context," which is a criticism of an argument of Austin's; (2) Searle's "Reiterating the Difference: A Reply to Derrida" which argues that Derrida has misunderstood Austin; and (3) Derrida's "Limited Inc," which is an attack on Searle. There is an extraordinary contrast in style and in tone between (1) and (3): The former is serious; the latter is playful. In the former Derrida is embarked on the kind of cognitive inquiry that Searle is embarked on in (2), the kind of inquiry that Anglo-American philosophers commonly undertake. In (1) Derrida and in (2) Searle, that is to say, both assume that philosophical terms designate sufficiently rigidly for a careful reader to ascertain what an author means, and in particular they assume that Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* refers to the events that Austin calls "speech acts." That being the case, the question is whether Austin got it wrong about speech acts, as Derrida maintains, or right, as Searle maintains. In (3) Derrida does not reply by undertaking to show that he is right about Austin being mistaken. On the contrary, reverting to his official position that all reference is open-ended -- there is only a hole where Austin and Searle naively expect to find something referred to by "speech act" -- he abandons the project, launched in (1), of discovering what speech acts are and takes to dancing around Searle and Searle's paper, starting out, for instance, by listing all the quite unwarranted assumptions Searle had made when he copyrighted the manuscript of (2), which he had sent to Derrida for comment.

This confrontation between Derrida and Searle is typical of world view disagreements. From Searle's point of view, Derrida changed the rules of the game as soon as he realized that by the rules they had adopted in (1) and (2) he had lost the game. Searle did not reply to (3)

by dancing about Derrida's dance . Searle was probably an unpracticed dancer and must have felt anyway that he did not want to win a dancing competition; he therefore had no option save silence. From Derrida's point of view, he has demonstrated once again that philosophers cannot answer questions; they can only cite the unwarranted assumptions made by other philosophers in the course of seeking answers.

But I have introduced this exchange less to illustrate the non-terminating nature of world view disagreements than to provide some guidelines for uncovering what is below the surface of *Differance*. At various points in that essay Derrida ceases to dance; he becomes serious. At these points he is either making cognitive claims that are at variance with his Saussurean view of reference as necessarily open-ended or he is expressing regret that the Saussurean position excludes the possibility of there being a "kingdom" of closed-ended reference. I focus on these points because I believe one can read back from them to fissures in Derrida's world view. I hold -- to anticipate the conclusion I am going to propose -- that a sub-textual reading of this bricolage shows that the therapy Derrida has proposed for coping in a world without foundations has not, even in his own case, been wholly successful.

Consider, as a start, these three bits of bricolage:

"strange space" (p. 5)

"bottomless chessboard" (p. 22)

"irreparable loss" (p.19)

The space discussed here is between "speech and writing"; the chessboard is the empirical world in which most people believe they conduct their traffic with nature and other men and women; the loss is the loss of "presence," that is, the failure to make contact with an unmediated, non-linguistic reality.

But why "strange"? why "bottomless"? why "irreparable"? What does Derrida's choice of these adjectives suggest about his world view? They reveal, I think, disappointed metaphysical expectations: it is only when one is expecting a familiar space and encounters an unusual one that one calls it "strange." And so, even more evidently, for "bottomless" and "irreparable". Since there is a close correlation between the level of one's expectation and the intensity of the disappointment one experiences if that expectation is defeated, a really radical reversal of expectations is reflected in these adjectives. It is not merely a matter of Derrida having been handed a partially filled glass when he expected one that was brimming full; it's rather a matter of his finding that, as he was bringing the glass to his lips, it wholly disappeared.

In a word, Derrida must at some time have had high metaphysical expectations -- the usual expectations of the philosophical tradition, from the Platonists to the Cartesians and beyond -- that firm foundations for metaphysical beliefs can be found. Moreover, in Derrida's text there is not merely disappointment that the world does not live up to his high expectations for it; there is also nostalgia for the lost world⁵ that would have corresponded to those expectations. Consider, for instance,

Not only is there no kingdom of *differance*, but *differance* instigates the subversion of everything within us that desires a kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and

infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom (22).

At a purely textual level what is being alluded to by "kingdom" is what is referred to by such expressions as "form of the good" in a Platonic vocabulary; by "self" in a Cartesian, and by "absolute" in a Hegelian vocabulary: the notion of a terminus, something toward which cognitive and moral inquiry is directed, and on which when it is reached, inquiry can end. Why then did Derrida prefer "kingdom" to these other terms? Because, read subtextually, "kingdom" suggests, as the others do not, a security that is at best only conditional, not unqualified: security for those who dwell in the kingdom but confined to them. Outside is insecurity; the barbarian, for all one knows, may be at the gate. And, this is the point, even the limited security of a kingdom is denied us. For there is no kingdom -- no possibility of determinate reference. There is only *differance*, and "*differance* is not" (p. 21). Because *differance* is not, "the domination of beings" -- that is to say, all that is -- "shake[s] as a whole, ... tremble[s] in entirety." The world, so far from having secure foundations, is seismically unstable.⁶

No wonder, then, that "everything within us that desires a kingdom" finds this situation "obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded" (p. 22). However inclusive or restricted Derrida's "us" may be, he has certainly included himself amongst these shaken people. That he has done so is evidence, I suggest, that he is a not entirely happy dancer. He is a dancer *faulx de mieux*, a dancer who dances less because he delights in dancing than because he finds himself to be at the edge of the abyss of indefinite, infinitely expanding reference.

Support for this subtextual reading is to be found in still another bit of bricolage, this one an observation about names: "There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being" (p. 27). That there is no unique name is just a restatement of the already familiar, and thoroughly elaborated, proposition to the effect that in language "there are no positive terms" (p. 11), i.e., no terms that unambiguously refer. What is interesting is that when, as is the case here, he is thinking of the application of the doctrine of *differance* specifically to the term "Being," -- the term that it has been reserved by generations of philosophers since Plato as the name of the foundation of foundations -- he feels called upon to add the warning, "we must think this thought without nostalgia." It is painful enough (this is the subtext of the bricolage of p. 11) to discover that the terms by which beings are thought to be named, whether in ordinary, or in scientific discourse, so far from referring to horses, dogs, galaxies and neurons, they refer to an indefinitely expanding textual field, an abyss about which one can only dance. But the shaking and trembling that this discovery causes is as nothing as compared with the shaking and trembling experienced when one realizes that the term "Being" is itself unstable. Hence a warning is especially called for here: faced with the discovery that "Being" names nothing, that it is a "myth," "we" must resist nostalgia for the "lost native country of thought." Instead, we "must *affirm* this [discovery] with a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance" (p. 27).

Who is being warned here? As with the "us" of the passage on p. 22, tone and the context certainly suggest that Derrida includes himself amongst those needing a warning. And, since one hardly issues warnings to those one believes are not prone to experiencing nostalgia, it is

surely not unreasonable to conclude that the subtext here expresses Derrida's own nostalgia.

Possibly Derrideans will argue that Derrida himself does not experience nostalgia; his "we's" and "us's" are mere rhetorical ploys designed to suggest to the nostalgic that he shares their sentiment. Perhaps -- if these were the only bits of bricolage available. But they are not. Hence, though the deconstruction of other Derridean texts is beyond the scope of this paper, I will once again introduce a bit of bricolage from another text, because in it Derrida identifies himself quite explicitly and in a particularly revealing way with the sentiments that, as I believe, also form the subtext of *Differance*.

This bricolage is the conclusion of *Structure, Sign, and Play*. He has just distinguished "two interpretations of interpretation" which are "irreducible," and "absolutely irreconcilable, even if, together, they share the field which we call the human sciences" (p. 265). One of these modes of interpretation aims, and aims naively, at determinate reference; it "seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay" (p. 264).⁷ The second mode of interpretation has abandoned this dream because since the structures on which analysis terminates have a history and an origin, "the origin of a new structure [must be conceived] on the model of catastrophe -- an overturning of nature in nature, a natural interruption of the natural sequence, a brushing aside of nature" (p. 263). In other words, it recognizes that no terms, not even the scientific vocabulary of structuralism, are, or can be, rigid designators. This second mode of interpretation therefore "affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism."

What is Derrida's attitude toward this mode of interpretation? After noting that such terms as "gestation," "conception," and "labor" are appropriate for describing it, he comments:

I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the business of childbearing -- but also with a glance toward those who, in a company from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity. (p. 265)

This company, in which Derrida explicitly includes himself -- there is no possibly ambiguous "we" or "us" here -- is the company that has also been instructed that it "must *affirm*" that the term "Being" names nothing (see above, p. 00). Taking these bits of bricolage together and noting that Derrida's italicization suggests resistance that has to be overcome, it seems not unreasonable to conclude that his attitude toward the absence of foundations is at the furthest extreme from what Derrida rightly calls "Nietzschean *affirmation* -- the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of a world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation. . . ." (p. 264).

In such bits of bricolage as these one does not have to read subtextually to find the nostalgia; it is at the surface, recognized and acknowledged by Derrida the author. But with these overt expressions of nostalgia for foundationism as clues, one can find evidence of nostalgia below the surface at many points -- indeed, as I shall argue, wherever, as in the passages (p. 11 and p. 22) that I quoted earlier -- the tone is serious, not playful as it is in those sentences about pyramids and tombs quoted at the start of this paper. There, and usually

in *Differance*, he is in control; dancing, it seems, proves to be good therapy -- he dances as gaily as ever Nietzsche did. But now and then the therapy fails; he becomes aware of the hole about which he is dancing and, overcome by a nostalgia for closure, for completeness, he ceases to dance and becomes in effect a traditional metaphysician seeking -- and even finding! -- answers to questions which, when he is in his usual, anti-foundationist stance, he holds to be unanswerable. This kind of change in tone from playfulness to seriousness occurs at several other points in the essay -- whenever (as I suggest) he allows himself to contemplate, head-on, the consequences for foundationism of the Saussurean view of language. At these points the abyss proves not to be quite empty: there is, after all, a *hors-texte*.

Consider, for instance, one of the numerous mentions of "traces," i.e., evidence in beings of the presence of Being. The problem of reference is once again raising its ugly head; restated in terms of "traces," it amounts to asking how one can find, within language, traces of what, because it is beyond language, anchors language. The difficulty, as Derrida sees, is that this seems to raise a question about origins, and since, from his point of view, the very notion of origin entails the notion of effect, has he not, he asks himself, committed himself to still another of those dialectically related pairs which are supposedly no more than features of the logocentric vocabulary we have all inherited? In a word, as Derrida recognizes, the name "origin" no longer "suits" what he wants to talk about. How can he extricate himself from "the closure of this framework"? How can he extricate himself from this pair of interpretative concepts in which his thinking about presence is embedded? His answer is

I have attempted to indicate a way out... via the "trace," which is no more an effect than it has a cause, but which in and of itself, outside its text, is not sufficient to operate the necessary transgression. (p. 12)

Here Derrida is no longer playful; he is serious. He is no longer dancing at the edge of the abyss; he is making two positive metaphysical claims: First, that there is, after all, evidence of there being something in the abyss; it has left a trace that marks its presence. Second, though there is enough of a trace to warrant a belief in an extra-linguistic reality, it is not enough of a trace to undermine -- to "transgress" -- Derrida's fundamental thesis that, given the nature of language, there can be no determinate reference.

What is one to make of this claim? Though one can agree that "effect" may not be quite the right category under which to classify traces, it is surely the case that a trace, in order to be a trace, must be a mark, itself accessible, of something no longer accessible but once accessible. The trace may be faint; it may be fugitive; it may be ambiguous. But however ambiguous, however uncertain the reference, it must, if it is a trace, refer to *something*.

Derrida's position seems not unlike that of the woman who claimed her baby was too small to be illegitimate. One is inclined to reply that at the moment the baby becomes so tiny that it ceases to be illegitimate (at the point at which it ceases to be a "transgression," just at that point it ceases to be a baby. *Mutatis mutandis* for traces.

Further, while Derrida's trace is obviously inside the text in which it occurs, is it a trace of something inside some other text; or is it a trace of "presence," i.e. something outside all texts? If inside, the notion of trace is unproblematic, but useless for Derrida inasmuch as the trace is not a trace of what is extra-textual, but only of another bit of textual bricolage. If

outside, there is indeed the possibility that the text is a sign of what is beyond all texts, but only at the cost of another "transgression."

How might Derrida reply? Paul Mann has suggested to me (in a personal communication) that "trace" is to be understood in Lacanian terms, as "an empty referent -- there is not nor was there ever any actual content latent in the unconscious to which the trace refers . . . for Lacanians the signifier is the sign of a Lack . . ." This seems to me a perspicuous reading of Derrida, but we have to distinguish a question of interpretation (What does Derrida mean by "trace"?) from the relevant question here: Does this notion of trace work? Does it escape "the closure of the framework?"

It is clear I think, that it does not. So far as Derrida adopts the orthodox reading of Freud he gives us an unproblematic notion of "trace," but one that it is not the "way out" which he sought, since the trace, so understood, is the marker of an earlier episode in the patient's life, which may be recovered by psychoanalysis, i.e., something *hors texte*. So far, on the other hand, as he adopts a Lacanian reading, he explains one enigma by appeal to another enigma. I suspect that, if the notion of "trace" works for Derrida and the Derridians it does so because of an unnoticed ambiguity between Lacanian and the orthodox interpretations of Freud; if one moves rapidly enough from one interpretation to the other, one avoids noticing the contradiction. It is doubtless easy for Derrida and the Derrideans not to notice contradictions because for them, of course, the law of contradiction is one more piece of logocentric baggage. Thus, later in *Differance*, he observes that "one can think without a contradiction, or at least without granting any pertinence to such a contradiction, what is perceptible and imperceptible in the trace....Heidegger can therefore, in a contradiction without contradiction, consign, countersign, the sealing of the trace" (pp. 24-5).

This seems to amount to saying that one can both remember and at the same time forget that the trace is a trace. Whether this kind of "active forgetting" (as Derrida calls it) is a psychological possibility is one thing -- given the spiritual exercises of the Jesuits and the "double think" described by Orwell in *1984*, or given for that matter the amount of muddled-mindedness loose in the world -- it would be naive to rule out active forgetting as a procedure by which one can learn to believe conflicting propositions.

But to recognize this possibility does not eliminate the "pertinence" of the contradiction; it is merely to say that some individuals can learn to avoid thinking about the pertinence of a contradiction, that is, that double-think is an alternative therapy for dealing with anxieties aroused by one's recognition that the world lacks foundations.

But the most striking venture into metaphysics occurs, not surprisingly, just after the warning against nostalgia, when, clearly, he is thinking of how very, very empty the abyss is:

From the vantage of this affirmation foreign to all dialectics, the other side of nostalgia, what I will call Heideggerian *hope*, comes into question. I am not unaware how shocking this word might seem here. Nevertheless I am venturing it, without excluding any of its implications.

These sentences introduce a long quotation from Heidegger, and the essay then concludes with the following comment:

Such is the question: the alliance of speech and Being in the unique word, in the finally proper name. And such is the question in the simulated affirmation of *differance*. It bears (on) each member of this sentence: "Being / speaks / always and everywhere / throughout / language." (p. 27)

There is nothing playful about this prose; Derrida is making a metaphysical claim -- stating what he holds to be the case -- about the world. What is the claim? That those who have just been warned against nostalgia, warned against regret for the loss of the kingdom, nevertheless have grounds for hope that there is a kingdom after all. And not only grounds for hope: there is evidence ("Being speaks") in every sentence uttered or written. Thus, these comments on Heideggerian hope not only unsay the immediately preceding warning against nostalgia; they unsay the central thesis of *Differance*, namely, that there is nothing *hors-texte*.

At the cost of digressing into one more Derridean text I shall point out still another, and quite remarkable, shift on the subject of the abyss. At the end of *Differance*, as we have just seen, Derrida slips into a Heideggerian view of the abyss. So far from the abyss being empty, Being speaks from it -- speaks to all who will but "hearken" to its voice. Ten years later, in *The Truth in Painting* he imposes on Heidegger a Derridean view of the abyss: it is quite empty. If there is anything clear about Heidegger it is that he held that Being speaks in paintings and other works of art (Heidegger's chief example was a painting of old shoes by Van Gogh) and, more generally in language, which, for Heidegger, as for Derrida, is an abyss. But for Heidegger, unlike Derrida, the abyss of language is not bottomless. For instance, as he wrote in the short paper *Language*, if we fall into the abyss of language

we do not go tumbling into emptiness. We fall upward, to a height. Its loftiness opens up a depth. The two span a realm in which we would like to become at home, so as to find a dwelling place for the life of man (pp. 191-2).

Nothing, one would have thought, could be more explicit. Yet in *The Truth in Painting*, which purports to be an exposition of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, this Heideggerian abyss is emptied and brought into alignment with what may be called the official Derridean doctrine. So far from the depth opening up to a height, it is bottomless, and because it is bottomless one can save oneself from falling into the abyss only "by weaving and folding back the cloth to infinity" (p. 37) -- that is, not by hearkening to the voice of Being, but by dancing, by tracking the indefinitely expanding network of always partial, always indeterminate, references accumulated in other, earlier, philosophical texts.

How does it come about that in the last pages of *Differance* Derrida makes a long move in the direction of Heidegger: the Derridean abyss is not quite empty, whereas in *The Truth in Painting*, Heidegger's abyss becomes Derridean, "bottomless" after all? I suggest that these shifts -- of Derrida himself in the direction of Heidegger and then of Derrida's Heidegger in the direction of Derrida, reflect a marked ambivalence toward foundationism.

I have now cited a number of passages, in *Differance* and in related essays, in which Derrida shows himself to be enough of a foundationist to want to make metaphysical claims. These are just the points at which nostalgia is expressed (sometimes openly, sometimes covertly), as he comes to realize that, despite all his ingenuity, despite all his twistings and turnings, his Saussurean view of reference invalidates these claims. It follows, if this

deconstruction of *Differance* is persuasive, that Derrida had by no means escaped from the "old debate full of metaphysical investments" (p.21) -- at least not as late as 1978, when *The Truth in Painting* was published. As of that date and contrary to his belief that he had liberated himself from metaphysics, he was deeply in debt and unobtrusively making payments on account, in the hope, it would seem, of staving off a visit from the bailiff.

Was the debt subsequently paid off? One's answer to this question will in large measure turn on whether one believes there are two Derridas, an earlier Derrida and a later, quite different Derrida. That is an issue that has been much, and inconclusively, debated⁸, and I certainly do not propose to try to adjudicate it. Instead, since there is also a difference of opinion amongst Wittgensteinians about how much of a break there is between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, and since Wittgenstein's thought, as much as Derrida's, is driven by the need to cope with metaphysical anxiety, I shall conclude with a few remarks about the differences between their approaches.

When Derrida, instead of finding a kingdom of determinate references, discovered only an abyss at his feet, the therapy he undertook was linguistic, a dance around the abyss. The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* also experienced metaphysical anxieties, because, as he put it, he had discovered that "all that happens and is the case is accidental" (6.41). The strategy he proposed, like Derrida's, was linguistic. But it was not a dance around the gaping hole that marked the site of unanswerable metaphysical questions. It was an act of linguistic exorcism. He denied that metaphysical questions exist: "For [he assured himself] doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said*" (6.51).

But recitation of this incantation, which was the most he was capable of in the *Tractatus*, was not enough to allay doubt; it proved necessary to *show*, not merely to *say*, that there are no metaphysical questions. For a time he therefore abandoned philosophical inquiry, and when he returned to it, it was in order to take up, one after another, traditional metaphysical puzzles, with the intention in each case of showing it to be the product of linguistic confusion. When a philosopher -- Augustine, for instance -- asks "What is time?" and is distressed because he cannot answer, the reason is that in this question language is spinning. The solution is to put language back into traction by employing it in the practical, getting-and-spending language games of everyday life ("What time does the flight leave?"), where use determines meaning. This he undertook to do in the *Investigations*. The therapy practiced there is still linguistic, but it is very different from Derrida's, being designed not (as with Derrida) to distract attention from an abyss, but to demonstrate that there is no abyss from which one must distract oneself.

That there is no abyss is doubtless something that must be demonstrated again and again, for language all too easily slips out of traction and begins spinning. But, whenever a Derridean abyss seems to yawn at one's feet, one can always dissipate it by putting language back into traction. The trouble with Derrida from Wittgenstein's point of view is that he never even tries to put language back into traction. His prescription -- using metaphysical language, as he thinks, playfully -- is no solution. For it is not playful; it is still metaphysical, still spinning. And as it spins, it generates a Derridean abyss even as at the moment when, according to Derrida, it is supposed to be distracting us from it.

The contrast between these two approaches is instructive, and it is highly relevant to the "deep difference of opinion" about Derrida on which I remarked at the beginning of this paper. Much of this difference turns on varying responses to Derrida's conflicted, on-again, off-again attitude toward the all-or-none rule. Most philosophers, as I have said, have not only taken this rule for granted; they have, almost all of them, opted for the "all" alternative. That is to say, almost all philosophical theory-construction has been driven by a very low tolerance for cognitive and moral dissonance, by the need of the theorists for a universe in which they can feel comfortable, but which they can contemplate at a distance, themselves uninvolved and uncommitted. It is evident, then, why foundationists would derogate *Differance*: it challenges their deepest beliefs and undermines their security.

But anti-foundationist philosophers -- those who, like Hume, Dewey and Wittgenstein, reject the all-or-none rule -- are as deeply offended by *Differance* as the foundationists, for they too take cognition seriously. It is just that, unlike Derrida and the foundationists, they hold serious cognitive and moral inquiry to be possible in a world without foundations. From their point of view, Derrida, like Wordsworth's pale rationalist, devotes himself to multiplying metaphysical distinctions, thereby justifying to himself his failure to tackle any real-life problems.

It is as if Derrida wants to be absolutely certain of eliminating every rat that happens to be roaming around the house before he starts to hunt any rat down. Since, unlike the foundationists, he believes there to be an indefinitely large number of rat holes, none of which can be completely blocked, he spends his time pointing out how earlier rat-hunters failed to block holes completely. In contrast, the anti-foundationists -- Dewey, for instance -- are sceptical about the claim that there are unstoppable rat holes and still more sceptical that there is an indefinitely large number of them. "Wait and see" and "Time will tell" are their mottos: they propose to turn their attention to stopping rat holes only after they see rats escaping through them. Meanwhile they pursue every rat they encounter. That they do so follows from the fact that each of them, in his own way, regards the quest for certainty as a form of mental illness.

The pattern of world view biases that leads to admiration for Derrida is quite different. People who share Derrida's nostalgia for the lost kingdom and his ambivalence toward foundationism -- and I believe many do -- will probably resonate with the passages in *Differance* on Heideggerian hope and on traces: Derrida will seem to them to offer a way out of relativism, scepticism, and pragmatism -- a way of enjoying metaphysical cake without having actually to eat it.

Those who read the remarks on nostalgia differently from the way I read them, and who therefore miss the ambivalence that I detect, will view Derrida as having deployed weapons for as sweeping an attack on Western culture as have been assembled since Nietzsche. For, viewed in this way, Derridean deconstruction does not merely mark the end of philosophy (an event few non-philosophers would deeply regret). It also marks the end of the enterprise that has characterized the West since the Renaissance -- inquiry into the nature of the *hors-texte* world. Inasmuch as Derridean deconstruction is a broom that sweeps away beings as well as Being, it has a great appeal for all those critical of what they see as the "pretensions" of the natural and social sciences and of the economic, social, political, and literary establishments based upon

them.

Two, from many possible, examples: The Women's Movement and the humanities. It is understandable why Derridian deconstruction, as set out in *Differance*, would appeal to the more radical elements in the Women's Movement -- at least until it occurred to them that the sword that they employ against phallographic language can turn against the hand that is wielding it. Similarly, it is understandable why *Differance* would appeal to historians, literary critics and to other humanists whom it releases from what seems to them a will-of-wisp pursuit of "the" meaning of some document or other.

In a word, responses to *Differance* are strongly affected by differential evaluations of the objectivity, neutrality, and seriousness that, for centuries, have been thought to characterize the appropriate attitude to adopt in all cognitive enterprise, and more generally, by differential attitudes toward completion, closure, and risk-taking. Since there are many -- Westerners and non-Westerners -- who are mounting attacks on the *status quo*, and as many others who want to repulse them, it is not to be wondered at that opinion is bipolarized.

ENDNOTES

I am deeply grateful to Steve Erickson, Paul Mann and Arden Reed for their detailed and thoughtful comments on successive drafts of this paper.

1. For an example of a non-terminating disagreement resulting from differences in world view, see below, p. 00.

2. Derrideans may object at this point, even before I have well begun, that in introducing the notion of differences in level I am casually taking for granted the distinction between surface and depth that Derrida has explicitly rejected, along with all other metaphysical dualities. Certainly there is much in this paper from which they will strongly dissent, but the distinction I am proposing here is not metaphysical; it is no more than the distinction between (1) what people say and (2) the unstated, and possible unconscious, intentions that lead them to say what they say; and this is a distinction that Derrida himself constantly makes use of -- for instance in his analysis, in *The Truth in Painting*, of Meyer Shapiro's paper on *The Origin of the Work of Art* -- I assume it is safe to make use of it in discussing one of Derrida's own papers.

Exception will also certainly be taken to what will be seen as my purloining of Derrida's term "deconstruction" to designate the kind of analysis I shall be doing. In reply two comments. First, given Derrida's view of reference (see below, pp. 00), he is not justified in claiming even squatter's rights to any term, whatever that term may be. Second, there is an important (from my point of view) family resemblance between Derridean deconstruction and philosophical archaeology to which I want to call attention: Philosophical archaeology *completes* the process of deconstruction by showing why Derrida assembled the bits and pieces of other texts that together form the text of *Differance* in just the way he assembled them.

3. See, for instance, "Philosophical Archaeology: Below the Surface of *Tragic Choices*, *Metaphilosophy*, 19, pp. 313-328.

4. Compare "The Ends of Man," a lecture Derrida gave in October, 1968. Given the extraordinary impact that the student/worker strikes in May of that year had on French intellectuals, and noting that Derrida has dated this paper "May 12, 1968," it is not implausible to conclude that, in Derrida's view, the second of the two possible strategies he discussed at the end of the paper ("to decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and disruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference") had already been launched.

5. It is possible not only to experience nostalgia for what has been lost -- the pre-logocentric language of the early Greeks; it is also possible to experience longing for the unknown future, the language hinted at in *The Ends of Man*. And that Derrida did indeed experience this longing is suggested by his discussion of "Heideggerian hope" (see below, p. 00).

6. Note the expressions "as a whole" and "in entirety." They reflect that influence on Derrida's thinking of the all-or-none rule: either all is firm or nothing is.

7. Derrida is thinking specifically of Levy-Strauss at this point, but Piaget would surely be another example. If so, we must add structuralism to platonism, cartesianism and logical positivism as a fourth move by foundationists to anchor "the field of the human sciences."

8. There is a useful short discussion of this debate by Richard Rorty (in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pp. 125, ff.), who comes down on firmly for a sharp discontinuity.