

Chapter 1

REFLECTING ON THE OCCASIONS OF INTRODUCTION: JUSTIFYING THE UNJUSTIFIABLE OR, BEGINNING AGAIN

Derrida's text leaves us with the infinite responsibility undecidability imposes on us. Undecidability in no way alleviates responsibility. The opposite is the case.

Drucilla Cornell

Sentences of the form "deconstruction is so and so" are a contradiction in terms. Deconstruction cannot by definition be defined, since it presupposes the indefinability or, more properly, "undecidability" of all conceptual or generalizing terms. Deconstruction, like any other method of interpretation, can only be exemplified, and the examples will of course all differ.

J. Hillis Miller

Ever since Jacques Derrida addressed himself to the problematic of introduction in relation to Hegel's "Preface" to the *Phenomenology*, everything that can be said on the subject of introductions has been said. Everything is exhausted, has become stale and familiar, especially, it has to be said, this chapter. And it's for that reason why this is not the introduction to this book, but is placed here, presumptuously, as the first chapter, a supplement to the introduction, stalled, a false start, and

also a series of reflections, backward glances, retrospective unlacings of threads that are already worn and fraying in a number of places. Why bother then? Why not just admit, in the words of the song, that I can't get started? If there is ever a more unjustifiable gesture it is perhaps this most untimely one, speaking of the occasion for introducing "Jacques Derrida," after nearly half a century of such occasions. Indeed—and this is not merely an overly neat fictive device to get me off the hook on which I've already hung myself—at the very moment when I was completing final edits and revisions to *Occasional Deconstructions*, I received an e-mail inviting me to contribute to a book introducing, yet again, Jacques Derrida. An uncanny event, the occasion of an unexpected arrival, to which I am obliged to respond. In this chance instance, there is perhaps the ghost of an answer to the otherwise unanswerable concerning the occasions of introduction.

Is it possible to "introduce" a book addressing either Jacques Derrida or deconstruction? Would it ever be possible to write such an "introduction"? What would that "introduction" look like? Can one ever do anything else apropos of Jacques Derrida, other than introduce his texts? Does one ever get beyond introducing Derrida, and yet, paradoxically, failing all the while to do so? As a provisional response to such questions, I would like to propose what might be construed as a somewhat scandalous assertion: on the one hand, one can never introduce the work of Jacques Derrida. Such a gesture is impossible if for no other reason than that Derrida's text exemplifies the condition of all thought, which is that it is irreducible to any attempt at totalizing recuperation. On the other hand, however, one can never do anything, when writing in response to Derrida's work, other than to effect an introduction, albeit one in ruins. So: one can never introduce the text of Jacques Derrida but one never does anything except introduce the text of Jacques Derrida, and this is due to the radically *occasional* nature of Derrida's writing. Let me borrow here from the introduction to *Occasional Deconstructions*: the book you are at present holding is nothing other than a series of occasional introductions, and if there is any justification for this, it is perhaps in the fact that they seek to address much of the more recent work by Derrida and to do so in relation to material that is not usually in conversation with the text of Derrida. In this sense, there is a double operation at work in the figure of introduction, one of more possible significance than any tired rehearsal of introducing someone who, simultaneously, is too well known and hardly recognized, barely glimpsed, as yet. This double operation

functions, if it functions at all, throughout the present text by seeking to introduce Derrida to particular discourses, subjects, disciplines, and to introduce, in turn, those same discourses, subjects, and disciplines to the text that goes by the name of Jacques Derrida. Each introduction is a separate occasion, and yet there emerges a sense, as with that arrival of the e-mail mentioned earlier, that the introduction has already taken place, and the occasions being remarked here are little more than so many untimely moments of belated recognition.

Acknowledging this throughout, the present volume therefore seeks to situate itself in more or less indirect relation to the work of Jacques Derrida and to one particular, and particularly exhausted notion and motif, that of deconstruction, as so many responses to given occasions. It does so arguing, as it has been put in the “introduction” to *Occasional Deconstructions*,¹ that this is necessarily the only appropriate orientation—an orientation involving a series of more or less singular reorientations and disorientations *in* and *of* writing and reading—to the text of Derrida. This present chapter, being an improper “introduction,” arises then, as I have already implied, as a response to the occasions, such as beginning a book or replying to requests that urge one to “begin” or to “start” thinking about particular subjects in relation to the more general “subject” of “deconstruction.” There are always occasions on which introduction is called for, again and again, and yet which, in being called for, present one, not simply with the dizzying impossibility of any such act, but with the even more vertiginous possibility of impossibility. A subject is produced, projected in the name of generalizing and totalizing gestures, and this “subject” becomes subjected to the instituting act of violence that goes by the name of introduction. Thinking is thus institutionalized. The institutionalized subject imagines him- or herself as being hailed, being interpellated by the demand to spell out clearly, in the scenario imagined here, the work of deconstruction, yet in responding to this call, the subject finds such a project impossible.

What follows in this chapter therefore is little more—and, perhaps, a little less—than a concession to the genre of “the introduction,” even though it introduces nothing other than its own failures. Or to put this another way: this therefore will not have been an introduction, recognizing as it does the aporia that appears before us, and which stops us dead in our tracks when we speak of the uncanny, disquieting singularity of the text of Derrida, particularly when that text is haunted by the ghosts of preface, preamble, prologue, beginning, opening. Instead, this is a

response to the very idea, the illusory concept of “introduction.” Order is disordered, and here we are under way in the “first” chapter, after any “introduction” should have been made, looking backward, in a gesture of retrospect that, far from offering any teleological comfort or promise, is premised on the apprehension that something has already opened.

The act of writing an introduction is, in general, out of the question, hopeless, unattainable, for it involves, in every singular example, justifying an absolutely unjustifiable act: such an act involves the violent delimitation of the singular in favor of the general. Supposing the possibility of introducing the work of a particular figure such as Derrida, whose own work has commented at length on the impossibilities of the genre and the act of introduction, is, arguably, even more unjustifiable and impossible. (Assuming for the moment that it is possible to suggest an impossibility beyond impossibility in general.) This act involves making a limited number of affirmations through the extraction of examples taken as synecdochic in their condition. Thus, you seek to represent the whole by the part, or by numerous parts, pretending all the while that such fragments are both authoritative examples and, at the same time, merely instances available for reassembly into some unified whole, which your prose, apparently subservient to the authority of the citation, nonetheless presumes to take responsibility for in the act of assembly (implying all the while that, somehow, the texts from which the various fragments came were not quite complete or clear enough, and that your function is to elucidate that which is unfortunately occluded). Proceeding in this manner, you would doubtless have to engage in acts of identification and determination, pointing to a number of problems in terms of your various justifications, all of which arise as a matter of course in making any affirmation or statement concerning your subject. All of which is, of course, unjustifiable. All of this is introductory in one sense; and yet the act of introduction is, inevitably, deferred, displaced.

Where then to begin? Perhaps it is a question of schematizing those affirmations, some of them at least, in the somewhat stark form of a list. Such a list might be composed, at least initially as the preliminary gesture of introduction, of statements, such as, “There is no such thing as deconstruction, if by this word one means a methodology or school of analysis.” Or, one could say, “Jacques Derrida is not the originator of a critical methodology called deconstruction”; or one might also add, “That which Jacques Derrida writes is neither available for abstraction or

reduction into a single, unified theory or methodology for the purpose of critical analysis.” Strange affirmations these, it might be remarked, constituted as they are by negations. Another affirmation, another statement, equally singular in its counterintuitive orientation, is to be found in the words of J. Hillis Miller: “Deconstruction is nothing more or less than good reading as such.”² This strange, enticing remark raises a question: If deconstruction is nothing more nor less than good reading *as such*, then why speak of deconstruction at all? It is impossible to respond to such a question; a definitive answer remains undecidable, although the impression is to be had that, traced within the statement is the ghost of an equation: deconstruction is good reading. We would still have to be wary of such a remark, given what appears as its positivist reassurance. Unless, of course, in reading the work of equation in the conjugation of the verb we were also to situate a simultaneous erasure. If deconstruction *is* (equivalent to) (good) reading, then deconstruction is no longer other than reading but, rather, the invisible alterity within reading, a necessary condition of reading, that which makes good reading good.

This doesn't appear to get the reader very far. Still, as odd as such comments might appear with regard to the very idea of introducing Jacques Derrida, and in an effort to avoid all the programmed excuses by which introductions conventionally proceed, it does at least seem that we have the beginnings of a list here. But a list is, of course, *just* a list, unless, of course, someone mistakes or desires to read the list as a taxonomically ordered series with a peculiar combinatorial logic, or otherwise as a collection of aphorisms serving, again, the synecdochic function. Either way, the list is read for a certain accretive or projective force, there being a kind of incremental calculation under way in the textual machine. Such judgments are inevitably unavoidable. They arise as a result of the list-maker's inability to control the destination or reception of the inventory. As is well known, it is impossible to guess, much less direct, either delivery or reception.

Yet, the very idea of an “introduction,” and of introducing, is itself never simply a starting point; it will also have been, to employ what appears here the most necessary use of the future anterior tense, a response, dictated from some other place, as well as being a responsibility. Such responsibility doubtless must involve an effort to justify what is unjustifiable, recognizing all the while in this what amounts to this inescapable condition of the arrival of a demand from elsewhere and, in that demand, a kind of negotiation between identities (the negotiation of

equivalence and erasure in the same place). The idea of an introduction *just is* this idea of the negotiation, propelled by the act of imagining the possibility of the impossible, of responding, on the one hand, to particular singularities, while addressing, without the possibility of controlling, an imagined identity, such an identity being, in the hypothetical scenario on which I am speculating, what might be called *the Derrida reader*. Yet how can one predict who the Derrida reader is or might be? Is it not the case that anyone who believes they read Derrida already imagines him- or herself in this role? And are there not others, each in their own fashion, who receive this text without ever having read it? No position, no identity, can ever be ascertained certainly.

However, such an act of naming is not simply a moment of problematization, it also carries with it a chance—but never more than a chance—of a transformation, a translation of sorts. It can always act as a performative speech act: in this possibility, there can be imagined the Derrida reader who reads while claiming never to have “read” particular texts or authors, as will be seen in the discussion that follows. On the other hand, the Derrida reader may name a certain heterogeneous collectivity, an imagined figure of multiple singularities or, otherwise, a “singular plural” to borrow a phrase from a book by Jean-Luc Nancy.³ Such a reader might be imagined, as Derrida has with respect to Joyce scholars, as “an infinite institution of people working as interpreters and philologists,”⁴ all of whom will never have done with reading, and who recognize how reading is always to come. For this reason, one among many without doubt, one is always forced to come back to the question of beginnings, of the iterability implicit and necessary in starting again and again, and seeking in some manner to engage with the possibility of the impossible—the introduction. The introduction is impossible, but one will never get past its necessity. The Derrida reader is the one whom we imagine, like Derrida, will always have to begin reading again and again and who will, moreover, always be able to imagine the possibility of beginning one day.

To reiterate: the aporetic of the “introduction” as it is inscribed within, as the disarticulation of, any introductory act is this, therefore: one can never get beyond or have done with introduction, but one can never do anything else, if one comprehends how one always has to begin again, repeatedly, in the same place and yet also in a different place. What proscribes the apparently, supposedly, simple act of introducing or pre-facing is, though, not merely the peculiar condition imposed in the effort

to respond to Derrida's text. This is not merely a peculiarity with regard to Derrida, but belongs also to any response or approach to any text. To risk once more a repetition: one can never introduce, finally, but one cannot do anything other than introduce. Of course, Derrida has discussed and unfolded the problematic of the preface or introduction in *Dissemination*, among other places. Any material designated as prefatory or introductory belongs neither wholly to its subject nor remains completely "outside" that subject. It plays on, moves across, and, in the motion, inaugurates the dismantling of, the borders of any "outside" or "inside." The idea of any gesture of introduction thus may be said to take place, even in its performative displacement, in a liminal location and relationship to what is conventionally considered any corpus, any oeuvre. However, it has to be said that if one can never introduce even though one never does anything else (even though one also attempts to do so much else), then all that takes place, if it takes place at all, is this liminal, threshold motion, each time assuming a singular aspect, reiterating-deconstructing both the premises of its own auto-conceptualization, and any conceptual-ontological completion or unity (and, then again, with that, any ontology of the concept—of the concept of concept, even the concept of ontology—irreparably).

In tracing *and* enacting this strange motion or modality of *occasional thresholding*, where the threshold is *just* this enunciation of the occasion irreducible to any generalization, the preface or introduction still takes place under the injunction of presenting or re-presenting the thoughts, ideas, arguments, analyses, suppositions, and speculations that occur in some other text. What is understood here is that there can never be a true beginning but always, on the one hand, the orientation to what returns and, on the other, a violent, however faithful, gesture of dismemberment *and* incorporation. Introducing, it might be said, is the performative disfiguring named catachresis, masquerading as more or less mimetic fidelity. The preface or introduction disingenuously proposes that the subject or text being assembled or reassembled is, on the one hand, insufficient in some manner, incapable of presenting itself clearly, while, on the other hand, and as a consequence of incapacity, in need of rendering in some fashion to some neat, homogeneous, comprehensible, and finite model or genus, constituted through the act of introduction of so many species of the subject. With regard to "deconstruction" and the impossibility of any introduction, Derrida remarks that a "*Preface* would retrace and presage here a *general* theory and practice of deconstruction,

that strategy without which the possibility of a critique could exist only in fragmentary, empiricist surges The preface would announce in the future tense (“this is what you are going to read”) the conceptual content or significance of what will *already* have been written.”⁵ Tracing the disruption already at work as his own prefatory gesture, while analyzing its function, and thereby collapsing the distinction between any identification of the preface as either solely constative or performative, Derrida continues to note that “prefaces, along with forewords, introductions, preludes, preliminaries, preambles and prolegomena, have always been written, it seems, in view of their own effacement.”⁶

What Derrida appears to show us here is the figure of a pen that, while it traces the outline of a text (while ostensibly miming what are taken to be the text’s “principal” features), never present as such, also erases that gesture of outlining or describing in almost the very same moment or movement. This is the peculiar double logic, the supplementarity, of introducing. Introduction might, therefore be seen as a somewhat bizarre trope, as already implied by the figure of catachresis. It is tropological to the extent that the very premise of inauguration, institution, or even intuition (in that sense of looking into or contemplating some subject, rather than being suggestive, as is more conventional, of an unmediated apprehension) is related to what Derrida calls “a structure of reproduction,” a structure that is also one of iterability *and* revenance. If this last figure seems a little excessive, we might recall here the rest of the quotation just indicated: “when the very *first* perception of an image is linked to a structure of reproduction, then we are dealing with the realm of phantoms.”⁷ As the very language of this false introduction demonstrates, the act of introduction is plagued with the traces of ghosts.

And so, I know that I will already have failed to write an introduction, that such an act is infelicitous *and* impossible; I cannot help failing and therefore, in seeking to be faithful to the injunctions of Derrida on the paradoxical conditions of any introductory act—as though one could start anew or start afresh without some ghost—I will betray Derrida in the process. Or, rather, perhaps it is the case that Derrida’s haunting gifts, all the complexities of his thought, betray themselves and, in so doing, betray my perverse adherence to the convention of writing an introduction. This “introduction,” already aware of its own problematic status *after Derrida* (so to speak, and with apologies to Nicholas Royle),⁸ seeks to avoid being merely what it is, while also, and simultaneously, being no more than what Geoffrey Bennington describes as a series of “pro-

grammed excuses,” a “point of departure” (one among many) and a “*strategic* justification.”⁹

So, while this introduction is not an introduction, while it is an introduction to the subject of introduction and not an introduction to this volume in any conventional sense, even though or, rather, *because* its excuses are wholly conventional—they are programmed, more or less obviously; they go “by the book,” as the phrase has it—it nonetheless aims to be both singular and excessive. In locating itself in this place, and announcing itself as an introduction, it does not pretend to deliver any inaugural statement. This is not a summary or potted version of what follows; neither does it seek to “introduce” Derrida in any real sense, even though this is only what it ever does, such is the complexity with which one has to deal with regard to Derrida’s text. Any act of writing *on* or *after* Derrida (and his work should always make any reader wary of the disruptive force of prepositions) can never be anything other than introductory, *while never being up to the responsibility invoked by such an unreasonable demand*. There cannot, therefore, be a question of joining up the dots, getting the complete picture, for all the reasons Derrida teaches us. There is no complete picture to be had (and, anyway, the dots always can be joined in different ways), and the effort to address the work of Derrida exposes, from all false starts, the fallacy of thinking and writing conceived as a mimetic or imitative act.

The singularity of this wholly unjustifiable “introduction” comes, then, from precisely the chances it has of exceeding the program to which it is most patently affiliated. Any chance for the singular articulation arises not in seeking to pretend to present any original thought or thesis, but only through the chance that, in proceeding predictably and with all the stale familiarity that it can muster, resistance might arise from the affirmation and self-awareness of “what the introduction does,” thereby exposing what the limits of that act are, comprehending the “technical” aspects of the idea of the introduction conventionally comprehended, but otherwise taking place in an unthought manner. At the same time, however, in seeking to position itself self-consciously in some supplementary fashion, in coming “after” Derrida self-reflexively while situating Derrida’s texts as yet to be read, always to come, this failed introduction aims at excessiveness and overflow. Such excess may be taken as performative to the extent that it attempts to proscribe ever moving beyond itself, beyond introduction, as though one could map out the terrain to be covered (as though one were not already lost in the landscape

without the possibility of a commanding view of the lay of the land) in some propaedeutic manner, and then embark from the coordinates of some methodology.

I find myself in a double bind, spelled out in the opening epigraphs by Drucilla Cornell and J. Hillis Miller. Cornell alerts the reader to the inescapable responsibility imposed by Derrida's writing because of his attention to the question of undecidability. Miller speaks to the problem inherent in any attempt at generalization concerning the act of reading, taking the singular example of deconstruction (so-called), and the problems attendant on saying what deconstruction is, thereby stabilizing or normalizing it, taming it or otherwise making it conform to some program or notion of a critical methodology. (This is a problem that will be confronted in a number of different contexts throughout the chapters of this volume.) The question of deconstruction—if there can be said to be just one question, one inquiry that abides in the face of an excess beyond plurality—is nothing more nor less than the question of the example. Each example differs from each and every other example. This is the only general remark one can make with any confidence concerning Derrida's writing, Derrida's "procedures." Derrida can only be "introduced" if one begins by acknowledging that, in each and every example, his text gives attention to both the singularity and to an excess irreducible to an economy of textual polysemy. Yet Derrida is only responding himself to that excess named writing, a surfeit unaccountable to logical explanation. It is thus because of Derrida's response to singularity, to surplus and undecidability in every example, as that which makes the example's exemplarity available through reiteration, that writing any "introduction" is, at the risk of reiterating myself, just *so* impossible, so unjustifiable, even though this is precisely what I am seeking to justify.

The chapters herein—and, by extension and in principle, this very volume—seek to negotiate this double bind without resolving it. In each chapter, there is an address to the demand and responsibility involved in any negotiation between singularity and the temptation to generalize. The chapters seek to resist the lure of generalization and totalization by their attention to specific occasions, thereby resisting the very idea of any "introductory" gesture, any gathering or folding of the traces of incommensurable differences into a seamless whole. (Of course, this is not to say anything that is not already well known, but this necessary reiteration very much proves the point about the impossibility both of the idea of introduction and escaping any introductory mode.) They affirm their occa-

sions, and, in so doing, resist, without being reducible to any simple dialectical or oppositional, negative function the idea that they can, through processes of reading, assimilation, and homogenization, become refigured as typical or representative of a particular approach, such as so-called deconstruction, even though it is the case that the title of the present volume plays on this very word, about which I feel so ambivalent, so divided. On the one hand, it is not a word I care for greatly. It is a word that has been overused, misused, misappropriated. This, we might say, is its history and its fortune or misfortune. On the other hand, it is a word that has retained a certain, occasional, strategic usefulness, indicating, at least for some, a certain excessiveness or violence in its very inscription. That it takes place in critical discourse and is therein misrecognized, suggests that it remains to be read, that it leaves in ruins the act of reading, and is, itself, if it is even this, the trace of a certain discourse in ruins, so to speak. Whatever the word might or might not be read as articulating, whatever it might be heard to announce, this often has, in truth, little enough to do with the work of Jacques Derrida; it certainly has little enough to do with the complexity and range of those writings that are signed by Derrida over some forty or more years. Each of the chapters here has a specific focus, responding to aspects of the work of Derrida, to the occasion of reading that Derrida makes possible, although it will be seen that particular interests overlap, particular motifs recur; the chapters constituting this volume are neither wholly singular nor wholly of a piece. They do bring together a number of issues that I take to be sustained, abiding concerns in Derrida's writing. However, this is neither to suggest, nor to be read as implying, that deconstruction-as-methodology either takes place or is otherwise assumed. All the chapters are just self-contained enough to offer a strong focus in their own right, retaining their disparity and heterogeneity from one another.

Arguably therefore, what Derrida makes possible is just this recognition of, and responsibility toward, singularity, a singularity that each of his publications bears witness to, although this is not always read, if it is read at all in particular instances. Derrida's writing bears a marked, and a remarkable, relationship to the singular, even though, arguably, it is also readable as sharing certain affinities with the work of, for example, J. Hillis Miller, Christopher Fynsk, Paul de Man, Peggy Kamuf, Geoffrey Bennington, Nicholas Royle, Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Tom Cohen, and others. (And there you have the beginnings of a list, where one might be tempted to enact a taxonomical gathering.) What

might be understood as being shared among the texts signed by these names is a detailed and patient attentiveness to a refigured materiality, or to what Cohen has called “the facticity of the textual event itself . . . thematized on the level of inscription, sound, letters, signature, and other figures; not as ‘formalist’ elements of play divorced from the realm of experience and social change, [as is, and has been, so often charged, such indictments themselves the signs of misreading] but as active agents of transformation in the inner history of reading/writing itself.”¹⁰ Alternatively, but again citing Cohen, what is both misunderstood, poorly read, or remaining to be read every time the spectre haunting departments of English named deconstruction is invoked—one might substitute “theory” or “poststructuralism” here with instructive effect—is, quite simply, “a different sort of praxis . . . anti-mimetic, epistemo-political.”¹¹ Similarity between critical voices, comprehended as “a different sort of praxis,” one that resists the mimetic through an attention to the materiality of the sign and thereby posits alternative epistemological models of reading and writing, should not, however—and once again—not be raised to the level of a general principle or “theory.” As Derrida comments on the question of singularity, relationship, and difference:

What I share with Lacoue-Labarthe, we also share, though differently, with Jean-Luc Nancy. But I hasten immediately to reiterate that despite so many common paths and so much work done in common, between the two of them and between the three of us, the work of each remains, in its singular proximity, absolutely different; and this, despite its fatal impurity, is the secret of the idiom. . . . *The most urgent thing . . . would be to break with the family atmosphere, to avoid genealogical temptations, projections, assimilations or identifications*¹² (emphasis added).

Derrida’s understanding of the respect and responsibility owed to singularity is of vital importance. The question of singularity is also the question of the idiom, that which is idiomatic in any and every act of writing. If deconstruction is anything, it is this: the irreducibility of the idiom to any abstractable formula and that, therefore, which will always already have left in ruins any ontologico-mimetic project in the name of criticism or reading, or any act of reading behaving according to the program of either an identity politics or the politics of identification. Avoiding the temptation to construct a methodology known as deconstruction from

reading Derrida would belong to the effort of breaking with the “family atmosphere” about which Derrida rightly cautions.

At the same time, and following from the position articulated by Derrida regarding singularity, it should of course be stressed that Derrida’s concern with singularity is not, itself, abstractable or available as a general theory or principle. Instead it emerges as a series of singular responses to, governed by the specific singularities, the irreducible idioms and occasions of encounters with the radically textualized other. Comprehending this, it may be said that Derrida does not so much “introduce” a theory of singularity. Nor does he raise singularity to the level of an absolute principle. Instead, it can be said that he “reintroduces” what is always already under way, that which often remains unread but makes possible the textual event. Derrida does not therefore merely “read” texts in any conventional sense; he introduces what we feel had been familiar, but now cast in an unfamiliar light. As he has pointed out in an interview, he claims never to have “read” certain authors at all. Of Joyce, Celan, and Blanchot, for example, Derrida has remarked that, while he has mobilized a word or two, here or there, as the occasion demands and as the operation of an analytical fulcrum, these authors remain to be read.¹³ More recently, he has said of Plato and Aristotle: “I have constantly tried to read and to understand Plato and Aristotle and I have devoted a number of texts to them . . . I think we have to read them again and again and I feel that, however old I am, I am on the threshold of reading Plato and Aristotle. I love them and I feel that *I have to start again and again and again*. It is a task which is in front of me, before me.”¹⁴ (emphasis added)

Reading here is the impossible task, always to come and always introduced, begun repeatedly, though never completed. One is never capable of completing a reading. Indeed, beginning reading is only ever the verge of a possibility, a liminal place, from where one starts *again and again and again*. And so on, and so forth, etc. etc. Here, it has to be said, is the admission—the confession rather than the act of crossing any threshold—of the impossible secret of introduction. Once more: one can do nothing other than introduce oneself to reading, to reintroduce oneself to the other; yet one cannot introduce the other, finally, so as to have done with this act, and thereby move beyond the gesture of introduction. Thus, is introduction impossible. And so we are where we began: on the one hand, one can do nothing but begin the introduction, over and over; on the other hand, one can never, for one time only, complete, or even

begin to complete an introduction. And what goes for Plato and Aristotle, goes for Derrida, too. The very idea of the introduction therefore introduces, admits one, forcing one to admit, to the experience of the aporetic, the undecidable. All one is left with, all that one has to admit is to come, is this singular experience, and its strategic justification.

As might be imagined, this is not all Derrida has to say on the impossibility of reading. Where he does attempt to speak of reading, he does so in a manner that does not seek to get to grips with the text, with the other, once and for all, thereby putting everything in order or in the right place, gathering everything up for the first and final time. Indeed, his understanding of reading, as already admitted, runs contrary to the conventional comprehension of what it means to read critically. Derrida's perception of the reading act is marked by a sense of chance and the ungovernable, in which something always remains behind and, therefore, to come, to be addressed. As an example of this, take the following passage from *Glas* in which Derrida seeks, in relation to a certain technicity or materiality of reading, the appropriate figure for "reading" the text of Jean Genet:

I am seeking here the good metaphor for the operation I pursue here. I would like to describe my gesture, the posture of my body behind this machine. . . .

So I am seeking the good movement. Have I constructed something like the matrix, the womb of his text? On the basis of which one could read it, that is, reproduce it?

No, I see rather (but it may still be a matrix or a grammar) a sort of dredging machine. From the dissimulated, small, closed, glassed-in cabin of crane, I manipulate some levers, and, from afar, I saw that [*ça*] done at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer at Eastertime, I plunge a mouth of steel in the water. And I scrape [*racle*] the bottom, hook onto stones and algae there that I lift up in order to set them down on the ground while the water quickly falls back from the mouth.

And I begin again to scrape [*racler*], to scratch, to dredge the bottom of the sea, the mother [*mer*].

I barely hear the noise of the water from the little room.

The toothed matrix [*matrice dentée*] only withdraws what it can, some algae, some stones. Some bits [*morceaux*], since it bites [*mord*]. Detached. But the remain(s) passes between its teeth, between its lips. You do not catch the sea. She always reforms herself.¹⁵

The figure of the dredging machine might appear a curious choice initially for describing *how* one reads, but its figural force is undeniable. It is equally clear from this example that the figure is a singular and excessive one. Certainly, it resists domestication or appropriation. It is not wholly appropriate to the literary-analytical process it disfigures, and could only be translated into a figure for reading generally in the most violent manner, a violence already implicit in the singular, lawless example—I say “lawless” because, while the figure is readable as a figure for reading, reading that figure requires response to this idiomatic occasion while recognizing its relationship to the law of reading; were it absolutely singular, absolutely other, it would not be available for even a partial reading and thus its strange and estranging illicit force would be lost. So, while lawless, the figure of the dredging machine, which arguably invokes an act of writing as much as reading, is appropriate, it appropriates an act of reading to itself, because it wrenches us from our complacent notions concerning the habits, the *habitus*, of reading, the kinds of epistemological habitations concerning reading we habitually inhabit. That it is a figure of machinery, inhabited by and enclosing the apparently sovereign “I,” suggests a certain estranging torque between habitation and the uncanny [*unheimlich*], the more so because we do not have complete control over what is being dredged/read, and because the machine grasps what it will, leaving other matter behind, despite our place behind the controls, indicative in this case of an reading’s irreducibility to any wholly anthropomorphic governance. The force of the image is such that the effect is best described not as metaphorical but as an example of catachresis, of catachrestic function, whereby the exchange of images—between reading/dredging, human/inhuman, familiar/unhomely—is so violently dissimilar and yet hauntingly recognizable as to defamiliarize, denaturalize, the assumed relationship. To imagine reading as dredging is to puncture any more or less mimetic correspondence through an analogical attention amounting to a performative act that materially countersigns the textual event, even while, in plying its speculative weave between the mechanical and the human, there is just enough sufficient dislocation to unnerve us, recalling Freud’s well-known location of the uncanny in the response to the automaton, which is just human enough, but never quite human.

Derrida follows through his performative engagement in describing how, as the teeth (again, this plays on the human/inhuman, familiar/uncanny, so typically at work at least since Kleist and Freud) scrape the

seabed so, while random particles are picked up, other matter is dropped, something remains, and there is that which cannot be gathered in the first place. The act of gathering remains haunted by its own impossibility. No act of reading or writing can ever attain mastery over the object of its inquiry. It cannot do so for two reasons at least: (1) what reading or writing “pick up” cannot be determined ahead of the event of the textual encounter or the singular response to the other; and (2), whatever reading does gather, there is always that which remains, which are the remains of reading, the excess or supplement beyond the act of reading as the traces of an other writing, and the writing of the other. This is acknowledged most obviously in this passage from *Glas* where French words appear in brackets. Each carries within it an untranslatable, excessive supplement, a singular alterity, other possible phantom effects in sound and/or inscription, that no act of translation as reading or writing can recuperate, but which, prior even to Derrida’s response to Genet, is always already at work, as the work of language. Furthermore, Derrida leaves the reader with what was there, so to speak, in the first place, the sea-text reforming itself, as though untouched by any act of reading, of dredging. Derrida teaches, among so many other things, that the condition of textuality is such that all boundaries and divisions assigned to a text are always overrun by, and from within, itself. Attending to this means that, in response to textuality, we acknowledge that what Derrida calls the “accredited concept, the dominant notion of a ‘text’”¹⁶ has to be extended and expanded. As is now well known, the text is always “a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces.”¹⁷

Why reintroduce what is apparently so familiar from Derrida’s writing? It seems to me that the idea of text as a differential network is both productive and transformative in radical ways. Rather than being simply available as something akin to a constative statement available to the critic for commentary on other texts—though this is, it has to be admitted, a necessary step in any act of reading or writing “after Derrida”—the notion of text as a fabric of traces has, as yet, not been received fully, as that which motivates and mobilizes any critical act that is also, simultaneously, performative. This is not to suggest that critics have not understood how or to what extent their own writings are composed of so many traces, or that any particular example of writing, while singular, is only both an instant and an instance of the gathering of intensities along so many lines of flight or flows. Instead, what I wish to propose is that the

comprehension of the critical act can be transformed if one comprehends the extent to which, while Derrida claims never to have read certain authors, it is also the case that he has never written books as such. His writing is most intimately apprehended not as the pursuance or proving of a thesis so much as it is *occasional*; it operates through and as so many serial interruptions of the differential network. His published texts weave themselves out of that fabric of traces. So it should hardly be surprising that Derrida's interest in phantoms, spectres, ghosts, and phantasms, for example, is not limited solely to *Specters of Marx*. The traces of this interest extend back at least as far as *Disseminations*. Yet, reading after such traces, delimiting the differential network to those locations where the spectre, phantom, or ghost occurs, is, quite obviously to ignore, downplay, or, even on occasion, to sacrifice the work of other traces. One can neither introduce nor ever get beyond hopeless gestures of introducing Derrida's writing because it is resistant to all such thematizing maneuvers aiming at recuperation. As Derrida says of his own fragmentary writing in "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," "I value them for their incompleteness, even more than or their fragmentation, more for their pronounced incompleteness, for their punctuated yet open interruption"; such traces are "little stones, thoughtfully placed, only one each time, on the edge of a name as the promise of a return."¹⁸

Of course, Derrida is speaking here of the particular form of the essay from which these remarks are taken.¹⁹ But, at the risk of a degree of violence always associated with citation, is it not possible to see, to hear, to read in this commentary, a statement of principle concerning the ways in which Derrida proceeds, negotiating between the event and the program? As Derrida remarks elsewhere, "the thread of repetition . . . splits singularity: as soon as a phrase is iterable, and it is so right away, it can break loose from its context and lose the singularity of its destined addressee. A technical machinery comes in advance to strip it of the unicity of the occurrence and the destination."²⁰ Taking this to be one possible scenario, working on the principle of the differential network as being composed of so many such open, interruptive placements, otherwise thought of as the "tangled web of these threads"²¹ by which this volume is articulated, by which it got under way before it was thought of as such, each of the chapters works with, and works, recurrent threads, reworking them, reformulating, transforming, translating, in particular ways.

If anything can be said to connect these chapters—and this is a highly tentative, provisional connection, one in which the threads are

frayed and separate or split off—then the connective tissues may be sought through attention to the constant, albeit discontinuous address to questions of rhetoric, tropes, motifs, and structures, to matters pertaining to elements of poetics and rhythms of reiteration, operating performatively within textual form, all of which may be identified provisionally as occasions. The focus on certain movements, rhythms (again), and resistances, and the concomitant attention to the double logics that inhabit writing and text, belong to an effort to respond to what Derrida has described as “the tension between disruption and attentiveness.”²² From this principle of response, a principle whose responsibility is to open reading to the singularity of the other through “reference . . . to the letter” with “patience [and] slowness,”²³ analysis proceeds, in Derrida’s words, by trying “to find out how . . . thinking works or does not work, to find out the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within”²⁴ the singular examples herein considered. Such an effort must also necessarily inhabit in a not completely comprehensible or accessible manner one’s own writing, rather than being merely the modality by which one questions or analyzes. This involves a “certain zone of disacquaintance, of not-understanding, [which] is also a reserve and an excessive chance—a chance for excess to have a future.”²⁵ But at the same time that this must be the case, that I must in all responsibility recognize that what is remarked is also as true of my own text as it is of those on which I write, I have also to come to terms with the fact that I cannot control this or seek to have control over it in my own writing, I cannot employ it as a ploy within thought, as that which controls the reading from, as it were, the start. Were I to be able to master the procedure, program its effects, I would have given up on what the occasion makes possible, what might or might not occasionally take place, what might take place on certain occasions, as the unforeseeable result of occasions that will have arisen, if they arise at all.

All of which still gets me no further. I still have remaining in front of me the unjustifiable act, that injunction and double bind, of writing an introduction, of sorts, in the face of everything that mediates against such generalizing gestures. Like someone from a novel by Samuel Beckett, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.²⁶

But this is also a way of giving to be read [donner à lire].²⁷