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문학석사 학위논문

**Writing on Art:
The Derridian Performative**

미술에 대한 글쓰기:
데리다의 수행성 개념을 중심으로

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Writing on Art: The Derridian Performative

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Abstract

Writing on Art: The Derridian Performative

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What does writing about art *do*? This thesis explores this question by reading Jacques Derrida's "+R," a textual response to the paintings and drawings of the artist Valerio Adami, as a performative engagement. J. L. Austin's introduction of performativity in the 1950s opened a new prospect in thinking about communication: a speech, spoken or written, not only describes the given facts but also performs an act in its issuing. Derrida appreciates the notion of the performative as it allows for an understanding of communication that is not limited to transference of a unified content. Nevertheless, Derrida questions the notion's underlying conditions and attempts to situate it in different terms throughout numerous oeuvres. Notably, Derrida undertakes a brief yet significant reconfiguration of the performative, and suggests a close association between the term and his writing on art, in the introductory pages to *The Truth in Painting*. However, as yet there has been little scrutiny on this association. I argue that Derrida's understanding of the performative is a critical missing link in reaching a comprehensive grasp on Derrida's art writing. "+R," in particular, has been marginalized in the literature on Derrida's philosophy and art criticism alike due to its enigmatic and irregular style of writing. In light of the Derridian performative, I reintroduce "+R" as an occasion to rethink the conventions of art criticism and to address the general question of what writing about art does.

To this end, I examine first the Derridian notion of the performative. According to Derrida, the performative in Austin's sense does not escape the metaphysical tradition that privileges presence over absence; the speech act theory is still rooted in dichotomies such as the serious and the non-serious or the standard and parasitical use of language, in all of which the latter is

excluded. This leads Derrida to carry out a reconfiguration of the notion, which I will examine in terms of iterability, the logic of the supplement, and the production of event. In accordance with his critical perspective of Western metaphysics, Derrida argues that it is neither the present intentionality nor the exhaustibly definable context that regulates meaning; instead it is the absolute absence of, or a radical break from, the immediate context that allows a communication to take place. In this regard, iterability, the ability to be repeated in alterity, is the condition of the performative. Based on this observation, I analyze the supplementary structure of the Derridian performative to show how binary hierarchies presupposed in the orthodox speech act theory can no longer be maintained. By inscribing the infinite supplementarity to the performative and displacing the dogmatic distinctions of its original scheme, Derrida proposes an extended understanding of the performative, beyond the strict distinction between the verbal and extraverbal as well as the constative and the performative. Finally, I examine the performative production of the event by elaborating Derrida's distinct understanding of the event, the inaugural power of the performative, and interpretation. As meaning is understood to be possible within the supplementary chain, production does not indicate a creation *ex nihilo* but rather something that takes place within an interpretation that explores limitless possibility and transforms what it interprets.

Based on this analysis, I examine the performative qualities of "+R." In "+R," the conditions of the performative as examined in previous chapters are carefully considered and performatively demonstrated. Accordingly, it does not abide by the conventions of art criticism with a seeming disregard for dominant elements such as the presence of the artwork, the intention of the artist, and preexisting discourses. Without absolutizing any of these elements deemed essential in art writing, the performance of "+R" displaces and resituates the relationship between the physical attributes of the artworks and the descriptions of them, the artist and the writer, and preexisting discourses and art writing. "+R" does not provide a methodology or a model of art writing in the conventional sense. But it urges the writer to engage performatively with the artwork in a singular way, without relying on absolutized criteria or discourse equipped in advance to master the work.

Keywords : Jacques Derrida, performativity, iterability, logic of the supplement, event, art criticism

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List of Abbreviations

The following is a list of the works used throughout the thesis. All other references appear in the footnotes, and all works are reproduced in the bibliography.

Works by Derrida :

- AL *Acts of Literature*. ed. Derek Attridge. New York & London: Routledge, 1992.
- FL “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority.’” *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld & David Gray Carlson. trans. Mary Quaintance. New York & London: Routledge, 1992. pp. 3-67
- LI *Limited Inc.* trans. Samuel Weber & Jeffrey Mehlman. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- OG *Of Grammatology*. trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- TP *The Truth in Painting*. trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Ian McLeod. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- WA *Without Alibi*. trans. Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Others :

- H Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- D Bennington, Geoffrey. *Deconstruction is Not What You Think*. Bennington Books (e-book format), 2005.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
List of Abbreviations	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Preliminary Discussion: the Notion of the Performative in Austin and Derrida	9
1.1. Austin’s Concept of the Performative	10
1.2. Derrida’s Reading of Austin’s Speech Act Theory.....	19
Chapter 2. The Logic of the Supplement and the Extended Notion of the Performative.....	34
2.1. The Logic of the Supplement.....	35
2.2. The Supplementary Structure of the Performative.....	42
Chapter 3. Performative Production of the Event.....	56
3.1. The Event Made Possible by Iterability	57
3.2. The Inaugural Power of the Performative	66
3.3. The Performative Production as Interpretation	72
Chapter 4. Reading “+R” as Performative Engagement	77
4.1. Performatively Describing the Artwork	80
4.2. Mutual Betrayal: Adami and Derrida.....	84
4.3. Rethinking Discourse: To Remain Heterogeneous	89
Conclusion: Art Writing after “+R”	99
Bibliography.....	108
Illustrations	113
Abstract in Korean	114

Introduction

This thesis aims to understand Derrida's writing on art as a performative engagement.¹ Among Derrida's many texts on art, "+R,"² an essay on the drawings and paintings of the contemporary Italian artist Valerio Adami, is particularly relevant to the discussion on art writing. This is because it engages with particular works of art as opposed to embarking on a theoretical or philosophical discussion on traditional problematics of aesthetics, which is closer to what he endeavors in other texts such as "Parergon"³ and "Restitution."⁴ However, "+R" has largely gone unnoticed within the literature on Derrida's philosophy of art or in the discussion of art writing in general. One of the reasons for this critical inattention is due to its fragmented and enigmatic style; its beginning and ending are abrupt, the shifts from one discussion to another are swift, and ostensibly extraneous elements are brought to the fore. Another cause may lie in the fact that "+R" does not directly address elements that are considered essential to writing on art, such as the formal structure of the artwork or the intention of the artist, not to mention the preexisting discourses that provide guidelines for

¹ Although Derrida addresses other forms of art such as literature, theater, and music, this thesis focuses on visual art, and drawings and paintings in particular, as elaborated in *The Truth in Painting*. Extended discussions on the performative engagement with other art genres are certainly foreseeable, but as Derrida respects the distinct qualities of each art form, each genre deserves an analysis of its own in further research.

² Jacques Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Ian McLeod (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 150-182.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-147.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-382.

deriving meaning.

However, the reasons for the unpopularity of “+R” provide an occasion to rethink the conventions of art writing. In the course of art history, we find crucial misunderstandings on the part of art critics who have joined in blatant denunciation of works that would subsequently be identified as breakthroughs by their future generations. Such was the case with the critics who took offense at the Impressionists for their disregard for the rules of the academy of the 19th century. At the turn of the 20th century, a group of artists was ridiculed and took the name “*fauves* (wild beasts),” which was proposed initially by a critic who meant it as a form of derision for their lack of skills and principles. Although Derrida does not provide explicit examples within the history of art, his doubt about the discourse on painting that is prone to subsume the artworks under preconceived rules can be considered in this light. The critics of the time were quick to dismiss the works of art for which they had no idiom, inclined to draw judgments according to the preexisting standards. This thesis attempts to explore the unconventionality demonstrated in “+R” against this backdrop. As elaborated above, “+R” does not amount to a solid conclusion regarding its subject matter and shows no sign of a desire to *master* it. If a text on art does not get a hold of its subject matter as is desired by art criticism, what does it do? How are we to understand the irregularities of “+R”?

“Passe-partout,”⁵ the introductory pages to Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting*, provides a passageway to address these questions regarding “+R.” “Passe-partout” undertakes an analysis and reconfiguration of the notion of the performative while connecting this concept to his writings on or *around* art that follow. According to “Passe-partout,” “+R” is not a text that simply says what the writer means, but one that *does* something as a performance. An assumption that “+R” should provide a well-informed analysis of or judgments on the artworks of Adami would inevitably invite misunderstanding or even a disregard of the text. Despite the glaring textual evidence that links Derrida’s art writing with the notion of the performative, the former has not been scrutinized according to the latter, and this thesis attempts to account for this vacancy in preceding literatures. To this purpose, a twofold analysis is required: one that examines the Derridian notion of the performative and another that navigates its implications for writing on art.

Since its introduction by Austin in the 1950s, the notion of the performative has involved a complicated critical terrain as the term has developed in diverse fields of studies with disparate significations and ramifications.⁶ However, this thesis will limit its discussion to Derrida’s understanding of the term as it has opened chances for many thinkers and theorists to follow, addressing diverse problematics in politics, gender studies, performing arts, and so on. In “Passe-partout,” Derrida qualifies the

⁵ Ibid., pp. 1-13.

⁶ James Loxley, *Performativity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), J. Hillis Miller, “Derrida’s Special Theory of Performativity,” *For Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), pp. 133-173.

notion of the performative with attributes such as the logic of supplementarity and the production of an event. These qualifications of the performative are worth noting as they are foreign to the orthodox speech act theory where the concept of the performative was originally introduced. This indicates that Derrida's notion of the performative does not conform entirely to the term's original conception but goes through a reconfiguration. Accordingly, Derrida's understanding of the term should be followed closely in terms of particular predicates illustrated in "Passe-partout."

However, such an undertaking is a difficult one for two reasons. On the one hand, Derrida provides only hints, although compelling ones, of his qualifications of the performative. Significant attributes of the Derridian notion of the performative are not sufficiently elaborated, thus necessitating further research. On the other hand, the Derridian notion of the performative has not often been discussed in terms of writing on art. In many of his later writings, Derrida addresses ethical and political problematics in terms of the performative, which subsequently resulted in more critical attention being given to such concerns rather than to the issues of art writing. When it comes to the concept of the performative and art, theories of the performing arts have taken it up as one of its major concepts. However, discussions in this field at times have taken a counter-Derridian turn by celebrating the irreducible presence of the artwork while ostensibly relying on Derrida, who

in fact has attentively questioned such an affirmation of presence.⁷ Unlike the popular reception of the term, Derrida instead shows interest in the way writing can be performative. Accordingly, this thesis delves into Derrida's understanding of the notion of the performative under two tentative directions: limiting the discussion to the qualities introduced in "Passe-partout" in order to focus on Derrida's understanding of the performative in terms of art writing, and drawing from Derrida's works other than *The Truth in Painting*, notably *Limited Inc.*, *Of Grammatology*, and "Force of Law," among others, for a better grasp of the reconfigured notion of the performative.

Chapter 1 focuses on the orthodox understanding of the performative as initiated by J. L. Austin, followed by Derrida's reading of it. The performative, in its initial sense established by Austin, indicates the utterance that *does* the act instead of describing certain facts. Derrida recognizes Austin's theory to be fruitful as it defies a certain sense of communication and writing that is governed, according to Derrida, by

⁷ See Peggy Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction," *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 146-166. Such twists in the reception of Derrida's notions other than performativity are common in the art circle as well. Matthew Biro points out how, despite the popular currency of the term "deconstruction" in art critical writings, it has been invoked with a persistent adherence to a point of view antithetical to it. According to Biro, Rosalind Krauss, an influential figure who has been a prominent advocate of deconstruction in art criticism, is not ultimately a deconstructive critic. Biro argues that Krauss ends up insisting on her own conceptual structures to institute a new orthodoxy, which is exactly what Derrida had consistently avoided, and "that Krauss's concepts should themselves be deconstructed is an issue that is never raised in her writings." See Matthew Biro, "Art Criticism and Deconstruction: Rosalind Krauss and Jacques Derrida," *Art Criticism*. Volume 6, No. 2 (New York: State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1990), pp. 33-47. However, there still remains a question of whether "a deconstructive art critic" in its *true* sense is possible depending on how deconstruction and criticism are understood.

Western metaphysics. Such a perspective could be understood in terms of his consistent questioning of the metaphysical tradition that privileges presence and immediacy. As much as Derrida's suspicion about what he calls the "metaphysics of presence" prompts his interest in the performative, this suspicion will turn out to be the very reason why Austin's presuppositions are questioned. In the analysis of Derrida's critical reading of Austin, iterability—the ability to be repeated in alterity—will emerge as a critical attribute. Despite the doubt Derrida casts on certain aspects of Austin's notion of the performative, he nevertheless continues to employ it, resituating and transforming it on his own terms. Although there are a number of ways he undertakes this reinscription, this thesis focuses on particular notions that are explicitly remarked on in "Passe-partout," anticipating a renewed understanding of art writing. This theoretical endeavor is delineated in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 2 examines the performative in terms of Derrida's logic of supplementarity. Derrida employs the word "supplement" to illustrate the ambivalent attitude of Rousseau—as well as of Western philosophy more generally—toward the privileged values that include presence, nature, immediacy, and the thing itself (as opposed to absence, culture, the derivative, and signs). Meaning both a surplus and a substitute at once, the term supplement serves as a guiding thread in demonstrating a way of rethinking the binary relations that the metaphysics of presence has presupposed and reinforced. The logic of the supplement further develops

into an infinite chain of supplements, calling into question the hierarchical binaries imposed throughout the history of metaphysics. And understanding the supplementary structure opens up an extended field for the performative, questioning the limits of the orthodox speech act theory.

Chapter 3 focuses on the performative production of an event. As the notion of the event can be understood differently depending on the context, Derrida's relocation of the term will come to be important. A major attribute of the event, singularity, will be redefined in the process. The discussion further involves a navigation through the performative's inaugural power. From this examination, I observe Derrida's ambivalent attitude towards existing discourses. Furthermore, to bring the discussion closer to the context of engagement with art, the relationship between the performative and interpretation will follow. Although (as I intimated above) the performative inauguration of the event has largely been thematized in terms of Derrida's political and ethical concerns, this chapter demonstrates how it is relevant with the act of reading and interpreting.

Lastly, Chapter 4 is devoted to analyzing "+R" as a performative engagement from the viewpoint of Derrida's reconfiguration of the performative as elaborated in previous chapters. I demonstrate that Derrida's art writing, which appears to be especially enigmatic in "+R," demonstrates a restructured terrain of writing on art that is not subordinate to the desire for presence. As Derrida's understanding of the performative alters how we can conceive of the relationship between the artwork, theory, and art writing,

this chapter examines “+R” in terms of how these three elements are resituated. This analysis allows a rethinking in general of the relationship between the artwork, art writing, and preexisting discourses under a different light.

Chapter 1. Preliminary Discussion: the Notion of the Performative in Austin and Derrida

In order to examine Derrida's practice of writing on art in terms of the performative, this chapter is devoted to a preliminary analysis of the term. This undertaking includes Austin's concept of the performative and Derrida's reading of it, as the performative is not a notion exclusive to Derrida nor is it a term that he embraces without revision of its underlying presuppositions. As reading a predecessor's text as a departure is a signature move of Derrida in developing his discussion, Derrida's critical assessment of Austin's concepts is crucial in elucidating the Derridian notion of the performative. The performative as a concept was first formulated by J. L. Austin, the English philosopher who is known as a significant exponent of the speech act theory.⁸ Derrida took interest in Austin's discussion of performativity and dealt with it head on in "Signature Event Context," published initially at a conference held by the Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française in 1971.⁹ Derrida's reading of Austin's theory attracted a considerable amount of critical attention and

⁸ James Loxley, *Performativity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), p.1.

⁹ The essay was subsequently published in Derrida's *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), and its first English translation, translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, was collected in *Glyph 1* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). The translated version of the text was published along with a summary of Searle's "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida" and Derrida's response to Searle in *Limited Inc.* (Illinois: Northwestern Press, 1988). The quotations from this thesis follow the page numbers in *Limited Inc.*

prompted Searle to refute Derrida's reading.¹⁰ Although the dispute between Searle and Derrida has been highlighted as a striking encounter between the two philosophical traditions, I attempt to focus on Derrida's reading of Austin and incorporate Searle's rebuttal only when needed, as such a discussion deserves an occasion of its own to do it justice.

1.1. Austin's Concept of the Performative

According to Austin, language not only describes or states facts but also *performs* something in our daily uses.¹¹ The backdrop of this claim closely involves Austin's objection to the logical positivist idea of language that considers statements as the only legitimate subject matter for philosophical analysis. Logical positivism maintains that a sentence should contain a verifiable import, or undergo a translation into the form of a statement, in order to qualify for serious discussion. Accordingly, ordinary usage of language is largely dismissed. Austin, on the other hand, focuses on everyday language as a point of departure for philosophical inquires instead of limiting the discussion to verifiable statements.¹² A statement's truth

¹⁰ See Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc a b c...", *Limited Inc*, pp. 29-110., John R. Searle, "Reiterating the Difference: A Reply to Derrida," *Glyph 1* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 198-208. See also Christopher Norris, "Letters Home: Derrida, Austin and the Oxford Connection," *Derrida* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 172-196.

¹¹ In 1955, Austin delivered a series of lectures titled "Words and Deeds" in the William James Lectures at Harvard University where he proposed his theory of the performative. The contents of seven lectures were published under the title *How to Do Things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹² For this reason, Austin is grouped with several more philosophers including Gilbert Ryle and P. F. Strawson under the names "ordinary language philosophy" or "linguistic philosophy." Although only loosely associated with one another through a shared recognition of ordinary language as the starting point for philosophical discussion, these

value is determined by the correspondence of its denotation with the facts in reality. When one says “it is raining outside,” such a statement is true when it is, in fact, raining outside. According to this understanding of statements, sentences that question, command, or exclaim were deemed nonsensical, or “pseudo-statements.” Austin terms such a view of language “the descriptive fallacy” (H 3). It is a fallacy in overlooking possibilities of sentences that are other than descriptions of facts, or those that hold values that are not susceptible to the distinction between truth and falsity. Also, it amounts to a mistake of considering as statements of facts utterances that are in fact meant to do something else. As a result, it excludes a great portion of language uses in reality that do not serve to report a reality. Accordingly, Austin contends that “many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake—the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are *either*... nonsensical *or else* intended as something quite different” (H 3, Austin’s emphasis).

To account for the logical positivist tradition’s undertaking of such exclusions, Austin proposes a distinction between the constative and the performative. The previous notion of statement, pertaining to descriptions of facts and verifiability, is coined “constative.” The performative, on the other hand, does not describe but *does* something by saying, and is thus

philosophical movements spanning from the 1940s to the 1960s were influenced by the later Wittgenstein as opposed to the logical positivists or “ideal language philosophy.” See Kanavillil Rajagopalan, “Ordinary Language Philosophy,” *Key Ideas of Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2009), pp. 149-155.

irreducible to verifiability.¹³ Saying “I do” in a marriage ceremony or declaring “I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*” falls into the category of the performative. Betting—“I bet you ten bucks you won’t laugh”—, declaring—“I hereby declare war”—, and promising—“I promise I’ll never be late again”—are also examples of the performative. In these cases, the phrases do not describe an action that takes place outside of the utterance; instead, to utter those words is to perform the act. It is important to note that in these cases, the truth value in terms of the correspondence of a statement with the facts cannot be applied. One cannot simply take a look to see whether a performative utterance is true or not, as is the case for the constative. In the case of the performative, the utterances are already a part of the action.

However, Austin notes that uttering a few words is not the only action to be done in order for the relevant act to be carried out to its fullest. He established six principles (i.e., felicity conditions) for a performative to be “felicitous” or “happy.”¹⁴ These conditions outline the total context, which

¹³ The definition of the performative proposed by Austin is encompassed in the following: “A. they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something” (H 5).

¹⁴ The felicity conditions established by Austin are encompassed in the following: “(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further, (A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked. (B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and (B.2) completely. (Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and

is decisive in evaluating whether or not a speech act is appropriate and effective. The relevant context of a speech act involves conformity to the conventions and the intention of the signatory. For the words “I do” to accomplish a marriage, the one posing the question—“do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?”—needs to be an authorized figure. And the two parties answering should not be already married or be in some other way unqualified for marriage. Also, the circumstances around them should indeed be in accordance with the conventions of a marriage ceremony. Furthermore, the speakers should mean it when they say “I do.”

If any principle among the felicity conditions is unfulfilled, the performance is infelicitous. The felicity conditions indicate that the performative cannot be evaluated in terms of the truth value but is dependent on conventions and the intention of the speaking subject. Furthermore, Austin warns that a performance is in constant danger of failure, underscoring certain risks of infelicities. On the one hand, the performative is an action and is liable to be affected by what may disturb actions in general. The performative may be done under threat or as a mistake apart from the intention of the signatory. On the other hand, as the

further. (Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently” (H 14-15). Austin draws a distinction between the first four rules and the last two, hence the usage of a Roman alphabet instead of a Greek one. In the case of a violation of rule A or B, the action is not achieved. Austin terms these cases “misfires.” The attempts may have been made, but fall short of the accomplishment of the act; it is *void* or without effect. However, when the doctrine Γ is infringed, the deed is in fact achieved, as “abuses.” In instances of abuses, the action at hand takes effect although it is, to use Austin’s word, *hollow*. This is notable as Γ principles involve the thoughts and feelings or the intention of the speaker as criteria for felicity. In the case of saying “I do” down the aisle, given that principle A and B are fulfilled, the marriage may be accomplished but runs the risk of being hollow if either of the participants did not mean what they said.

performative here is discussed as an utterance, it is subject to the same perils as any other utterance. This means that a performative utterance may “be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy” (H 22). Austin contends that such uses of utterances are “used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use” (H 22). Austin clearly states that he is excluding such cases of infelicities from the discussion and including only the performative within the standard use of language. This exclusion is worth noting as it will come to be problematic for Derrida. The point to be highlighted is this: Austin acknowledges these obstructions as a constant danger to the performative at the very moment when he decides to exclude them: “we are not including this kind of unhappiness—we must just remember, though, that features of this sort can and do constantly obtrude into any particular case we are discussing” (H 21). Austin goes on to qualify the exclusion of the non-serious as temporary for the sake of his theory while supposing that a general high-level doctrine, which is yet to come, might include them. Following this premise, utterances in fictitious situations are not counted as the subject of Austin’s study as they are derivative to serious cases of the performative. It was previously noted that in order for the utterance “I do” to take effect in accomplishment of a marriage, a set of conditions must be satisfied. However, if the exact same words were to be spoken in a play, even when the actors were about to wed soon in reality, the utterance would not be felicitous, and it would not bind the two parties into marriage.

According to Austin, the same words from the play are derivative of those spoken with the appropriate circumstances and with the relevant intentions.

After the initial exploration, however, Austin questions the distinction between the constative and the performative that he has himself formulated. Austin observes how certain statements have to be true in order for a certain performative to be happy. Even in the case of a felicitous performative, verifiability, which was conventionally assigned as a criterion for statements, may still apply in some way. For example, one might say “I advise you to turn left,” when in fact, one is supposed to turn right. Let us suppose that this performative is neither void nor insincere, meaning that the advisor meant well to help the lost person, and that the circumstances were appropriate for this kind of advice. Yet it is still subject to criticism for being bad advice. As such, an evaluation of true or false is at work in the performative as well. In reverse, evaluating the truth value of statements requires the total situation. This means that the rules with which the performative’s felicity is judged could be applied to the constative as well. Austin argues that a statement entails, implies, or presupposes the truth of other statements, bringing the surrounding circumstances to be taken into account. For example, when one says “Clara’s children have red hair,” this statement presupposes that Clara has children. Before knowing whether the presupposition is true or false, the statement cannot arise; there is no point in stating anything about Clara’s children when it is not certain whether she has any. Although the statement is not ungrammatical or incomplete, it is

nevertheless *void* for being devoid of appropriate circumstances.

Moreover, Austin reveals that the contrast between the criteria of true or false and that of happy and unhappy is not as sound as he postulated. For example, the statement “John is running” can be modified to “I am stating that John is running.” The truth value of the latter sentence depends on the happiness of the phrase “John is running” as is in the case of evaluating the happiness of a performative such as “I apologize.” In reverse, in the case of the performative “I warn you that the bull is about to charge,” when in fact it is not, the warning is false or mistaken, as a statement could be. Thus, the consideration of the happiness and unhappiness may infect the statements while the criteria of true or false may apply to the performative.

Upon such an outcome, Austin seeks a way to define the performative with greater clarity. Austin attempts to find criteria to sustain the distinction in terms of grammar or vocabulary. However, such an endeavor is proven to be without success after going through criteria such as the use of the first person singular and of the present indicative active, mood and tense, and certain vocabularies.¹⁵ None of these factors were able to serve as an absolute criterion, failing to contain the performative separate from the constative. Although Austin subsequently embarks on a venture to identify explicit performative verbs, he concedes that it is difficult to distinguish the performative from the constative.

¹⁵ The attempt to determine the essential criteria of the performative in terms of grammatical orders is demonstrated in the fifth lecture in *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 55-66.

This realization brings Austin to consider a fundamental examination on what “doing something” means. If the definition of the performative—an utterance that does something in its issuing—cannot be contained, a different approach is on demand. Instead of striving to secure a different realm of the performative, Austin attempts to explore the circumstances of issuing an utterance, focusing on the “speech act” in general. In this regard, Austin suggests another set of categories comprising the locution, illocution, and perlocution. Firstly, locutions are a full unit of speech with a semantic and referential dimension. They incorporate a system of using sounds that are recognizable in their senses or references. Secondly, the illocutionary act is what is performed in saying something such as when informing or warning another. Austin identifies the illocutionary act as a kind of force. In order for the illocutionary force to take place, the speech act should follow a certain convention. The descriptive fallacy, in light of the new division, arises in mistaking all matters as the locutionary kind with referential contents when there are other dimensions at work as well. Thus, even in his new categories, he is careful to distinguish referring and doing, or meaning and force. Lastly, the perlocutionary dimension deals with the consequential effects of issuing an utterance on the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the receiver. For example, when one says “save her!” “save” means to rescue, and “her” refers to a certain person in the locutionary dimension. In this utterance, the speaker is urging or ordering me to do something in the illocutionary dimension. As a result, in the perlocutionary dimension, the

speaker may startle me and persuade me to do as told. Such dimensions do not call out specific criteria in grammar or vocabularies to define the uses of language. Rather, they embrace the multiple uses and forces that an utterance may have in its issuing.

It is important to note that Austin still excludes the non-serious uses of language from these new categories. According to Austin's classification, joking, acting, or writing poetry are not accounted for in the illocutionary act. Also, the speech act is liable to ills and infelicities as was the case with the performative. As he had already done in the analysis of the performative, Austin decides to rule out these constant ills from his formulation. The constant possibility of an unintentional hindrance is once more excluded from full acknowledgement.

In the subsequent analysis, Austin discovers how all utterances perform both locutionary and illocutionary acts, or saying and doing at the same time. In light of the later discussion of the speech act, the distinction between the constative and the performative stands as "the *special* theory to the *general* theory" (H 147, Austin's emphasis). The doctrines of the new general theory include the following: "A) The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating. B) Stating, describing, &c., are *just two* names among a very great many others for illocutionary acts; they have no unique position" (H 147-148, Austin's emphasis). The doctrine B suggests that the constative, considered to be the normal use of language with the traditional dichotomy

of truth and falsity, is in fact a special kind of the performative alongside promising, betting, and naming. Description of fact is one among the possible illocutionary acts that we do in saying something. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Austin's exploration of the marginalized cases led to the formation of the performative. Nevertheless, the performative turns out to be what incorporates the constative that was considered the natural use of language, subverting the initial hierarchy.¹⁶

1.2. Derrida's Reading of Austin's Speech Act Theory

Among the many texts that deal with the notion of the performative, "Signature Event Context" (SEC) is the first essay where Derrida attends to Austin's theory in a direct manner. Contrary to the common misunderstanding that situates the two thinkers as antagonistic, Derrida considers himself rather close to Austin, conceding that he identifies with Austin's interests and problematics (LI 38). Derrida's appreciation for Austin's theory is contextualized in the discussion of communication in SEC. In the context of questioning a certain notion of communication while suggesting a different understanding of it, Austin is recognized for proposing "a 'communication' which is not limited strictly to the transference of a semantic content that is already constituted and dominated

¹⁶ Jonathan Culler notes that this theoretical move by Austin is parallel to Derrida's logic of supplementarity, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. See Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 113.

by an orientation toward truth” (LI 13-14). What brings Derrida to acknowledge Austin’s contributions in this aspect? In order to understand such an assessment, Derrida’s philosophical concerns in general as well as his problematics in communication should be introduced. Subsequent to this observation, Derrida’s reading of Austin’s notion of the performative will follow.

The main purpose of SEC is to question the preexisting notion of communication as transference of a unified meaning due to a certain metaphysical ground on which it is based. Throughout his texts, Derrida has problematized the Western metaphysics as “a determination of being as presence” (OG 97) from diverse angles.¹⁷ Briefly stated, Derrida argues that the metaphysical tradition consists of structural binaries or polarities such as presence vs. absence, speech vs. writing, and nature vs. culture. Such dichotomies are by no means innocent categories as the former are privileged while the latter are considered to be corrupt and impure renditions of the former; absence is a deficiency of presence, writing a representation of speech, and culture a supplement for nature. The hierarchical axiology could extend to putting the normal, immediate, pure, natural, and simple to one pole and the parasitic, mediated, impure, accidental, and complicated to the other while celebrating or strategically choosing the former over the latter (LI 93). Derrida recognizes such a

¹⁷ See Barbara Johnson, “Translator’s Introduction,” *Dissemination*. trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 7-33 and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” *Of Grammatology*. trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 9-87.

tradition as the “metaphysics of presence” due to its inclination to prioritize presence, which is supposedly immediate and unified. As the metaphysics of presence is pervasive and inveterate, at work not only within the arguments of particular thinkers of the Western philosophical tradition but also within the quotidian use of language, let us contextualize the discussion in terms of language and communication, which are the main interests of SEC.

According to Derrida, the history of metaphysics consists of a consistent move of privileging speech over writing. The metaphysics of presence assumes that a communication involves the speaker delivering the unified content that s/he means convey, in the presence of both the speaker and the listener. Privileging speech over writing entails an adherence to immediacy in communication, as well as the unity of meaning. Derrida coins these underlying assumptions “logocentrism” to accentuate the privilege given to the *logos*—the Greek word for reason, logic, the divine Word, and speech—by assigning “the origin of truth in general to the logos” (OG 3). The metaphysical tradition has accredited an immediate proximity of the logos and voice while treating writing as a derivation of speech, thus further removed from the logos. In this regard, logocentrism is also phonocentrism, which privileges voice over written marks (OG 11). According to Aristotle, as quoted by Derrida, “spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words” (OG 11). Within the metaphysical framework, writing is technical and instrumental as “the means of conserving the spoken language, of

making it function without the presence of the speaking subject” (OG 10).

In this respect, Derrida identifies a predetermined notion of communication “as a vehicle, a means of transport or transitional medium of ... a *unified* meaning” (LI 1, Derrida’s emphasis) and problematizes it as it is imbued with the metaphysics of presence. In SEC, Derrida outlines Condillac’s recapitulation of the history of communication as it reflects on how the written text has been treated within the philosophical traditions in an explicit manner. According to Condillac, as resumed by Derrida, writing is a means of communication that presupposes an idea or thought to be transported. The idea, as the signified content, is what governs the process of the transportation. From this standpoint, the history of communication proceeds in the course of economization: from gestural or spoken language to written language, and proceeding from painting to letter, which incorporates hieroglyphic, ideographic, and finally phonetic-alphabetic systems in order. This simple gradation indicates a “continuous derivation from a common root that is never displaced” (LI 5). The written communication is supposedly a derivative or secondary means of communication as it is called upon in the need to extenuate a certain presence employed in spoken language. The languages of speech or gesture require the presence of the addressor and the addressee. In contrast, writing is devised to extend the presence of both parties, to continue the transference of the thought-content in the absence of gestures or spoken words. According to this line of thought, writing is supposed to have no

effect on the determined content to be delivered or the system in which the communication takes place; it is only secondary or derivative to means that are more immediate to the conscious presence. Any kind of alteration or disruption in the content is thus considered an exception or even a perversion to be prevented; “[a]ny alteration would therefore be accidental” (LI 3).

In this regard, the absence attributed to writing is “a continuous modification and progressive extenuation of presence” (LI 5). Condillac’s examination presupposes writing, which is derivative to speech, its history proceeding in the order of preserving the presence, which governs communication. As noted above, this treatment of writing is not strictly limited to Condillac but is common to the metaphysical tradition. Derrida considers it “ideological,” in the sense that it is not neutral but is based on “a vast, powerful, and systematic philosophical tradition dominated by the prominence of the *idea* (*eidos*, *idea*)” (LI 6). Against this backdrop, Derrida proposes a rediscovery of absence. Derrida transforms the notion of the absence not as an extenuation of presence, but as a radical element that brings about a break in presence.

In terms of communication, Derrida contends that it is not the presence of the conscious intention but the possible absence of the addressor and the addressee that conditions writing. Surely, in the conventional case of writing a letter, the sender writes in the absence of the receiver and the receiver reads it in the absence of the sender; the written marks are supposed

to operate in the absence of the sender and receiver. However, Derrida pushes this absence in the empirical dimension further to “a certain absoluteness of absence” (LI 7). For writing to be what it is, it should be able to presuppose an absolute absence, not a distant or delayed presence, of both the sender and the receiver. Absence in this sense is a positive possibility necessary for writing as it ensures its readability. It should be noted that the absolute absence does not indicate an empirically necessary absence; it goes without saying that communication in written language does function in the case of the presence of both interlocutors. One could easily imagine a situation where one writes a letter in the presence of the receiver, and the receiver reading while the sender is present. What Derrida underscores is the absence as a structural necessity that conditions writing: “... this *possibility* is *always* inscribed, hence *necessarily* inscribed as *possibility* in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark” (LI 48, Derrida’s emphasis). Such an understanding of absence brings not a continuation but a rupture in presence, rendering it complicated and divided. As the absence in this sense is an essential and structural possibility, it cannot be bracketed or left aside “even temporarily, on allegedly methodological grounds” (LI 48).

In what way does absence condition readability? Whether or not a written communication functions does not depend on the presence of the participants or their intentions but on the ability to be readable in the absolute absence of both parties to the communication. This ability is

ensured not by correspondence between the written signs and the referent but by iterability. As a general structure of writing, iterability is a capacity to be repeated in alterity, or to be identified in different contexts. Followed by the acknowledgement that “iter” comes from “itara,” which means “other” in Sanskrit, Derrida proposes iterability as an ability to incorporate the other, recognizing the difference that makes possible the identity. Iterability allows “the identity of the *selfsame* [to] be repeatable and identifiable *in, through,* and even *in view* of its alteration” (LI 53, Derrida’s emphasis). In the internal semiotic layer, a written syntagma can be cut off from the given chain and be grafted onto other chains without completely losing its functionality. Only by inscribing the mark in other chains and navigating other possibilities can its identity be recognized. The same structure applies in the lexical dimension; a word is identified not from a correspondence with a definite signified but is identified in its various usages in disparate contexts. If it cannot shift from one context to another, it cannot function as a word. Such a structural necessity holds true even for idiomatic expressions that are believed to have a tight relation with their meanings. No matter how unique their significations may be, they should still be able to situate themselves in different contexts in order to take effect. Furthermore, Derrida argues that the structural iterability beyond the presence of the addressee and the addressor holds true even for the most private and discrete system of signs. Any code so discrete to the point where only two people share it still has to be iterable in order to function. Even in the deaths of the two parties,

the mark's identity is guaranteed by its iterability beyond their deaths. To be precise, their deaths are the positive condition of the language to function, as it is absence that structures language. Thus, no context can absolutely enclose the written marks due to their essential iterability in the absence of the "intention of saying something meaningful" (LI 8). As the identity of the mark is engendered by virtue of the ability to be separable from the immediate context, the identity in the sense of unified self-identity is rendered impossible. In this sense, every mark is identified not in its full presence but as a differential mark, already inscribed with alterations in its repetition.

Furthermore, iterability is the condition of possibility not only to written language but also to spoken signs and to experience in general. In the case of spoken signs, any delineation requires iterability in the absence of the speaker and the counterpart. The identity of a spoken sign should be recognizable despite empirical variations such as the voice, tone, or accent of the speaker. Such an identity is given not from the presence of the speaker but from the ability of a unit to be repeated even in the absence of the referent, a determined signified, or the intention of the present communication; the "unity of the signifying form only constitutes itself by virtue of its iterability" (LI 10). Accordingly, no different from the written language, the spoken language operates based on its iterability. In this sense, the attribute accorded to writing applies to language in general. Derrida

coins this general trait “*graphematic in general*” (LI 14).¹⁸

From this move, Derrida questions the standard understanding of writing as derivative and transforms it into a general attribute of all signs. Viewed in this light, Derrida affirms the disruptive implication of Austin’s speech act theory: the speech act as communication does not aim for “the transference or passage of a thought-content” but for “an operation and the production of an effect” (LI 13). The conventional understanding of communication is imbued with the metaphysics of presence, or logocentrism, as it is governed by the idea to be transferred. However, Austin’s concept of the performative addresses what it produces or transforms in place of indicating referents outside the utterance. Furthermore, Austin’s notion of the performative is detached from the truth value whether the truth is considered in terms of the unveiling of a hidden unified meaning or the correspondence between an utterance and the event. In sum, Derrida contends that “Austin has shattered the concept of communication as purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept” (LI 13).

Despite his recognition of Austin’s speech act theory, Derrida nevertheless problematizes Austin’s notion of performativity for the same

¹⁸ For Derrida, “*graphematic in general*” refers to the general textuality or the Derridian notion of the text. “Text” for Derrida is not limited to only graphic quality, the book, or even discourse. It also implies “all the structures called ‘real,’ ‘economic,’ ‘historical,’ socio institutional, in short: all possible referents” (LI 148). Hence the well-known quote of Derrida’s: “*There is nothing outside the text*” (OG 158, Derrida’s emphasis). By redefining text in this manner, Derrida argues that every referent is possible only within a “structure of a differential trace.” One cannot refer to the referent in its immediacy; the act of referring is always mediated and its immediate presence is deferred. Thus, it is only through the interpretive experience that meaning is possible. This implication on the interpretation is examined in Chapter 3.

reason that he took an interest in it: its involvement with the metaphysics of presence. Although the concept of the performative contributed to questioning the notion of communication as a delivery of semantic contents, Austin nevertheless falls back into the dogmatism of the philosophical tradition. Such a relapse is demonstrated in the presupposition of the total context, and in the exclusions that Austin has undertaken in his speech act theory. From the six felicity conditions, Derrida observes Austin's adherence to the total context, "a context exhaustively determined, in theory or teleologically" (LI 14). The list of infelicities is based on criteria such as compliance with the conventional procedures, the presence of relevant participants, and the intention of the participants to conduct the act. These elements constitute the total context that Austin emphasizes as the subject matter of the speech act theory: "The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating" (H 147, Austin's emphasis). According to Derrida, the total context's organizing center remains the "conscious and intentional presence in the totality of the operation" (LI 14). In this regard, the performative is confined yet again to the communication of the intentional meaning, faithfully continuing the classical strategies of the metaphysics of presence. Accordingly, Austin reintroduces the truth value in evaluating the performative, pointing out how certain statements have to be true in order for a certain performative to be successful, as noted previously in this chapter. In sum, Austin postulates a total context of a speech act where the

speaker and receiver participate as a conscious presence with intentions in a determined circumstances, consequently preserving the metaphysical tradition of privileging presence.

Such a supposition is problematic for Derrida as it does not take into account iterability as the condition of the speech act. Iterability as a general structure not only of writing but of all signs does not allow the context to be exhaustively determined; in order for signs to function, they should be able to be cut from their original context, including conventions and intentionality, and be grafted onto others. Such an oversight is also revealed in Austin's exclusion of the ills other than those noted in the felicity conditions. Austin rules out the hollow or void cases where an utterance takes place on stage or in a poem. These circumstances are defined as non-serious and parasitical compared to normal uses of language. Derrida notes how Austin decides to exclude these cases as accidental or exterior while acknowledging that the supposedly parasitical cases are risks that *always* endanger the speech act. Derrida argues that Austin's exclusion of the non-serious overlaps with the way the metaphysical tradition has treated writing. Although the system of writing or iterability is the structural possibility of all signs, it was assumed as derivative or even menacing to voice. In this regard, Derrida contends that the risk of being cited in different situations resides within the speech act, as "its internal and positive condition of possibility" (LI 17). By the same token, what Austin delineates as standard and normal is not naturally given in itself but is defined by

excluding the general structure of iterability.

At the end of the essay, Derrida offers three implications of the discussion. Firstly, Derrida redirects the concept of writing, and for him, it is not understood as a means of transferring meaning or exchanging intentions. Derrida proposes a concept of general writing with a system of predicates that he calls “*graphematic in general*” (LI 14).¹⁹ This notion of general writing is what engenders “the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc.” (LI 20) only as an effect. Secondly, the semantic dimension that dominates the preconception of communication is “split by the intervention of writing” (LI 20). Writing, with the inscription of iterability as its predicate, does not pertain to a finalized message. Thus, reading would no longer involve “a hermeneutic deciphering, the decoding of a meaning or truth” (LI 21). Lastly, despite the rediscovery of the concept of writing, Derrida considers it crucial to maintain the old name of “writing.” Although Derrida problematizes the hierarchical oppositions governed by the metaphysics of presence, he contends to work from within the classical oppositions and displace the system rather than simply moving onto another concept with an entirely different name. As Derrida has argued elsewhere, “the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophizing badly), but in

¹⁹ It should be noted that notions such as “general writing,” “graphematic in general,” “text,” and “archi-writing” do not equal writing in the conventional sense. Although Derrida extends the qualities attributed to writing—the ability to function in the absolute absence of conscious intentionality—as the possibility of all kinds of language and even experience in general, this does not mean that he erases a distinction between writing and other acts.

continuing to read philosophers *in a certain way*.”²⁰ As hastily proposing a new concept is likely to fall back into the trap of metaphysics of presence, Derrida’s philosophy consists largely of reading and resituating the preexisting concepts. According to Derrida, all concepts are constituted within a system of predicates; “[t]here is no concept that is metaphysical in itself” (LI 21). Thus, Derrida recognizes how the concept of writing has been involved with predicates such as secondary, derivative, and exterior throughout the history of metaphysics and attempts to resituate it. Iterability allows a reading of grafting the term onto another context, reconfiguring it into an altered notion of writing corresponding to predicates that “has always *resisted* the prior organization of forces” (LI 21, Derrida’s emphasis). Maintaining the old name for a renewed concept is Derrida’s approach in intervening in the history of the classical metaphysics.

To better understand Derrida’s reading of Austin’s performative, let us address two possible objections or misunderstandings. One possible misunderstanding may involve Derrida’s treatment of intention. Derrida’s contention may seem like a rejection of intentions in general. However, Derrida neither erases the category of the intention nor denies the intention *per se*. What Derrida does to the understanding of the intention is to question its status, linked with the value of presence, of mastering the entire system of utterance (LI 18). Derrida problematizes not intentionality *per se*

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Sign, and Play,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 288.

but “their *telos*, which orients and organizes the movement and the possibility of a fulfillment, realization, and *actualization* in a plenitude” (LI 56, Derrida’s emphasis). Intentionality is privileged in terms of a speech act as it embodies the teleology of actualization. If one understands the speech act as governed by intentionality, then the purpose of an utterance is to deliver the intention in its full presence with as little deviation as possible. However, iterability does not allow such a fulfillment of intention present in itself because the intention itself is made possible or identifiable from the alteration or difference; iterability does not negate intentionality altogether but makes it possible as something divided and distanced from itself.

Another objection may pertain to Derrida’s criticism of Austin’s exclusions. In regards to Derrida’s problematization of Austin’s exclusion of the non-serious or parasitical use of language, one may argue that it is only a strategic and methodological delay rather than an ultimate omission.²¹ However, Derrida is well aware of the fact that Austin’s intentions may not consist of conducting a final exclusion, and SEC does not criticize Austin’s analysis for not being more encompassing. In view of iterability as the general condition of language, the supposedly methodological and temporary nature of Austin’s exclusions is nonetheless based on the metaphysical presuppositions. The question with which Derrida challenges Austin is this: why is the parasitical *excluded* when it *constantly* affects the

²¹ See Searle, R. John, “Reiterating the Difference: A Reply to Derrida,” *Glyph* Volume 1. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 204-205.

so-called standard? Could this strategy of suspending the non-serious uses of language remain strictly neutral when it is in fact privileging an arbitrarily supposed normality? The focus of SEC is on “a reelaboration of the axiomatics or of the premises themselves” (LI 85). According to Derrida, Austin’s postulation of the ordinary use of language is already marked by an exclusion of the exterior and parasitic, which is in fact a fundamental and constant possibility.

Although it may appear that Derrida criticizes Austin’s concept of the performative and moves on to the redirected concept of writing, he nevertheless does not discard the notion of the performative. After assessing its presuppositions, Derrida continues theoretical undertakings of the term by resituating it on an altered terrain. What would the notion of the performative imply if it took into account iterability as its condition of possibility? Derrida takes on the reconfiguration in this regard in many texts. But this thesis limits its discussion to the qualifications found in *The Truth in Painting* with a purpose to delineate the notion of the performative in terms of Derrida’s textual engagement with art. This discussion involves the logic of supplementarity and the production of an event, noted explicitly in “Passe-partout” in relation to the performative, and these topics are respectively examined in each of the following chapters.

Chapter 2. The Logic of the Supplement and the Extended Notion of the Performative

In the previous chapter, the notion of the performative was examined in terms of the conceptual institution of Austin and Derrida's readings of it. While recognized for the insights it provides, the notion of the performative is nevertheless scrutinized in terms of its persisting metaphysical presuppositions. Yet Derrida's initial interest in the relationship between saying, or writing, and doing continues. This chapter is devoted to articulating the Derridian notion of the performative regarding one of two predicates suggested in "Passe-Partout": the logic of the supplement. In "Passe-partout," Derrida pays a great deal of attention to a quote from Cézanne's letter to Emile Bernard, written in 1905: "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you" (TP 2). The cited utterance is in the form of a performative, a promise, to be precise, according to the initial distinction of the orthodox speech act theory.²² Cézanne's promise to tell the truth in painting consists of a performative as it does not describe the fact outside the utterance but subscribes the signatory to the act; Cézanne does the very act of promising by writing those words. Although Derrida expresses doubt

²² Derrida considers the promise to be a privileged form of the performative although it is one example among others in the speech act theory. He goes as far as to appoint the promise as the basic element of language because whenever one says something, one is committing oneself to a promise to continue and finish the sentence, and to tell the truth even when the speaker is in fact lying. In this sense, analyzing the structure of the promise in "Passe-partout" alludes to the fact that Derrida considers the performative as a major consideration of art writing. See Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," *Critical Inquiry*, trans. Gila Walker (The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 33, No. 2. Winter 2007), p. 458.

regarding the strict distinction between the constative and the performative, he employs it to embark on an analysis on the phrase. Nevertheless, Derrida qualifies the cited performance with the logic of the supplement. His reconfiguration of the performative in this regard can be telescoped into the following quote: “Performative supplementarity is thus open to infinity” (TP 3). What does supplementarity mean for Derrida? What does the logic of the supplement tell us about the performative? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by first drawing from the discussion unfolded in *Of Grammatology*²³ to outline Derrida’s logic of the supplement, and then comprehending the performative supplementarity and its implications.

2.1. The Logic of the Supplement

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida puts forth the notion of the supplement as the underlying logic of binary oppositions that persist in the works of the 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Derrida’s concentrated and distinctive reading of Rousseau’s writings can be found in the chapter “... That Dangerous Supplement.”²⁴ Derrida’s reading of Rousseau focuses on how Rousseau treats writing and masturbation as a supplement based on the desire for presence. Let us first examine the relation of writing and speech in Rousseau’s works as examined by Derrida. In theory, Rousseau raises speech above writing by arguing that writing is secondary, or even menacing,

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1976]).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-164.

to living speech. In a move typical of the metaphysical tradition, Rousseau contends that writing is merely a reappropriation or restoration of speech that is more direct and immediate to the presence of the subject. Rousseau goes as far as to assert that a substitution of writing for speech is a scandal, a perversion of nature. Despite the affirmative values he attributes to speech in theory, Rousseau portrays an ambivalent attitude when he justifies himself as to why he became a writer. In contrast to his theory that privileges speech over writing, Rousseau admits how speech, supposedly immediate to his presence, betrays him due to his shyness or mistakes that could be made in the course of improvisation. As quoted by Derrida, Rousseau concedes the following: “If I were present, one would never know what I was worth” (OG 142). Deficiencies in speech prompt Rousseau to write, choosing absence in order to better represent his worth. Thus, the relation between speech and writing, or presence and absence, is rendered ambivalent and no longer strictly hierarchical. Writing is treated as a means to recapture speech and is accordingly considered secondary and exterior. Yet it is the lack or deficiency in speech that necessitates such a supplementary act of writing. In this dynamic, speech is presupposed in the form of how it is supposed to be—in terms of plenitude, immediacy, and presence—as opposed to how it *is*—insufficient and lacking.

Throughout his interpretation of Rousseau’s text, Derrida inscribes the word “supplement” to account for Rousseau’s contradictory attitude, employing the double significations of the French word “supplément.” On

the one hand, it indicates an extra or a surplus, something to be added. On the other it signifies substitution, a taking-place-of. Rousseau's ambivalent approach, as illustrated in terms of writing and speech, plays on the double significations. On the one hand, the supplement is what is added to the already full presence as a surplus. In this respect, "art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function" (OG 144). Rousseau assigns presence, nature, and speech to the same axis with the connotation of plenitude and self-sufficiency while perceiving absence, culture, and writing as a surplus to the former. This signification is applied when Rousseau treats writing as an exterior element that reappropriates speech while denying the former of any positive value in itself. On the other hand, the supplement substitutes in the sense that it takes the place of what it is supposed to add onto. It substitutes and replaces what it is supplementing, as if filling in a void. From this signification, representation or an image is necessitated by a lack in the presence. It not only adds to a presence but places itself in the deficiency. The presumed presence or full speech can accomplish itself "only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy" (OG 145). As such, there are various other hierarchical polarities besides speech and writing for Rousseau: the thing itself and sign, nature and culture, hetero-eroticism and auto-eroticism, real mother and nurse, and so on.

Much like the word "supplement," which embodies a double signification, Derrida's concept of the supplement is formulated upon the

cohabitation of the two implications. The ambivalence of the supplement engenders a contradiction: if the presence, or nature, were sufficient in itself, it should not be in need of a supplement and nothing exterior to it should be able to make up for the void. The supplement renders nature complete by filling in for its deficiency while proving nature's very lack in so doing. The scandal of the supplement testifies for the insufficiency of the supposedly self-sufficient nature. In working his way through the double implications of the supplement in Rousseau's writing, Derrida reads how the hierarchy of speech and writing is made possible only by the institution of the supplement. For speech to gain an upper hand, its deficiency should be suppressed while accepting the supplement of an exterior, secondary, or derivative writing. To put it otherwise, the supplement conditions the thing itself, or nature, while at the same time denying it of the purity it claims for itself. In this sense, the supplement is "originary" to that which it is supposed to supplement. The supplement is what "produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible" (OG 143). Thus, the notion of the supplement suggests a way of understanding meaning without succumbing to the conventional dichotomy established based on the metaphysics of presence. It allows us to think the parasitical, exterior, and secondary as the "origin." In this regard, the hierarchical binaries based on the metaphysics of presence are subverted, or self-subverted, since it is not something Derrida has done himself but rather something that has already been effective in the history of metaphysics.

Accordingly, the logic of supplementation is what engenders the concepts of nature while disrupting its purity. If speech is necessarily supplemented by writing to be what it is, it no longer pertains to the absolute presence. The same logic is at work in Derrida's reading of Rousseau's sexuality. Rousseau posits masturbation as a dangerous supplement that cheats nature; it is a perversion to the conventional hetero-eroticism that involves the presence of a partner. With such a moralistic typology, Rousseau is cautious of this vice and strives to maintain a distance from it because it is seductive, leading him away from the natural way of hetero-eroticism. However, Rousseau contends at the same time that this dangerous supplement is also advantageous as it helps save up his strength: "I [Rousseau] learned that dangerous means of assisting it [*ce dangereux supplément*], which cheats Nature and saves up for young men of my temperament many forms of excess at the expense of their health, strength, and, sometimes, their life" (OG 150).²⁵ Auto-eroticism (masturbation) is a means to distance himself from the natural union, operating by ways of the imaginary. Without having to obtain the consent of a partner, auto-eroticism allows for "lively imaginations" to replace the real person. This supplementary move, according to Derrida, operates just like writing: "Just as writing opens the crisis of the living speech in terms of its 'image,' its painting or its representation, so onanism [masturbation] announces the ruin

²⁵ Quoted from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reverie of a Solitary*, trans. John Gould Fletcher (New York: B. Franklin, 1971), pp. 108-109.

of vitality in terms of seductions” (OG 151). The attempt to reconstitute presence by means of image, as is the case for writing and speech, testifies to the lack in the ideal presence or nature, self-subverting the relation of the originary and the derivative, the interior and the exterior.

Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s accounts on masturbation as a supplement goes further to deal with not only binary distinctions but also a chain of supplements. If auto-eroticism is a substitute for hetero-eroticism, does it mean that the presence of a sexual partner cancels out the necessity of masturbation? According to Derrida’s analysis, this is not the case. In Rousseau’s recount of his lifelong recourse to masturbation, which corrupts him while saving him, he justifies the corrupt habit on the account of ill health. Yet there is another reason: the lack of his partner’s love. Rousseau concedes that the love Thérèse—Rousseau’s last partner, who cohabited with him until his death—gives him has subsided at one point, causing him pain. The absence of Thérèse’s love has prompted Rousseau to fall back to the menacing supplement in a desire to substitute the lacking presence. However, as Derrida underscores it, the substitution does not stop with the absence and presence of Thérèse. Before this replacement has taken place, Thérèse was already introduced as a substitute for *mamma*, his past lover named Madame de Warens, who is not his natural mother despite the misleading nickname: “In a word, I [Rousseau] needed a successor to *mamma*. . . . *I found in Thérèse the substitute [supplément] that I needed*”

(OG 157, Derrida's emphasis).²⁶ And *mamma*, as the nickname may suggest, is also a substitute for Rousseau's real mother, whom he never had the chance to appreciate due to her early death. What does this line of supplementation suggest? Instead of arguing about who is the most significant among them or designating one woman as the true source of Rousseau's desires, Derrida contends that these women constitute "an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that *produce* the sense of the very thing they *defer*" (OG 157, emphasis added). This does not mean that the chain of supplements is limitless in an empirical sense. It implicates a system of supplementarity without a center that should already be open for possibilities in order for a supplementation to take place. For masturbation to be a supplement for Thérèse's love, the economy of supplementarity should already be operative. Auto-affection could be a supplement for the presence of Thérèse only so long as Thérèse is already a supplement for something or someone else. Without the logic of the supplement at work, Thérèse or any other woman could not have been supplemented in the first place. Within this system, no woman can put a stop to the infinite deferral of supplements as the ultimate center. If there had been a center to fix this supplementary system, the play of substitutions would not have been possible.

Such a supplementary structure holds not only for sexuality but also for other binary polarities that have been governed by the metaphysical

²⁶ Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 332.

tradition. The signs do not simply stand in for the thing itself; culture is not mere a support for pure nature; and writing is not a transparent extension of speech. The infinite chain of supplements defies the axiologies of metaphysics, considering the former (values degraded as absence) as derivative of the latter (values ascribed with presence). Rather, the latter is infinitely deferred by the system of supplements; there is no such thing as “the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception. Immediacy is derived” (OG 157).

2.2. The Supplementary Structure of the Performative

What does the supplementary structure tell us about the performative? As noted in Chapter 1, Austin has devised a concept of the performative that not only says but performs the act of the utterance only to fall back onto the metaphysical presuppositions, reintroducing the truth value in the performative. The structure of the performative, according to the speech act theory, has recourse to verifiability centered around the signatory’s conscious intention. Accordingly, a promise on stage, under threat, as a part of a fraud, or within a fiction is not a promise in the strict sense. As such, the speech act theory, according to Derrida, maintains the moralistic approach to the performative by excluding the non-serious, insincere, or parasitical. The signatory has to mean what s/he says or writes, providing the full presence of intentionality, which would anchor the significance of

the performative. Subsequently, to verify a promise, one would only have to see if the signatory has indeed fulfilled the promise that s/he meant to undertake. Thus, the structure of the promise in this sense consists of clear referential relations; the conscious intentionality is delivered by the utterance; and the performative utterance is verified in terms of its correspondence with the actions exterior to it.

However, Cézanne's promise cited above cannot be properly addressed according to Austin's scheme. Cézanne promises to tell the truth in painting. But what exactly does Cézanne mean by that? According to the structure of the performative elaborated above, the telling of the truth consists of the promised content that is supposedly verifiable in terms of the truth value. But is it possible to verify the content of Cézanne's promise? Can one confirm that Cézanne's promise has indeed been fulfilled? Derrida suggests that such an approach does not open the passage into Cézanne's performative. Instead of applying verifiability, Derrida argues that the promise is made possible by the supplementary structure. In a sense, a promise is supplemented by what it promises; the promise is suspended to the promised content, which in turn supplements the promise. However, this supplementary relation is not limited only to the promise and the promised content by virtue of the infinite chain of supplements; the promised content refers to, and is supplemented by, yet another content. Such a possibility of supplementation is what constitutes the promise. Derrida makes this point by suggesting four possible translations of the expression "the truth in

painting (la vérité en peinture),” demonstrating how the act of telling the truth entails other supplementary determinations.

Firstly, “the truth in painting” could pertain to the presentation of the thing itself. It should be noted that *peinture*, a French word for painting, also means the live or imagined description or evocation of something. Employing this figural signification, Derrida reasons that “painting” from the phrase could pertain to the power of direct restitution. In this regard, “the truth in painting” could mean the “truth itself restored, in person, without mediation, makeup, mask, or veil” (TP 5). In this case, the truth “in painting” is not in a painting as an artistic medium but indicates a truth that is restored, unveiled, or presented without mediation. Secondly, “the truth in painting” may pertain to the adequate representation. As in the first instance, painting is understood here not as a pictorial work. This time, it indicates a faithful portrait in the figurative sense, or a representation of truth. As opposed to the first translation, the second interpretation considers the truth not as something that can be unveiled or that can present itself, but as something to be adequate or represented. While these translations pertain each to different model of truth, they both employ “painting” not as an artistic medium but in terms of figuring the presentation or representation of truth. Thirdly, “the truth in painting” could be understood in terms of picturality of the truth as presentation or representation. “Painting” in this case is understood as one among other modes of art such as poetry, literature, music, and so on. In this translation, the truth is presented or represented

according to the mode proper to painting; it is the truth “in painting” as opposed to the truth rendered in music or play. Lastly, “the truth in painting” could pertain to the truth on the subject of painting. The truth in painting in this regard indicates that which is true in pictorial art. In this sense, “the truth in painting” is related to being knowledgeable in the particular domain of painting. And further understanding of the phrase in question will be divided depending on how “truth” is to be understood in the domain of painting.

These tentative translations demonstrate how the content of Cézanne’s promise is suspended to the subsequent translations of how “truth” and “painting” are each understood. It is susceptible to various interpretations depending on the theoretical or non-theoretical context onto which it comes to be grafted. The translation of Cézanne’s promise is further determined by supplements of other notions and how these notions are understood, engendering an unlimited chain of supplements. In this regard, the immediate and present meaning is deferred, putting into question the assumption of a transparent meaning of “the truth in painting.” Without succumbing to the desire for presence permeated in discourses, it is open to translations and employs the “capacity to play with the determinations of the context” (TP 7).

However, it is not to be misunderstood that Derrida is an advocate of indeterminacy of meaning in general. Derrida does acknowledge that there are interpretations that are predominant and conventionally accepted. What Derrida focuses on is the *relative indeterminacy* of the seemingly solid

significations, which opens the space for other interpretations (LI 144-145). As is the case with the word “painting,” there is indeed a primary meaning or a minimal consensus surrounding a word. However, such stability is only relative in the sense that it is situated within a determinate context that encompasses historical, cultural, hegemonic, linguistic, and institutional levels. Derrida contends that understanding the tentative determination of meaning leads to an open space for new interpretations that does not simply say anything at all but takes into account all the contexts that determine the subject matter.

According to Austin’s scheme, the promise ascribes the signatory to the promised content, and the evaluation of the promise involves verifying the promised content and the signatory’s fulfillment of it. However, in the case of Cézanne’s promise, the promised content, to say the truth in painting, is not simply constrained to literally saying in the constative sense. It is also a kind of doing: “Its performance does not promise, literally to *say* in the constative sense, but again to ‘do’” (TP 3). Recognizing the telling of truth in painting as a doing is understandable if we take into account how it could also mean the truth rendered in painting. It could as well be a painting *act*. However, the implication of this step is significant also for the notion of the performative as it raises the following question: what is the performative if telling the truth could be one example of it? This question will be addressed later in this chapter in order to focus on the supplementary system at the moment. For Cézanne’s promise to take place, the promise should be able to

point to another action, to be supplemented by another performative. Thus, the promise does not only perform a single action but also refers to another action. For such a link to be possible, the deferral of the promised action, or the system of supplementation, should already be a possibility. In this sense Cézanne's promise is based on the possibility of another performative; "the content of the promise is determined, like its form, by the possibility of that other [performative]" (TP 3). In this chain of the performative, a performative utterance does not direct us to a particular doing that is fixed, but one that is supplemented by another performative and another. This deferral, or what Derrida calls "performative supplementarity," "is thus open to infinity" (TP 3).

Understanding the performative with respect to the logic of the supplement sharply contrasts with Austin in two respects. On the one hand, employing the logic of the supplement in analyzing the performative identifies the non-serious and parasitical as the originary element, or the condition of the possibility of the performative. The cohabitation of two implications of the supplement—adding to the plenitude and filling in for the void—demonstrates how the elements considered to be secondary or derivative are in fact the structural possibility of the concepts that are claimed to stand on its own. In analyzing Cézanne's promise, Derrida directs our attention to such an economy at play instead of bringing in actual examples of Cézanne's paintings for verification. In this way, the idea of saying in doing as hinted here is closely related to an operation of displacing

the conventional and hierarchical binaries that privilege the serious and ordinary use of language. The performative for Derrida is no longer limited to the serious and ordinary but is already marked by the non-serious and parasitical use of language. Yet it should be noted that this does not mean that Derrida is privileging the non-serious use of language in particular. The analysis based on the supplementary structure suggests that the conventional hierarchy in the metaphysical binaries can no longer remain intact without falling into the trap of the metaphysics of presence by entitling one element over the other. Accordingly, Derrida avoids privileging yet another element, even when it is an element that has been largely neglected.

On the other hand, the play of supplementation considers the original context to be one possible determination among others rather than the only one that governs the utterance. In the speech act theory, the conscious presence of the intention of the subject is the determining center of an utterance. Based on this premise, Cézanne's promise should be analyzed with a focus on the addressor's intention and the immediate backdrop that surrounds it. It should be noted that Derrida does not oppose this kind of approach in its entirety. Surely, one may attempt to track the immediate context of the promise—when and why, on what occasion, and for what reason was the letter written?—to locate it precisely. What Derrida problematizes is the assumption that these criteria should be prioritized when the answers to these questions are never definitively decidable due to the supplementary structure. Why should the immediate context of the

performative be granted the power to regulate the performative when it is always possible to be lost from it? Why not take this risk of being cut off from its own context and be referred to others as the positive condition of the performative? Derrida takes in the logic of the supplement as the structure of the performative, allowing it the chance to be freed from its immediate context and link up to others. In this sense, the infinity of performative supplementarity is due neither to the endless suspension in an empirical dimension nor to the inconceivable breadth of the context to be determined. It is due to the lack of a center that would serve to master the meaning of the performative. By virtue of the radical absence of the addressor and the addressee, or the iterability inscribed in all kinds of signs, the intentionality cannot be delivered in its full presence in a performative. The immediate intention of the addressee is already replaced or substituted by the utterance, which consists of signs. And such signs cannot absolutely contain its meaning in itself as it is structurally made possible by the other performative that it promises. Thus, the logic of supplementarity makes the performative possible while prohibiting its immediate and anchored meaning.

To be clear, Derrida does recognize how a performative attains meaning in a certain context to which it is already attached. Nevertheless, “there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring” (LI 12). The context should be taken into account in interpretation, and the force of the mark “depends on this capacity to *play* with the determinations of the

context” (TP 7, emphasis added). However, the utterance can break away from it and graft onto an infinite possibility of contexts. To put it otherwise, on the one hand, a performative is identified within a finite system. On the other hand, the seemingly finite system bases itself on the essential infinity of the supplementary chain. Understood in terms of the supplementarity, the performative is no longer exclusively linked to utterances that take effect within a given situation or a determinable context. Derrida redirects the concept to deal with the ability to break with its initial circumstances rather than focusing on the effects that are generated by being arrested to them. The matter is now one of identifying what is being performed within the supplementary structure.

Let us return to Cézanne’s utterance—“I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you”—from which this discussion departed. As noted above, according to Derrida’s analysis, what Cézanne promises—telling the truth in painting—is a performative. However, this understanding requires further qualifications as it is incompatible with the performative in terms of the speech act theory. In recognizing the act of telling the truth in painting as a performative, Derrida carries out theoretical shifts in two directions. These shifts defy the theoretical schemes of Austin, consequently characterizing the Derridian notion of performativity. On the one hand, by designating the telling of the truth in painting as a performative, Derrida insinuates how his notion of the performative is not bound by the distinction between a verbal act and an extraverbal act. On the other hand, although

telling the truth is a descriptive act in the classical sense, Derrida recognizes it as a performative and alludes to the performative quality even in the constative mode. These transitions in the notion of the performative are only hinted at in “Passe-partout.” Yet the textual evidence for greater elaboration is provided in “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2).”²⁷

In this essay, Derrida reads through one of de Man’s essays in *Allegories of Reading*, “Excuses (Confessions).”²⁸ In “Excuses,” de Man discusses the common confessions of Augustine and Rousseau to their thefts committed when they were both sixteen years old. In analyzing their excuses for their misdeeds, de Man bases his arguments on two distinctions. On the one hand, de Man presupposes a distinction between the act of the theft and the confession of the misconduct. While the theft does not require a verbal engagement as it is an extraverbal act, the confession is a discursive and verbal act. Such a distinction is also a ground for Austin’s arguments, as the subject of the speech act is limited to spoken or written utterances, the verbal act. However, Derrida contends that testimonial conduct is not purely verbal. In turn, the determination of the factual occurrence “passes by way of an act of testimony, whether verbal or not” (WA 110). This point of view is inscribed in Derrida’s suggestion that telling the truth in painting might as well indicate a pictorial act. When Cézanne promises to say something, “that saying could well be a doing, or a discursive doing, another

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2),” *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 71-160.

²⁸ Paul de Man, “Excuses,” *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 278-301.

performative saying, producing a truth which was not already there, or a pictorial doing which, by reason of some occupancy of painting by speech, would have the value of saying” (TP 9-10). As such, Derrida’s performative could be a discursive act or a pictorial act depending on the context in which it is considered. It should be noted that this move is not aimed at canceling out the distinction between the discursive act and pictorial act but is directed to extend the notion of the performative to be more than a categorical concept as employed by Austin.

On the other hand, de Man sets up a distinction between two modes of confession: the confession as avowal and the confession as excuse. Rousseau confesses his misdeed on two occasions, one in *The Confessions* and another in the *Fourth Reverie*. De Man examines these as an avowal and an excuse, respectively, arguing that they are distinctive and in need of a passage between the two. De Man identifies the initial account as an avowal, a simple indication of the misdeed, which pertains to “a purely cognitive, epistemological dimension, a moment of revealed truth” (WA 112). This dimension is set upon the distinction of the verbal and extraverbal event mentioned above; a verbal act is to be affirmed by the extraverbal act with the former simply describing the latter. De Man recognizes the other confession, made in the *Fourth Reverie*, as an excuse rather than an avowal. In this case, referential verification is not possible. According to de Man, an excuse asks for forgiveness, unlike an avowal, which informs someone of one’s fault. As these two accounts are of a disparate nature, de Man insists

that a bridge between the two is necessary to understand Rousseau's confessions. Furthermore, de Man notes how the excuse could be understood in terms of the Austinian sense of the performative utterance: its purpose is to convince, not to inform, and "only words can bear witness."²⁹ In turn, an avowal could be understood in terms of the constative utterance in Austin's design. In sum, de Man's understanding of the avowal and excuse as two different operations translates into a strict distinction between the constative and performative modes.

Derrida, however, argues that confessions in the modes of avowal and of excuse cannot be strictly divided. Is rigorously stating one's own fault separable from asking for forgiveness? Derrida thinks not. Derrida argues that there is no such thing as a confession that is strictly informative. In order for a confessional declaration to take place, there should be a recognition of guilt that does not lie entirely in the cognitive dimension. In this regard, the truth that pertains to the confession cannot strictly be something to be known or revealed, but is closer to "a truth to be 'made'" (WA 109); an avowal is always already apologetic.

Developing the latter point further, Derrida goes on to argue that it is necessary to presuppose the performative as the root of every constative rather than considering them as oppositional concepts. Regarding this point, Austin concedes that the constative is a special kind of performative at the end of his lecture invoking the illocutionary effects of an utterance. Austin

²⁹ Ibid., p. 282.

ends up blurring the initial distinction between the performative and the constative by bringing the truth value back into the consideration of the performative. As examined in Chapter 1, Austin concedes that although the initial delineation attributed the truth value to the constative, the performative is also subject to a referential verification to determine its happiness. However, Derrida's reason for displacing this distinction is different from Austin's. Whereas Austin finds the verification of the cognitive kind as the common ground for both the constative and performative, Derrida points out a constant possibility of falsity as their common ground. Derrida contends that the general form of testimoniality incorporates the fact that falsity is always a possibility. Due to the inherent inaccessibility of another's proper experience and the impossibility of immediate access to another's originary intuition, one must always ask to be believed. The constative is thus formed as in "I think," "I believe," "I argue," and so on. Even in an utterance of the constative type, such as confessing a fact that is supposedly verifiable, "the apologetic confession is already at work, *à l'oeuvre*" (WA 111).³⁰ Recognizing the performative aspect of not only particular sets of utterances but also in all discursive acts is not without crucial stakes. The discourses that are believed to be, or claim

³⁰ This perspective is stated in a more straightforward fashion in Derrida's "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism" (*Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe, London & New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 84): "There is no language without the performative dimension of the promise, the minute I open my mouth I am in the promise. Even if I say that 'I don't believe in truth' or whatever, the minute I open my mouth there is a 'believe me' at work. Even when I lie, and perhaps especially when I lie, there is a 'believe me' in play."

to be, neutral or objective are under scrutiny as belonging “within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerfully established, stabilized or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language)” (LI 136); a certain “truth” is never without a performative aspect of imposing itself as a truth. Acknowledging that a truth is contextualized does not solidify it but destabilizes it, as a context is limitless and a recontextualization is always open to possibilities.

By displacing the distinction between the verbal and extraverbal act as well as between the mode of avowal (the constative, the truth to be known) and that of excuse (the performative, the truth to be made), Derrida suggests a different terrain for the performative. The supplementary structure of the performative consists not only of verbal acts but also includes extraverbal or non-linguistic acts. The verbal act does not merely refer to or supplement the extraverbal act. Rather, they are both within the chain of supplements. Therefore, the notion of the performative is not exclusive to a certain type of “speech” act but incorporates both verbal and extraverbal as its elements; the performative consists of a saying that does something, but it could also incorporate a doing that says something. Also, as Derrida articulates the performative dimension also in the constative, the performative for Derrida is not a classificatory concept that identifies and regulates distinct forms of speech act. It is rather a passage to thinking about the effects of the supplementary chain. Then, what does the performative do? The next chapter will examine Derrida’s reconfiguration of the

performative in terms of the second quality demonstrated in “Passe-partout”: the production of an event.

Chapter 3. Performative Production of the Event

The preceding chapters articulated the Derridian notion of the performative in terms of iterability and the logic of the supplement. Given that the performative does something beyond merely describing or stating, we can anticipate the following inquiry: what does the performative, in a Derridian sense, *do*? This chapter is devoted to answering this question in terms of the second predicate of the performative introduced in “Passe-partout”: the production of an event. After articulating the performative in terms of supplementarity, Derrida notes how “the promise makes an event” (TP 3). In the context of “Passe-partout,” the association of the performative with the event is closely related to Derrida’s textual performance on art. What is the event that the textual performance produces? How does a performative interpretation produce something? This chapter delves into these questions to bring the discussion closer to understanding what Derrida is doing, performing, or producing in his texts on art. The following discussion will begin by examining the notion of the event, rearticulating it closer to how Derrida employs it. As the term “event” is conventionally understood in a certain way, it is important to identify how Derrida has altered it. As well, this chapter will address the inaugural power of the performative in order to understand the ramifications on the production of the event. Following these

inquiries, this chapter will examine the performative production of an event in terms of an interpretation of where the production takes place.

3.1 The Event Made Possible by Iterability

In “Passe-partout,” Derrida mentions how the performative produces a singular event. This is not a surprising claim as the performative, by definition, makes something happen, as opposed to the constative, which describes or states what happens outside of itself. However, when Derrida argues that the performative produces an event, he notes how the production of an event in his sense does not take place the same way as in the speech act theory. This is due to Derrida’s distinctive understanding of the notion of the event. Thus, an examination of how Derrida understands the notion of the event differently should precede the discussion of the performative production of an event.

According to Derrida, the notion of the event in the philosophical sense has been associated with attributes such as singularity, actuality, being present here and now, and irreplaceability. However, Derrida questions this understanding of the event by contending that it is structured by iterability, which divides the pure singularity of the event. In “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2),”³¹ Derrida puts forward a conventional antinomy of the event and the machine. Within this dichotomy, the event is generally

³¹ Jacques Derrida, “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2),” *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 71-160.

understood as singular and organic. It pertains to “some nonprogrammable and therefore incalculable singularity” (WA 72) as something that happens for the first time.³² Also, it is something that happens to a living being that would be affected by it: “No event without *experience*... there is no thinking of the event, it seems, without some sensitivity, without an *aesthetic* affect and some presumption of living organicity” (WA 72, Derrida’s emphasis). In contrast, the machine is something programmable, repeatable, and inorganic. When something is called “machinelike,” it follows a certain mechanism that does not generate anything inherently unique. Also, it is inorganic in the sense that it functions “without intention, without spontaneity” (WA 72).

The event presupposed by the orthodox speech act fits into this framework. The performative of the speech act theory, or *pure* performativity, is based on “the presence of a living being, and of a living being speaking one time only, in its own name, in the first person” (WA 74). For example, when a judge reads a sentencing order aloud in a courtroom, given that it is a sentencing trial and the judge is qualified for the job with good intentions, the judge’s intentional utterance initiates the event of

³² Towards his later works, Derrida associates the notion of the event more closely with predicates such as “surprise, exposure, the unanticipatable” (Jacques Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2007), pp. 441) rather than employing iterability or machinal elements to indicate the divide and split in the pure eventuality. Derrida accentuates the unexpectedness of the event as follows: “if there is an event, it must never be something that is predicted or planned, or even really decided upon” (Ibid., p. 441). It appears that such a change coincides with his relative focus on ethics, which is closely related to embracing Levinas’s thoughts and the notion of hospitality. However, this chapter focuses principally on the event as elaborated in “Passe-partout.” Yet the event as the unpredictable remains at the horizon in the discussion of the performative inauguration, as it is pertinent to Derrida’s discussion of ethics.

sentencing. This understanding of the event considers singularity to be an inherently unique quality that is present in itself. The singularity of the event presupposed by the speech act theory is guaranteed by the present intentionality and enclosed context while excluding the calculable and inorganic attributes of the machine. In this regard, an event is engendered by the intervention of an utterance that is “allegedly present and singular” (LI 17). In this sense, “[i]ntentionality forecloses the machine” (WA 74). Therefore, any machinelike quality like calculability or repetition is considered accidental and extrinsic.

However, the intentionality and the total context presupposed by the orthodox speech act theory are grounded in the dogmatism of the metaphysics of presence, as examined in the previous chapters. For speech or writing, or for all utterances to operate as they do, the general iterability, the ability of alterity in repetition, should already be at work regardless of the present intention of the speaker or the understanding of the receiver, as well as the total context that is bound to fail in completely enclosing the speech act (LI 14). This means that the operation of the utterance is dependent on its ability to be cut out of the original context and be grafted onto another instead of being contained within a fixed context. Thus, the conventional sense of the event is untenable with the notion of iterability, excluding it as a machinality that disturbs the event. Accordingly, Derrida avoids articulating the event as centered around such a notion of presence as is the case with the speech act theory. If iterability conditions the event, it

means that “a logic of the machine is in accordance, however improbable that may seem, with a logic of the event” (WA 75). Thus, the event produced by the performative in the Derridian sense should be rearticulated in line with thinking of the event and the machine together, or the event made possible by the machine. In sum, the orthodox speech act theory and Derrida each give contrasting answers to the question of how something *happens*. The former points to the conscious intentionality while the latter puts forward iterability, which divides the pure intentionality; the former’s answer is antagonistic to the machine while the latter insists that the machine makes the event possible while rendering its purity impossible.

Such a divergence extends to a disparate understanding of singularity, a crucial attribute of the event. The speech act theory and Derrida both postulate singularity as a prominent quality of the event but are at odds in their understanding of it. According to Derrida, the general iterability that operates as the condition of all utterances “come[s] to split and dissociate from itself the *pure* singularity of the event” (LI 17, emphasis added). The split or cut mentioned here does not negate the singularity of the event. Rather, it is what conditions the possibility of the event’s singularity; the singularity of an event is not neutralized but is made possible by being identified “as *conforming* with an iterable model, ... identifiable in some way as a ‘citation’” (LI 18, Derrida’s emphasis). This means that a singularity would not be observable if it were not available for a reading that recognizes it. And this availability is made possible by being

divided and taking part in a certain context and meaning; “[t]o become readable, it has to be *divided*, to *participate* and *belong*... in the genre, the type, the context, the meaning, the conceptual generality of meaning, etc. It loses itself to offer itself” (AL 68, Derrida’s emphasis).³³ As the singularization necessarily accompanies a divide in its identity, the singularity is recognized by taking part in shifting contexts and connecting to other possibilities rather than claiming for itself an absolutely independent realm of its own; the event loses its absolutely pure singularity in order to obtain singularity. In this regard, Derrida’s differential typology does not oppose citational elements to the singularity of the event (LI 18). Every utterance embodies a differential mark that is possible to be itself only by differing from itself and lending itself to be read. Accordingly, Derrida is skeptical of a certain notion of the singularity insistent on being severed from history or context and claiming to be natural when it had only been possible from within such frameworks. In this respect, the performative production of an event comes to navigate through possible contexts and systems of signification in order to recognize an utterance or an event’s singularity while foregoing an absolutely pure singularity.³⁴

³³ Derrida unravels a similar line of logic in addressing the notion of invention in “Psyche: Invention of the Other” (Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Invention of the Other, Volume I*. ed. Peggy Kamuf & Elizabeth Rottemberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 1-47). Although Derrida does concede that the notion of invention involves something new taking place by an inaugural performance, he nevertheless argues that it can never be recognized as original unless it is “legitimized, countersigned by a social consensus according to a system of conventions.” More directly put, “Invention *begins* by being susceptible to repetition, exploitation, reinscription” (Ibid., p. 6, Derrida’s emphasis).

³⁴ Along with redirecting the understanding of the singularity, Derrida rearticulates the

Let us take a look at two instances—signature and artwork—of the event that seem the least susceptible to the mechanical structure, or the mechanism of iterability. According to Austin, the event initiated by an utterance is ensured in the provisional absence of an addressee by extenuating his/her presence with a signature. In the case where an utterance does not contain a reference to the person initiating the act, there are two ways that s/he can be referred to. In case of a verbal utterance, all it takes for the speaker to lay claim to the utterance is to be in the presence of the speaking situation, by being the one who says it. This option fits into the classical case of a speech act. Another means of fixing the utterance to the initiator is the signature. According to Austin, “written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are” (H 60, Austin’s emphasis). A signature serves to compensate for the absence as a unique mark that bears the signatory’s handwriting. It is used in various performative situations such as giving permission, approving, resigning, promising, and so on. As Austin considers the presence of the speaker as the source of meaning, he is assigning the signature the role of continuing the

organicity that is another signature attribute of the event as conventionally understood. According to Derrida, the orthodox preposition of organicity is twofold. On the one hand, an organic event is understood in terms of “an internal principle that is proper and *totalizing*,” as “a beautiful form, an aesthetic form” (WA 73, Derrida’s emphasis). On the other hand, *what happens*, an event, gives an affection “in a sensible, aesthetic manner right on some body or some organic matter” (WA 72). However, Derrida’s understanding of the event is disparate from both comprehensions. The event is neither something that operates organically with a single, unified meaning nor something to be understood in terms of the experience it provides to a present living being. However, this does not mean that Derrida is precluding the element of the experience from the event. The point is that the structure of the experience is already iterable and the presence of the experiencing subject is necessarily divided.

presence of the addressor by virtue of its unique qualities that are intimately attached to him/her. However, according to Derrida, despite Austin's preconception of the signature as an inherently unique mark securely linked to presence, it nevertheless should be repeatable in order to function. For a signature to take effect, it has to be identifiable as the same throughout its repetitive uses; a signature is not what it is unless it can be used elsewhere while maintaining its identity, and "[a] signature that would take place just once in a noncoded, unreadable form would not be a signature... There is no pure signature event, no pure signature."³⁵ To push this point further, its ability to be forgeable, a possibility that even someone else may copy it, constitutes its possibility of referring to the signatory. In sum, by virtue of the general iterability, "the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form" depends on its reproducibility (LI 20).

Another instance is artwork. At a roundtable held after Derrida's presentation of SEC, a few panels raised objections to Derrida's contention that iterability is the condition of all types of communication as well as experience in general by suggesting that an artwork escapes iterability; Marcotte claimed that an artwork cannot be iterable because a repeated artwork would merely be a copy of the original, while Lane contended that iterability is not an essential predicate of a mark and put forward artworks as

³⁵ Jacques Derrida et al., "Philosophy and Communication: Round-table Discussion Between Ricoeur and Derrida," *Imagination and Chance: The Difference Between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 143-150.

an example of something noniterable.³⁶ These objections are in line with the understanding that an artwork is a singular event that could be endangered by iterability. Derrida acknowledges how an artwork is an event that is unique. However, Derrida attempts to remind his challengers that the identity of an artwork is not present in itself but is made possible by repetition. A work of art does not remain an object in itself but is recognized within relations with its maker and its audience. It has to be experienced, forming a certain relation in order to acquire identity. An experience of an artwork is not merely a perception in the fleeting instance but embodies a structure of iteration. If an artwork cannot leave an imprint that one can return to, we cannot recognize an artwork as the same work. An experience of an artwork is made possible by retention, a process of retaining a phase of perception in the consciousness; otherwise, a melody would not be recognized as constituting a single piece of music, and a line or a brushstroke would not be identified as a part of the same painting. A structure of iteration is required to recognize an artwork as identical to itself and different from others.

Also, Derrida implies that the experience of an artwork incorporates a historical, social, and institutional import that is relevant in each art genre. When challenged as to how a melody that is experienced in certainty from the very first time one hears it can ever be iterable, Derrida contends that experiencing a melody is an “already very sedimented” experience since a

³⁶ Ibid.

“melody is connected to a musical world of a considerable, historical complexity.”³⁷ As such, each genre of art stems from a complicated organization and system that engenders not a simple perception but an experience that is based on various types of iteration; “[i]n the case of these singular events [a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of music], the type of iteration is not of the same order as the type of iteration found in other artworks, for example, in written art. There is iteration there but of an entirely other form.”³⁸ Thus, the event of an artwork acquires its singularity from the structure of iteration, which is not limited to the present intentionality of the subject; it “has a virtual future only by surviving or cutting itself off from its presumed responsible signatory” (WA 75). Taking into account the singularity of an event as divided and situated within an iterable structure, a question arises concerning the performative production: according to Derrida, does the performative production of an event abide by the given frameworks? Does an event merely find its place from within the preexisting discourses without the possibility of something new *happening*?

Although Derrida does not associate the event with predicates such as absolute singularity or organicity by identifying it in terms of iterability, he nevertheless acknowledges that the performative production of the event entails something new happening, which is not without rupture of the preexisting orders. According to Derrida, the originary performativity has

³⁷ Ibid., p. 163.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 152.

the “force of *rupture* [that] *produces* the institution or the constitution, the law itself.”³⁹ Let us take a look at Derrida’s understanding of the performative’s inaugural power as demonstrated in “Force of Law.”⁴⁰ In deliberating the issue of justice, Derrida distinguishes the concept of law (*droit*) from that of justice. This thesis employs Derrida’s account of inaugural performativity concerning the understanding of justice as Derrida deals with the performative aspects without any fundamental discrimination of the subject matter. Indeed, there are different types of iteration that qualify various kinds of performances. But Derrida does not exclude or privilege any particular domain in discussing a certain predicate of the performative. As the interest of this chapter is in articulating the performative production, we will limit the discussion to addressing the performative inauguration rather than tackling a comprehensive understanding of Derrida’s ethical and political concerns that unfold in the given text.

3.2. The Inaugural Power of the Performative

According to Derrida, the law has been closely associated with justice to the point where, in a conventional sense, abiding by a given law is considered to be a realization of justice. However, Derrida questions this

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 36-37, emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson, trans. Mary Quaintance (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-67.

problematic association by distinguishing the law from justice. The law embodies enforceability, which cannot automatically guarantee justice. The very structure of the law is to enforce its own application. This enforceability is executed regardless of “whether this force be direct or indirect, physical or symbolic, exterior or interior, brutal or subtly discursive and hermeneutic” (FL 6). The force of law in this sense is considered to be legitimate without the laws being questioned, even when there is always a possibility that they will be judged as unjust elsewhere; “the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule” (FL 16). To be able to judge a choice or a situation as just, there must be the possibility of violation or perjury. If there is only a single choice available, of following the enforced law, then there cannot be a judgment of justice at all. Therefore, the force of law in regard to the enforceability of the existing rules does not allow for thinking about justice.

In order to address the notion of justice, Derrida examines another type of force of law. Derrida points to an originary violence that must have been performed in the inauguration of the law, which is unlike the enforceability of law that is already legitimized. According to Derrida, at the point of the foundation or institution of any kind of law, there are no prior criteria to judge whether such a law can be justified. In this sense, “the operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law (*droit*), making law, would consist of a *coup de force*, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence” (FL 13). Derrida identifies the

performative inauguration of law as violence since it does not abide by any given rule and no discourse is available yet to justify it. This act is performative as the instituting utterance, spoken or written, does not describe or designate something that is already available but *does* the making of the laws. According to this line of thought, every law or rule that asserts itself as natural or innately justifiable is essentially without foundation; “they are themselves a violence without ground” (FL 14).

An example of such a performative or interpretative violence is the Declaration of Independence.⁴¹ It is known that the Declaration of Independence was drafted by Thomas Jefferson and signed by fifty-six delegates. The representatives signed for themselves as well as for others, as they were delegated the authority by the people of the independent states. Let us take note of how a supplementary move is at work here: Jefferson is a representative of the delegates, who are in turn representing the “good people” of the United States. According to Derrida, the “good people” who are supposed to have accorded the right to sign to the representatives do not exist prior to the Declaration. The Declaration is what gives birth to the independent subjects as possible signers; “[t]he signature invents the signer. ... There was no signer, by right, before the text of the Declaration, which itself remains the producer and guarantor of its own signature.”⁴² By signing, the “good people” of America invent their identity and declare

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” *Negotiations*, trans. Tom Keenan & Tom Pepper (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 46-54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

themselves entitled to institute the independent states. Within the chain of the representatives of the representatives with no absolutely present grounds, it is not clear whether the Declaration is a statement of an already-obtained independence or a production of it. Derrida argues that this undecidability between the constative and the performative is a requirement to produce the effect of the Declaration. It is a performative inauguration that purports to be a constative; it is an act of inauguration that imposes itself as if it is a simple statement of facts. The Declaration claims to be constative by bringing in the foundation of natural laws and the authority of God. God, in this context, functions as the founder of the natural laws on which the Declaration could be justified. In this way, the Declaration is in “the whole game that tends to present performative utterances, *as* constative utterances.”⁴³ Such a play of performative inauguration shows how, even in the statements that assure its justification, there is always a possibility of another subjectivity coming to the fore, producing its own rights, performatively instituting itself by a *coup de force*.

Taking into account the performative inauguration suggested above, the violence or rupture coincides with the production; the institution of a new rule is at the same time a violence that attests to the instability of the preexisting rules. In order for the production of a new law to be possible, it should be a given that the preexisting rules have been founded the same way, by the inaugural violence of the performative. This means that the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 51.

preconditioned rules are not absolutely justifiable but are something that has been inaugurated performatively. This line of logic holds true not only in the juridical field that Derrida is addressing in this discussion. This is because the juridical field is not separate from others such as those of “ethics, politics, economics, psycho-sociology, philosophy, literature, etc.” (FL 28).

Accordingly, the dynamics of performative violence can be reappropriated in the terrain of writing on art as well.

In sum, the production of an event as elaborated above embodies an ambivalent attitude toward preexisting frameworks. On the one hand, as the singularity of an event resides not in its inherently unique qualities but in the ability to be divided and partake in the shifting frameworks, a performative production does not pertain to a mere ignorance of various—historical, discursive, or philosophical, and so on—strata of the event. In this regard, a performative production of an event is necessarily a recognition or a reading of the singularity that identifies the event as what it is from various dimensions of existing discourse. On the other hand, the performative has the inaugural power to make something new happen, attesting to the instability of the preexisting rules. In this respect, a performative engagement is an invocation of the groundlessness of metaphysical hierarchies as well as a power to inaugurate new laws.

This ambivalence is demonstrated in *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida reflects on his method of reading. In explaining his reading of Rousseau, Derrida contends that respect for the traditional instruments of

criticism is required to a certain extent; without them, a critical production would let itself say almost anything, advancing in all directions. Yet Derrida argues that “this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading” (OG 158, Derrida’s emphasis). Although conventional tools such as critical methodologies and theories serve as a boundary that guides the way of a reading, following them without question would not open other possibilities. Thus, the performative inauguration of the event is an act of recognizing the divided singularity by grafting or resituating the given work in possibilities of contexts in a way that does not entirely succumb to the existing discourses. It is an undertaking that potentiates its ability to be divided and partake in other contexts to open up new links and ways of thinking while acknowledging that the preexisting hierarchical oppositions are not absolutely guaranteed.

Nonetheless, it should also be noted that Derrida is cautious about the inaugural power of the performative since it is capable of giving rise to an institution. This point is especially relevant in writing on art, as illustrated in “Passe-partout,” where Derrida articulates his uneasiness toward preexisting discourses in the regions around art “where one *legislates on the right to painting* by marking the limit, with a slash marking an opposition” (TP 11, emphasis added). The discourse on painting in general, according to Derrida, attempts to enforce the law on painting. They attempt to decide what constitutes or does not constitute a painting by establishing oppositional hierarchies. Although such a move is performative

according to Derrida, the resulting principles claim to be established on a constative structure, as a contribution to uncovering the “truth in painting.” Yet one should take notice of how the seemingly factual and descriptive approaches in discourse are performative in seeking to exercise rights on painting, which is an event that cannot fully be mastered by discourse. This understanding calls for a way not to absolutize or privilege the existing theories while potentiating new approaches to come.

3.3 The Performative Production as Interpretation

As articulated above, the Derridian notion of the performative produces the event in a sense different from the speech act theory. The singularity of the event is not ensured by the presence and the total context but by the ability to be split and cut from its original context and to be identifiable as singular within various contexts. Yet it is impossible to obtain a full grasp of the event with the preexisting frameworks, as it is something that defies the orders and happens beyond what is possible. The inaugural force of the performative gives way to this unthinkable event, which in turn introduces the limit in the seemingly natural and inherent conventional rules. Such an observation demands a different understanding of “production” as well. If the singularity of the event pertains not to an absolute originality but is made possible by the ability to be cut off from its determining presence, the productivity of the singular event would not consist of a pure creativity; “interpretive reading does not create just any meaning *ex nihilo* and without

prior rule” (LI 148). Also, as the event is no longer articulated as an organic unity, and the performative inauguration entails a break in the preexisting rules, the productivity does not pertain to a procedure of rendering explicit a meaning that is unified and already given.

Let us recall that Derrida directly mentions how the performative produces the event in “Passe-partout” where he discusses the performative engagement with art. What does it mean for a *textual* performance to produce an event? Given the alterations undertaken on the notion of the event, in what way is the performative engagement with art productive? It should be noted, as hinted above, that Derrida suggests that a performative force is an *interpretative* force and that a performative violence is also an *interpretative* violence (FL 13). Recognizing the role of the interpretation in this sense will help address these questions.

As noted previously, the performative institution of law is violent because it lacks the anterior conditions with which one could decide whether or not it is just. Without an absolute justification, it is “founded, constructed on *interpretable* and transformable *textual strata*” (FL 14, emphasis added). There is no absolute grounds or authority to regulate an institution of an unprecedented law. This very groundlessness opens up the possibility of an inaugural performative. The performative operates within this condition of unconditionality, working its way through the *textual strata*. The logic of the supplement, as examined in the Chapter 2, implies that the transcendent referent has the structure of infinite supplementarity, from

which meaning is possible only by differing from itself. While the absolute presence has already escaped, or never existed, the real supervenes only from a certain reading, or in an interpretive experience; it means that “every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretive experience” (LI 148). To put it otherwise, the interpretative experience yields or assumes meaning by intervening into the movement of differential referring on which the reality is conceived. In this sense, an interpretation has the power to transform and displace conceptual orders.⁴⁴

Although the existing orders of concepts or discourses may seem stable, these are only relatively and tentatively stable because they are possible only from within the differential system. Also, conventions or institutions that attempt to maintain their tentative stabilization instead attest to their instability: “since convention, institutions and consensus are stabilizations . . . , this means that they are stabilizations of something essentially unstable and chaotic.”⁴⁵ An important implication of this relative stability, or the instability that the conventions imply, is that it provides “a

⁴⁴ In articulating the performative inauguration in *Limited Inc.* and “Force of Law,” Derrida expresses uneasiness in employing the term “power” or “force” and attempts to qualify it. According to Derrida, one has to have in mind the following two conditions when using the term “force” or “power”: A. One should acknowledge that there are only *differences*, qualitative as well as quantitative, of power. When it comes to force, it is always a matter of “the differential character of force” (FL 7). B. Taking into account the qualitative difference of power, one should recognize how the force that is ostensibly greater than others can be, in some other sense or context, in fact weaker (LI 149).

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism,” *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 86.

chance, a chance to change, to destabilize.”⁴⁶ An interpretation involves an engagement with the differential system upon which the conventions are established. In this sense, the performative interpretation is “an interpretation that *transforms* the very thing it interprets.”⁴⁷ It is not confined to only indicating the inherent qualities of the work it is addressing, but also transforms it.

Given this understanding of interpretation, where does interpretation stand in terms of the work that it is reading? The performative production is always an interpretation or a reading, if “reading” is not understood in the sense of deciphering a given meaning. Derrida raises the stakes for interpretation when he attributes singularity not only to the artwork but also to a reading of it. In discussing the task of criticism, Derrida points out how the interpretation or reading of the artwork is as singular as the work that is read: “There is as it were a duel of singularities, a duel of writing and reading” (AL 69). In this dynamic, interpretation of a work is an invention of another singularity that even risks betraying the original work. Furthermore, Derrida contends that “[t]he performativity ... calls for the same responsibility on the part of the readers” (AL 51). A reading is not to be satisfied with merely a doubling of what the original says—repeating after the artist’s intention or stating facts about the art’s presence—nor falling back as recourse on existing frameworks that claim to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 63.

be stable and natural based on the premises of the metaphysics of presence. As there are no prior criteria to confirm the singular interpretation, there is no guarantee that a certain interpretation is a complete mastery of the work in question. As the event cannot be considered to be containing a unified and fixed meaning, dominating the situation and translating the event without remainder is an impossible task. In this sense, a work and a reading of it operate parallel to each other without one dominating or claiming to master the other. And as the interpretation cannot prepare for a contract with the work in advance, let alone simply apply the preexisting methods, the interpretation is essentially an endless task. Thus, interpretation as performative production does not generate something out of nothing. Rather, it engages with the differential economy on which reality is based and transforms it, ultimately unsettling the preexisting rules and conventions.

Chapter 4. Reading “+R” as Performative Engagement

To put it simply, “+R” is a writing on the artworks—the drawings and paintings—of Valerio Adami. However, it does not abide by the preexisting conventions of art criticism proper or theoretical discussion, which are considered privileged forms of writing on art. It does not faithfully describe the artwork, inform the readers of the artist’s intentions, or elaborate the immediate context of the works’ production.⁴⁸ Also, it does not commit itself to applying a certain theoretical framework or establishing new concepts or methodology. These traits are perhaps the reason why “+R” has been largely overlooked in the literature concerning Derrida’s writing on art as well as in the discourse on critical art writing.⁴⁹ Moreover, the

⁴⁸ Although art criticism encompasses a variety of styles and approaches, Feldman’s four-step method of visual art criticism is commonly taken as a standard approach. It consists of a sequential process of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. Accordingly, Derrida’s texts, including “+R,” are not considered relevant cases of art criticism in texts on critical methodology. See Edmund Burke Feldman, *Practical Art Criticism* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1994) and Terry Barret, *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994).

⁴⁹ Among the profuse literature on Derrida’s understanding of art, there are only few examples that deal with “+R.” See Laurence Simmons, “Drawing Has Always Been More than Drawing: Derrida and *disegno*,” *Interstices 11: The Traction of Drawing* (*Interstices Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*: 10), pp. 114-124; Renée Riese Hubert, “Derrida, Dupin, Adami: Il faut être plusieurs pour écrire,” *Yale French Studies*. No. 84 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 242-264; Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield, “The Performativity of Art,” *Performatives After Deconstruction*. ed. Mauro Senatore (Bloomsbury Studies in Continental Philosophy, 2013), pp. 169-185. Although these research works are each fruitful in their own distinct ways, they tend to focus on the artwork of Adami and reference “+R” to supplement the discussion rather than observe Derrida’s textual engagement. Dronsfield is exceptionally on point in focusing on the notion of the performative in discussing Derrida’s understanding of art. However, he assigns the attribute of performativity mainly to the artwork and does not address “+R” directly as performative writing.

fragmented style of writing makes it more difficult to be read or taken “seriously.”⁵⁰ However, what if Derrida is not looking to describe or inform, but do something else? The qualities elaborated above do not imply that “+R” is any less significant or pertinent. Understanding the Derridian notion of the performative provides a missing link in the attempt to understand what Derrida is doing, or performing, in “+R.” Once “+R” is recognized as a performative engagement, the reason for its unpopularity is, if anything, a motive for reading it all the more.

But why “+R”? To be clear, “+R” is not Derrida’s only textual engagement with art. Derrida’s understanding of the performative, as examined in the previous chapters, does not amount to a classificatory or evaluative concept but opens a new terrain for writing on art. The qualifications of the redirected notion of the performative—a general iterability, the supplementary structure, and production of the event—do not

⁵⁰ According to Rorty, Derrida’s later works are “more eccentric, personal and original” enterprises as opposed to his early works that delve into the traditional subjects of Western philosophy by engaging with the works of Husserl and Heidegger among others, with *Glas* and *The Truth in Painting* as the threshold (Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 122). Rorty is, up to a point, accurate in observing that Derrida’s later writings do not follow the preexisting rules or add up to an identifiable methodology. The move to identify Derrida as a private thinker is due to his firm belief that a refutation or subversion of logocentrism is yet another form of logocentrism. In this sense, “private fantasy,” an attribute Rorty ascribes to Derrida’s later oeuvres, is a compliment; “I take refutation to be a mark of unoriginality, and I value Derrida’s originality too much to praise him in those terms” (Rorty, “Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?” *Essays on Heidegger and others* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 120). Although Rorty is precise in remarking how Derrida escapes the metaphysical traditions, such an evaluation undercuts Derrida’s undertaking of undermining the metaphysical presuppositions in various fields of discussion, including writing on art. Also, Rorty is basing his version of Derrida on a strict distinction between the public and the private, assigning theory to the former while thrusting other possibilities to the latter when Derrida is precisely questioning this logic that leads to dismissing a certain text for not being serious or rigorous.

apply exclusively to a particular text; in a sense, all texts are essentially performative (LI 69). However, “+R” is exemplary because it shows what art writing would be like when the Derridian notion of the performative is taken “seriously” as a positive condition of engaging with art. In “+R,” the conditions of the performative are carefully considered and performatively demonstrated. It is a text that does not base itself on a mission to extenuate presence but rather embraces the radical absence as the very possibility of doing something—navigating, interpreting, transforming, producing effects, and so on. This consideration is not manifested by means of explicit indications and arguments but in a language that does what it says. Such a performance would provide a challenge to the conventions surrounding art writing in general, especially regarding the metaphysical presuppositions that are maintained willingly or unwittingly. This is why I prefer to read “+R” as a performative “engagement”: to underscore its active quality and effects instead of bringing in an indication of a dogmatic judgment or a confidence in unveiling the unified meaning that the category of “critique” or “commentary” is at times associated with.

Overall, “+R” does not limit itself to the delivery of semantic content but performs its condition of possibility that in turn destabilizes the metaphysical presuppositions regarding writing on art. Although the context of art writing involves various elements, the presence of the artwork, the artist’s intention, and preexisting discourse are the elements that are considered to be prominent. Consistent with all art writing, “+R” is in

relation with these elements. However, as it considers the reconfigured understanding of the performative as its positive condition, its relationship with these elements is not like that of the conventional approaches. As Derrida reconfigures the notion of the performative, “+R” rethinks metaphysical premises of the given elements and displaces their status, suspending them from being absolutized. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine how the performative engagement unfolds in “+R” with a focus on the three major elements of art writing: the material features of the artwork, the intention of the artist, and preexisting discourses. This analysis cannot be a comprehensive one that deals with “+R” in its entirety as “+R” is structured to escape such an overview. Therefore, I focus on how an understanding of the Derridian performative structures art writing and in what ways “+R” performs on the resituated terrain of writing on art.

4.1. Performatively Describing the Artwork

Describing an artwork is an important step in art writing. In the conventional sense, a description is considered a lexical indication of pictorial elements of the artwork.⁵¹ Such a preconception pertains to the metaphysical assumptions that privilege the artwork as being present in itself and inherently unique in its presence while reducing writing’s

⁵¹ Feldman argues that description attends to visual facts, which guarantee art criticism’s much-needed objectivity. The physical features are direct information that anyone can see without any preconceptions. In this sense, words are employed “to name or identify the things we can see,” thus amounting to acts similar to “decoding ciphers in cryptography, or sounding out letters and pronouncing words in reading.” See Edmund Feldman, *Practical Art Criticism* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1994), pp. 25-27.

operation into a neutral account of the artwork. Also, the descriptive stage in this sense relies heavily on the viewer's present and immediate experience of perceiving the artwork with a preconception that this such sensorial encounter is simply objective. To stress this point, Bennington goes as far as to mention that "[a]esthetics in general is mortgaged to sensory perception."⁵² However, Derrida's understanding of the performative is based on the contention that iterability, which takes effect in the absolute *absence* of the sender and the receiver, is the condition of all language as well as experiences in general, including encountering an event of an artwork. As differential structures condition the artwork and the experience of the artwork, as discussed in Chapter 3, the presence of the artwork is already divided and associated with various layers of the art world. Accordingly, in order for something to be singular, it has to be recognized as such by means of a reading that recognizes it. As such, a description does not merely follow the absolute presence of the artwork and the immediate experience of it, but it is already a recognition that makes up the singularity of the work. As Bennington succinctly suggests, "don't make too much of iterability and ideality on the side of writing, singularity and materiality on the side of painting" (D 6).

In this sense, the artworks are constituted by elements that are identified in alterity while a description of an artwork cannot simply be a

⁵² Geoffrey Bennington, "Aesthetics Interrupted: the Art of Deconstruction," *The Oxford Literary Review*. 36.1 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 22.

faithful verbal representation of a pictorial presence. It should also be noted that the distinction between the performative and constative is unstable according to Derrida's understanding. In the orthodox speech act theory, description, by definition, belongs to the constative, which is ascribed with the role of stating facts. A valid description, in the constative sense, would involve an accurate and thorough depiction of the object or situation at hand. However, as elaborated in Chapter 2, the constative is not limited to referential verification but embodies a performative aspect, essentially asking to be trusted that the signatory is accurate in her/his depiction. Understood in this light, descriptions are not simply neutral translations of the pictorial elements but rather involve certain choices, and ask to be believed and persuaded in these choices. Accordingly, a description of an artwork is already an interpretation of it, transforming the work from the textual strata.

Taking into consideration this line of thought as a positive condition, Derrida does not attempt to be rigorous and encompassing in his textual sketch of the artwork. Descriptions of Adami's artworks in "+R" are not limited to referring to material features of the work but already include an interpretive dimension. Derrida's text performs this point with a description that is already imbued with a perspective. Let us examine the passages where Derrida describes the artwork:

"In this very place, you see, he has forced a frame. He has stripped it and turned it, working relentlessly to dislocate its angles, rummaging in its corners, *A tergo*, letting you think that one could turn around it, go on a

tour of the property, go behind specular reproduction” (TP 152).

“Fished out of *Glas*, pulled up above the sea, out of its element, a sentence seems to last, both continue and cut itself off: first of all in itself, from left to right, breaking its own movement and then reconstituting itself, with a leap above the binding, above the domestic margins or the articulation ‘What both cuts me off and prompts me with all the rest’ is thus written and read, performs itself in cutting off and prompting all the rest, *in the process* of doing what it says it is doing, of drawing what it is *in the process* of writing” (TP 157, Derrida’s emphasis).

The first passage describes a drawing called *Study for a Drawing after Glas* [fig 1], where Adami has drawn a frame around the rectangular plain.

Although this passage is the first paragraph that enters into this drawing, it does not provide a general overview of the picture. Instead, it focuses on a specific feature—the frame and double-sidedness—with more than a mere indication of its material aspect. With this passage, Derrida is already alluding to a thinking that involves a certain framing, which will be examined later in this chapter.

The next passage is about another drawing that is also called *Study for a Drawing after Glas* [fig 2]. This drawing features a fish hanging from a hook, situated on a plain with a vertical line that looks like a spring that would hold together the pages of a sketchbook, and a horizontal line that sags to the right as it cuts through the vertical line. There are words from Derrida’s *Glas*⁵³ on it, although many parts are cut off at the margins. The passage quoted above intricately superimposes the image of the fish that is

⁵³ *Glas* by Jacques Derrida was first published in French (Paris: Édition Galilée, 1974) and translated into English (trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). *Glas* is organized in two columns, each in different font size. To the left, Derrida wrote on Hegel, and to the right, Jean Genet.

held halfway up in the air by the hook with the inscriptions that are barely contained within the four spaces.

As such, descriptions of the artwork in “+R” are inseparable from interpretations of it. The description cannot rigorously be a constative, but already incorporates performative aspects. It pertains to performances such as accentuating certain visual aspects, prompting critical questions, and resisting certain traditions of art and writing, etc. The accompaniment of the description and interpretation is a general condition of writing, yet “+R” takes this condition further and pushes its potential by deliberately doing both at once. In turn, it displaces the seemingly strict distinction between the immediate presence of the artwork and the language imbued with the task of faithfully translating the image.

4. 2. Mutual Betrayal: Adami and Derrida

Derrida’s understanding of the performative allows one to consider the relationship between Adami and Derrida, or the artist and the critic in general, under a different light. In order to examine the relationship between the artist and the writer, let us continue the discussion of the dynamics between art and writing that began with Derrida’s descriptions, this time from a different angle. As examined in Chapter 2, verbal and extraverbal acts both exist within the supplementary chain without one subordinating the other. The same could be said about art and writing. When it comes to writing on art, as the preposition “on” suggests, writing is often regarded as

secondary or exterior to the immediate presence of art. Accordingly, an artwork is considered to engender a singular event while writing on it is merely a support that describes and elaborates it. However, writing's status as a supplement to the artwork takes on an ambivalence. On the one hand, writing is *additive* to the presence of an artwork, which does not speak for itself. Writing is only added as an extra to the plenitude of the artwork. On the other hand, it is only when writing comes along to supplement for the artwork that the latter assumes the meaning that is produced by the writing. In this sense, writing substitutes the artwork, taking the place of the latter's immediate presence. These significations co-exist; the relation between the two is not bound by a rigid opposition that ends up celebrating one at the expense of the other. They are both within the system of the supplementary chain with no defining center to stop their dynamic. Derrida explores this condition of writing by deliberately betraying Adami: "*in order to betray Adami, to be traitor to his travail, I would let myself be framed*" (TP 151, Derrida's emphasis). How does Derrida betray Adami? What does it mean to betray the artist by being framed himself?

To be clear, Derrida does acknowledge Adami as the creator of the works that he is engaging with, and he invokes a few characteristics of Adami's style such as the frequent appearance of machines and crosses, as well as his angular handwriting. However, Derrida does not examine Adami's intentions or motives behind the drawings. No personal background of Adami is provided and none of the artist's words are

delivered in the text. Instead, only the artist as framed by Derrida is available. From the text, we have no way of knowing if Adami would agree with Derrida's daring framing, and Derrida does not strive to approximate his reading with Adami's intentions. Such a limited interest in the intention of the artist attests to how Derrida's writing situates intentionality. If Adami had abandoned his intentions clearly, would his works be as clearly understandable?⁵⁴ Yet even if we had access to Adami's statement of intentions, it could not have served as the governing center of the artwork's meaning. As the examination of Cézanne's promise from Chapter 2 demonstrates, the intention is always already divided and suspended; it cannot be enclosed to a single meaning as it requires further translations. Although Derrida does not argue that the intention of the artist should not be taken into account, he nevertheless performs transgressions regardless of the artist to put into effect the very condition of writing: the absolute absence of the addressor. The following are passages from "+R" that exemplify Derrida's betrayal that structures the text:

"For example in the fish drawing which I shall baptize *Ich: without the author's authorization, in order to take it from him in turn and hold it at the end of my line*, with an apparently simple line, without a reel, without the interposed machine..." (TP 157, emphasis added).

"The treachery of this translation or transcription, the transpassing, the trance or the tragedy of *Ich*, the transpiercings, trunks, trepannings, the

⁵⁴ Despite the distance Derrida maintains from Adami in "+R," *Study for a Drawing after Glas* was in fact the outcome of a close collaboration between Derrida and Adami. They had been in communication before and after the creation of the work. However, such encounters between the two are not clearly stated in "+R." See Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*. trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge & Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2013), pp. 264-266.

tréma or the ex-tra which interest Adami have apparently no linguistic or semantic affinity with what I say I'm doing when I try to trick on a hairbreadth, when I *tringle*..., when I travail, tremble or become troubled while writing..." (TP 171).

How is this kind of betrayal possible? As quoted earlier, Derrida betrays Adami, framing the artist in his performance, only by being framed by the artist as well. On *Study for a Drawing after Glas* [fig 1] is written a passage from Derrida's *Glas*. One cannot completely make out the quotation, as the words are truncated and cut in the middle by the frame that Adami has drawn in. Words from *Glas* are written in the fish drawing [fig 2] as well, dispersed in four divided spaces. Derrida considers these quotations as a kind of reading of *Glas*, if reading is not understood in the sense of deciphering the meaning behind the text; the drawing is framing Derrida's text in a certain way. In a sense, Adami has already betrayed Derrida in advance and Derrida underscores it as in the following:

"At the point of this text (general text...), the angular signature of Adami was waiting for me. A stupefying *advance*, and one made simultaneously on all fronts (historical, theoretical, formal, political, etc.). So I yielded, even before knowing it, *as if I were read in advance*, written before writing, prescribed, seized, trapped, hooked. And then it was my business. Making me speak, *it was putting me in the wrong* but it was too late and that will have taught me a lesson" (TP 156-157, emphasis added).

For Derrida to be able to frame or interpret Adami in a certain way, a system that allows this betrayal should already be at work, and Derrida is not exempt from it.⁵⁵ In this regard, Derrida could read or betray Adami so long

⁵⁵ This point is relevant regarding the common misunderstanding of the "deconstructive" approach to art. Feldman delivers his discontent regarding a rather misconceived idea of Derrida's deconstruction by stating that "[d]econstruction tends to be annoying because it is

as it is possible for Derrida himself to be betrayed with his text open for framing even against his intentions. As Derrida considers the possibility of betrayal as the condition for his reading of Adami's works, he does not lay claims to the inscriptions within the drawings, consistent with his inattention to Adami's intentions. Although Derrida is the author of *Glas*, from which Adami draws the quotation, he neither explains what he meant in the context of *Glas* nor attempts to fill in the missing parts. Derrida lets himself be framed by Adami in the drawing that quotes Derrida's words out of their original context. Such an abandonment of his own text to Adami's framing speaks as loudly about his consideration of the possibility of his text to be cited in a different context, or iterability, as the condition of writing. Any sentence from *Glas*, or any other writings by Derrida, can be cited or iterated elsewhere without permission of the author, even in a drawing, and that is what conditions *Glas*. Keeping himself from defending the original by bringing back the initial context—it is doubtful if the initial context could be exhaustively determined—is a way of performing the relation of mutual betrayal that conditions the engagement with the artwork. As the mutual betrayal constitutes a structural condition, the performance of framing is open for more traitors to come.

the critic, not the artist, who defines the work or text to be interpreted. Thus the meaning of the work changes according to the critic's needs, and no final or authoritative reading is possible" (*Practical Art Criticism*, p. 17). However, Derrida's notion of the performative considers iterability as the condition of possibility not only for the artist but also for the writer to be betrayed. The arbitrariness of meaning does not give a complete authority to the writer to decide on the meaning of the artwork, but prevents such an exercise of definitive right.

4. 3. Rethinking Discourse: To Remain Heterogeneous

Derrida's understanding of the performative resituates the status of preexisting discourses. As examined in Chapter 3, the ambivalent aspects of the performative production of the event lead to a double gesture toward theories. On the one hand, as the singularity of the event is recognized by virtue of its ability to partake in various frameworks, preexisting discourses cannot be discarded. On the other hand, as the inaugural power of the performative attests to the groundlessness of the given rules, no discourse in particular can be absolutized. Given this tension, how does "+R" treat discourse?

Throughout "+R" and "Passe-partout," Derrida consistently presents a critical view toward the discourse on art. According to Derrida, discourses on painting tend to establish limits and oppositions; "there is for them [discourses] an inside and an outside of the work as soon as there is work" (TP 11). Derrida's criticism of the preexisting discourse is directed not toward theoretical frameworks per se, but toward such discourse's dogmatic assumptions that the boundaries it establishes are indivisible, and toward its insistence on dominating the painting. As examined in Chapters 1 and 2, Derrida uncovers how the metaphysics of presence has privileged presence and excluded absence as a menace or derivation when the latter is the condition of the possibility of the former. By the same token, Derrida is critical of the conventional theoretical approaches to art that establish

oppositions and privileges, one at the expense of the other, when the two axes are not in fact strictly separable but operate within the supplementary chain.

Accordingly, Derrida considers discourses on art to be “didactic and incantatory, programed, worked by the *compulsion of mastery*” (TP 155, emphasis added). Such a desire for mastery only allows two kinds of relationships between discourse and painting. On the one hand, a painting is a presence to which no language is sufficient: “a stranger to all discourse, doomed to the presumed mutism of ‘the-thing-itself,’ restores, in authoritarian silence, an order of presence” (TP 156). On the other hand, a painting corresponds to the conventional frameworks and “reproduces virtually an old language” (TP 156). Derrida considers both types as essentially the same. They are both based on a kind of language that institutes rules to subordinate painting; the former accounts for a failure of language while the latter indicates a success. However, Derrida suggests another kind of language, one that “does without or goes beyond this language, remaining heterogeneous to it or denying it any overview” (TP 155). Derrida attempts to perform this other kind of language in “+R” to open up “what happens *before* the difference becomes opposition” (TP 11). Then how is this critical view on preexisting discourse performed in “+R”?

Overall, “+R” is structured in a way that defies an overview with transgressions and irregularities. It begins abruptly, with the conjunction “et” (French word for “and”) in small letters, and finishes just as suddenly

with the word “auto-portrait” without a period in the end. The first sentence—“and what if, resonance in this other language still leading you astray, I liked words *in order to be-tray* (to treat, triturate, trice, in-trigue, trace, track)” (TP 151, Derrida’s emphasis)—refers to a certain “language” with the pronoun “this” as if it has already been dealt with, as if a discussion has already begun prior to his writing. Throughout the text, there are irregularities in the intervals between paragraphs, seemingly precipitous shifts from subject to subject, and deviations even within the same paragraph. Although these attributes may trigger the conclusion that this text does not constitute a serious type of discourse, “+R” performs to question the strict boundary that discourse in the conventional sense imposes. Transgressions in orthography shown in the beginning and end allude to Derrida’s recognition that there can be no absolute beginning or ending when it comes to writing on art. There is no such thing as an absolutely proper way to begin the discussion, as the context involved in the artwork is incapable of enclosing the meaning of the artwork. Thus, no matter how thorough an essay might be, it necessarily falls short of a mastery of the work, allowing no legitimate ending without remainders; all endings are only tentative. This acknowledgement of the inability to dominate the context or to master the artwork without remainder structures the text, hence a writing that escapes the grasp of the conventional categories and frameworks. Instead of simply presenting a clear-cut argument, “+R” performs this general condition of art writing by entering the discussion as if

it had already been ongoing, and leaving the ending open as if it awaits further discussions to come.

As such, “+R” performs with diverse elements to remain heterogeneous to the discourse that imposes its limits. Among many such gestures, there are the elements of “gl” and “tr.” Among the truncated words drawn in the fish drawing [fig 2], Derrida focuses on the letters “gl” which are found right above the horizontal line, drawn within the fish’s body. Cut out from a word, “gl” is neither a word nor a morpheme, and it is barely pronounceable. “Gl” is not reduced to a simple form of a drawing as the letters are recognizable, immediately bringing along the system of language. Nor is it a logogram, as it does not constitute a specific word. It “splits with one blow [*d’un coup*], like the fish, both language and the picture” (TP 160). As the fish in the drawing is resistant to the fisher who attempts to bring it out of the water, “gl” does not succumb to the regulations that distinguish word from non-word, and the graphic from the linguistic.

“*Gl* does not belong to discourse, no more does it belong to space, and nothing certifies the past or future of such a belonging. ... A rebel to appeased commerce, to the regulated exchange of the two elements (lexical and pictural), close to piercing a hole in the *arthron* of discursive writing and representational painting, is this not a wild, almost unnarratable event?” (TP 160)

Derrida also launches a play with “tr” which, like “gl,” is neither a word nor a form. “Tr” resembles the title of the essay—“+r”—if seen as graphic lines while also functioning as letters that could compose a word with other letters. It escapes the dogmatic distinctions as it belongs neither to the

lexical nor to the pictural. So far, the attributes of “tr” are similar to “gl.” However, Derrida takes a step further with “tr” as he performs the possible transformations to demonstrate how language that does not succumb to the dogmatic oppositions operates. The following provides an idea of how “tr” works.

“... *tr* represents, imitates nothing, only engraves a differential trace, therefore no longer a formless cry, it does not yet belong to the lexicon, it does not yet allow itself to be domesticated by an appeased verb, it initiates and breaches [*fraye*] an entirely different body. So don't stop at that. Although it is not a transcendental (semantic or formal) element, *tr* gives itself up to analysis. Like any transformable conglomerate” (TP 174).

“The treachery of this translation or transcription, the transpassing, the trance or the tragedy of *Ich*, the transpiercings, trunks, trepannings, the *tréma* or the ex-tra which interest Adami have apparently no linguistic or semantic affinity with what I say I'm doing when I try to trick on a hairbreadth, when I *tringle*..., when I travail, tremble or become troubled while writing, treading the floating body of a ferry crossing a river, tracking down the beast, trailing my metallic line in the water, fishing from a trawler, with a trammel net, a trellis.” (TP 171)

As noted in the first passage, “tr” does not have any semantic value and escapes the grasp of discourse as its identity is not present in itself. However, “tr” does not stay completely incomprehensible as demonstrated in the second passage, where it is densely employed; by grafting onto other elements, it shows a variety of possible transformations of itself. “Tr” links up to other elements to make a word but even in such a case, it is not quite captured as it could just as easily transform into yet another word with a completely different meaning. As such, the identity of “tr” is never present in itself and is only identified in its alterity. In this sense, this enigmatic

element is put to effect by virtue of iterability. The logic of iterability—repetition in alterity—is at work when “tr” partakes in countless possibilities without being domesticated to a particular signification or to preconceived frameworks. Throughout “+R,” the transformations of “tr” take place at times prominently and at others subtly. The transformations of “tr” allow us a new outlook on discourse. The possibility of discourse is not in asserting a concept that attempts to capture and dominate its subject, but in the ability to navigate through various contexts, acquiring its identity in diverse sets of possible relations. In this sense, “+R” is not so much a discourse on art that educates us on how to understand Adami’s artworks in a certain way than a passageway that mobilizes its possibilities.

In this regard, the performance of “+R” throws a critical light on certain traditions of theories of interpretation. Theories of interpretation such as intentionalism and formalism are under scrutiny as they postulate particular elements—intention or formal structure—as the fundamental grounds for interpretation.⁵⁶ Despite their differences, intentionalism and formalism both presuppose that an artwork’s unified meaning is already given and assign the role of discovering it with accuracy to interpretation. A criticism is appropriate or valid when such a task is accomplished more successfully than others, as there can only be one interpretation that is true, as opposed to other incompatible, and therefore false, interpretations. In this

⁵⁶ Jinyup Kim, “Foundationalist Theories of Interpretation: Intentionalism and Formalism,” *Seoul National University the Journal of Humanities Vol. 37* (Seoul: Seoul National University Institute of Humanities, 1997), pp. 81-97.

sense, the fundamentalist approach to writing presupposes the constative structure of language; writing is to indicate the predetermined meaning and it can be evaluated in terms of its truth value. As elaborated in the previous chapters, such an approach is imbued with a metaphysical desire for mastery of the artwork. It is based on the confidence that an artwork could be reduced to a particular framework and ultimately denies the artwork of other potential meanings.

Then, does “+R” serve as an alternative model of interpretation or art criticism? Many art critics believe that the role of art criticism is essentially to judge a work of art.⁵⁷ However, “+R” does not provide any determinate standard that a critic may employ to address an artwork. Although this does not mean that Derrida is precluding the evaluative function of art criticism, Derrida is cautious of its dangers and calls on a certain responsibility of a writer instead of resting on a methodology or theory that leads to a finalized interpretation. An evaluative standpoint requires preceding principles with which a critic approaches artworks.

⁵⁷ Elkins sums up the current status of art criticism as “almost completely ignored” and points to its lack of judgment for the main reason. Elkins’ recapitulation of the terrain of art criticism is relevant and on point, and his push for more “ambition” that does not amount to high modernism is noteworthy. Also, although Elkins demands more rigor in the evaluative function of criticism, his analysis and solutions are not antithetical but are rather in line with the lessons to be drawn from “+R.” Elkins attempts to find a way to address art that leans neither toward the “unwanted convictions that possessed Greenburg” nor to “positionless position—the theory of theorylessness” (p. 95). In particular, Elkins’ conviction that a positionless effort nevertheless implies a certain position is parallel to Derrida’s understanding that a constative language considered to be neutral is essentially performative. In this sense, the performative writing demonstrated in “+R” is not at all in opposition to the contemporary demands of art criticism but provides a fruitful point for deliberation. See James Elkins, “On the Absence of Judgment in Art Criticism,” *The State of Art Criticism* (New York & London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 71-96.

Accordingly, the critic deprives oneself of the openness to the singular event of the artwork based on presupposed standards, at times excluding works that seem irrelevant to one's own critical agenda. For example, if a writer decides in advance to evaluate a work of art in terms of its formal structures, this necessarily excludes other possibilities, and moreover it ends up privileging the works that fit into a particular program.⁵⁸ With this caution in mind, "+R" does not provide preliminary criteria or standards to criticize artworks. In sum, "+R" does not add up to a particular model of art criticism in the conventional sense.

Then why should one read "+R" with care in consideration of art criticism? Although "+R" may not appear to contribute another model of criticism, it challenges the conventions of writing on art that are imbued with the metaphysics of presence, and it questions what criticality is in critical engagement with artwork. As the singularity of an artwork is recognized from a particular reading, a writer necessarily frames the artwork in a certain way. However, one has to write knowing that the text s/he is writing cannot master the artwork and that her/his interpretation could always be overturned in another context. This condition of writing on art accounts for a certain anxiety that a writer encounters when approaching a

⁵⁸ Barret pointed out the possible risks in terms of the relationship between the writer and the artist as follows: "To judge is to risk the possibility of being demeaning to the artist by assuming a superior role or attitude. Such an approach will likely set you against artists, and them against you, in an antagonistic way" (Terry Barret, *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994), p. 147).

work of art.⁵⁹ A writer writes with the acknowledgement that any theoretical support s/he relies on, or any endeavor s/he dares, is only provisional. With uncertainty, a critic stands before an artwork, which is an event that can never be completely articulated without remainder. The responsibility of a critic would be thus to determine a singular way to account for the artwork while maintaining an appropriate openness that does not merely fall into a blunt ignorance of preexisting contexts and discourses.

In sum, the performative writing questions the conventional approaches to art without being reduced to a general methodology of criticism. It should be noted with care that such an understanding is not demonstrated in a language that states the arguments based on the belief that a statement or a line of rigorous argumentation delivers the intended meaning of the writer. Instead, Derrida's writing *performs* another way of engaging with the artwork that does not restrict itself to only indicating a unified meaning. Writing performatively produces a singular event of which interpretation could be one action by situating the work in different contexts and significations; Derrida's performative writing, in particular, performs a recognition of the artwork's singularity without privileging any particular criteria as the determining center, implies the openness of artworks to other

⁵⁹ In articulating Derrida's deconstructive reading in terms of art criticism, Biro elaborates a writer's anxiety as follows: "The writer's *anxiety* at the moment when he attempts to write is thus the result of his knowledge of the '*pure equivocality*' of meaning which subtends his endeavors—the knowledge that what he inscribes could always have turned out differently." (Matthew Biro, "Art Criticism and Deconstruction: Rosalind Krauss and Jacques Derrida," *Art Criticism*. Volume 6, No. 2. (New York: State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1990), p. 41, emphasis added.)

performances to come, and challenges the conventional approaches that attempt to exhaustively determine an artwork's meaning according to a particular principle.

Conclusion: Art Writing after “+R”

The main goal of this thesis was to understand the Derridian notion of the performative and to read “+R” as a performative engagement with art. The first three chapters were devoted to the former while the last chapter attempted to do the latter. What have we learned about the performative and art writing through this examination? Let us briefly recapitulate what has been discussed before proceeding to the ramifications of this research in general.

Derrida questions the metaphysical presuppositions of Austin’s concept of the performative despite Austin’s recognition of language’s operation as other than mere transference of a thought-content. In the classical speech act theory, a performance of an utterance is ensured and evaluated according to a total context that is governed by the present intentionality. The performative in this sense adheres to the communication of a unified meaning within a determinable context. Based on these presuppositions, a text like “+R” is nonsensical or without truth as it neither provides precise information nor makes clear-cut arguments. However, this is exactly the risk it takes to make a “serious” point in the most non-serious way. In his transformation of the notion, Derrida maintains the basic definition of the performative, that it *does* something, while questioning its conditions and reconfiguring it in terms of iterability, the logic of the supplement, and the production of the event. Derrida proposes the ability to

be repeated in alterity—iterability—as the condition of the possibility of language in general. The general iterability, however, is also an impossibility of the purity of meaning; it engenders identity only insofar as an element is cut off from its original context and grafted onto another, ultimately deferring its absolute presence. Based on this condition, the performative operates within a supplementary structure where the meaning of a promise, for example, is not simply ensured by the content of the promise. The content of the promise, as another performative, is what makes the performance possible, and it is determined by yet another performative, amounting to an infinite suspension where polysemy can never be reduced. In light of the infinite chain of supplements at work in the performative, what was considered to be derivative and secondary is rediscovered as originary. By the same token, the thing itself that is supposedly capable of putting a stop to this supplementary move is infinitely deferred. In this regard, the performative production of the event does not indicate a generation of something *ex nihilo*. Rather, it consists of a recognition or an interpretation of the singularity that is shaped not by its inherent qualities alone, but in relation to various contexts. However, this does not lead to conforming to preexisting theoretical frameworks. The inaugural power of the performative exercised at the moment of a law's establishment evinces the essential groundlessness of any type of law, including principles that are often employed in art writing. Although the norms and conventions regarding writing on art are largely taken for granted, their inauguration is

essentially an arbitrary institution since there were no criteria to judge their legitimacy prior to their establishment.

However, it is true that Derrida starts to express a certain doubt on the logic of the performative in his later works concerning the performative's inaugural power. In "Performative Powerlessness,"⁶⁰ Derrida points out that the performative, as a language that produces events, "also gives rise to institutions."⁶¹ By institution, Derrida indicates not only social structures but also any set of rules, protocols, or programs that organize events and ultimately render them predictable and legitimate. As examined in Derrida's distinction between law and justice, one cannot do *justice* to the subject matter simply by following the given norms and conventions. The inaugural power of the performative as an interpretive violence runs the risk of introducing new rules and programs to follow, producing conditions that are themselves a limit to justice. Furthermore, as there must be a certain right or power to be capable of establishing the law, the performative may operate in "the service of powers of legitimation."⁶² Then, does this suspicion deny the notion of the performative elaborated throughout this thesis? Is "+R" no more than an attempt to introduce yet another system, putting into action its inaugural power to regulate art writing to come?

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Performative Powerlessness – A Response to Simon Critchley," *Constellations*. Volume. 7, No 4. (Oxford & Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). pp. 466-468. See also "The University Without Condition," *Without Alibi*. trans. Peggy Kamuf. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). pp. 202-237.

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, "Performative Powerlessness – A Response to Simon Critchley," p. 467.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Surely, as the performative is not a strictly evaluative concept, there is a possibility of a certain “negative” performative. A performative could exercise a legitimizing power, attempting to reinforce norms, enclose meaning, or establish new rules. Recognizing something in terms of the performative does not automatically lead to affirming its values, just as simply following the rules does not lead to justice. Thus, Derrida’s doubt does not indicate his abrupt abandonment of the notion of the performative but illustrates a refusal to absolutize the performative. In this regard, reading “+R” as a performative art writing should answer the following query: does “+R” give rise to a new system of art writing? Or does it fall back into the dogmatism of metaphysics by replacing preexisting discourses with its own propositions?

My provisional answer is no, in that “+R” exemplifies exactly the kind of writing that defies such a project. As examined in Chapter 4, the fragmented and unorthodox style of “+R” slips away from being domesticated and reappropriated into a set of principles. Instead of instituting a methodology for future art writings to follow, it questions the dogmatic preconceptions and the desire for mastery by performing the very unwillingness to set up a new system.⁶³ This comes at a price of “running the risk of no longer saying anything to anyone” (TP 9) if saying something

⁶³ Such an attitude has consistently been demonstrated in Derrida’s reconfiguration of the performative as well as his approaches in other notions he has proposed, such as “deconstruction”: “Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one” (Jacques Derrida, *A Derrida reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 273).

is understood as providing facts and proposing a coherent set of arguments. This unwillingness is particularly pertinent when it comes to art writing, as each artwork is a singular event that necessitates a singular approach. If performative art writing were tied to a methodology that one could readily apply to any artwork, it would not do justice to each event at hand. The meaning of the artwork is not provided a priori by preexisting frameworks but is positively rendered possible by the ability to leave its immediate context—the artist’s intention, the circumstances of its production, the social and cultural background, and so on—and be grafted onto different ones. In this sense, a performative writing on art is a productive reading of an artwork that plays with the undecidability or “a determinate oscillation between possibilities” (LI 148) of meaning to honor the potential of the work.

But if “+R” is not invested in establishing new norms, what does this performative engagement amount to? Derrida’s performative engagement opens up further questions to be answered in thinking of art writing in general. Derrida’s performative interpretation of art unhinges possibilities, offering a chance to think without itself succumbing to the norms or imposing its own rules. Instead of asserting categories to arrest and master the artwork, Derrida’s writing remains heterogeneous to such demands and is parallel to the singular artwork in its own singular way. Although “+R” does not attempt to provide precise information or transparent arguments—not only due to Derrida’s reluctance but also

because of the essential impossibility of such a task—it demonstrates how another kind of engagement is possible. Derrida’s performative problematization inaugurates not a program but a new terrain on which we are to ask once again what art writing does. Although this is the question from which this discussion began, we are urged to interrogate it yet again but upon different presuppositions. In this regard, what does “+R” allow us to think? What does art writing after “+R” involve?

One among many questions that “+R” opens up pertains to the distinction between serious and non-serious discourse. A significant turn in the Derridian notion of the performative is the rediscovery of the non-serious. The thinking of iterability and supplementarity gives way to understanding the non-serious as the very condition of the possibility of the serious, questioning the privilege that has been allotted to the latter. If the serious bases itself on an arbitrary designation and exclusion of the non-serious, why not embrace the latter and turn it into a positive possibility? “+R” ventures to perform this possibility in a distinctly non-serious way. Considering how theories of interpretation have evolved around a privilege accorded to particular elements, such as the intention of the artist or the formal structure of the artwork, and required the task of judgment, “+R” falls short of being recognized as a serious case of criticism. With its unorthodox beginning and ending, leaps and shifts, and the overall fragmented style, “+R” reads as if Derrida is deliberately escaping from the conventions of serious discourse. However, such an approach cannot be

reduced to an expression of private impressions or a work of prose isolated from the discourse on art. Rather, it is a performance that challenges the conventional way of thinking about art writing that runs parallel to the way Derrida addresses the speech act theorists: “It is up to them whether they will take advantage of this opportunity to transform infelicity into delight. For example, by proclaiming: everything that we have said-written-done up to now wasn’t really serious or strict; it was all a joke: sarcastic, even a bit ironic, parasitical, metaphorical, citational, cryptic, fictional, literary, insincere, etc. What force they would gain by doing this!!” (LI 72).

Another question involves the relationship between art, writing, and theory. “+R” places itself between art and theory, keeping an ambivalent relation with each of them. In regards to art, a performative writing is a parallel counterpart that is neither subordinate to the artwork nor overbearing with a project to master it. And in terms of theory, Derrida concedes that preexisting theories cannot be ignored while questioning their metaphysical presuppositions. Derrida’s art writing navigates through the limitless possibilities of artwork and theory by cutting off elements from the work and contextualizing them in a different way. Neither placing the presence of the artwork as an absolute standard for writing nor privileging theory as an applicable framework, Derrida’s art writing allows us to think of a different relation that does not involve hierarchical submission or exclusions. This allows the artwork and theories to encounter each other in a way that is not already prescribed or rigorously articulated. As there are no

predetermined rules to regulate this association, a writer takes on a responsibility greater than that of merely explicating the artwork's meaning or employing a preexisting methodology. One has to reorganize the space for art writing between the artwork and theory, producing unprecedented links and significations.

Lastly, Derrida's understanding of the performative provides an occasion to consider the political stakes of the modes of interpretation and criticism. According to Derrida's articulation of the performative, writing is not limited to the function of neutrally delivering a unified content. Since Derrida understands that all language is essentially performative, previous discourses on art can be scrutinized under a different light; although they may seem or claim to be objective, they are value-laden and performatively reinforce a certain way of thinking. Notably, an attentiveness to the performative aspect of a discourse allows an examination of what is excluded from a given framework in privileging a particular element, and a reading between the lines of the criticism that is written in the constative language. For example, formalist approaches to artworks have largely excluded social properties such as gender, sexuality, race, and so on as irrelevant in criticizing art while promoting their objectivity. However, as Korsmeyer argues, this approach is nothing but neutral as it bases itself on, and contributes to the reaffirmation of, male-dominant conventions and

values.⁶⁴ However, this does not mean that a particular framework, in this case feminist critical theory, is necessarily the ultimate interpretation or theory. The discourses that take into account various sets of social import may fall into the same trap of metaphysics by dogmatizing a single principle and establishing hierarchical oppositions prior to encountering the artwork.

These are the stakes of art writing after “+R”: the conventional approaches of writing about art are suspended while new possibilities of how to write or what to do in the performative engagement are anticipated. As there exists no ultimate center to govern the meaning of an artwork, the task of interpretation is infinite. As its abrupt ending without a period may imply, “+R” is not yet truly finished; it is awaiting other interpretive events yet to come.

⁶⁴ Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004).

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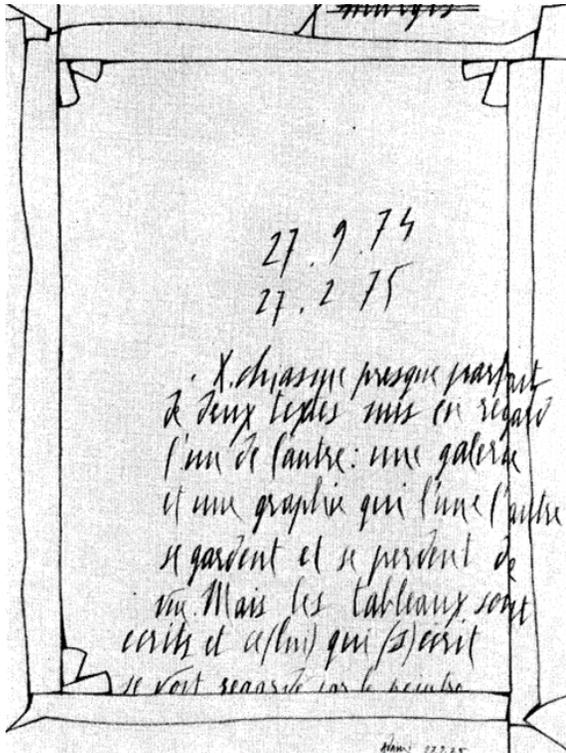
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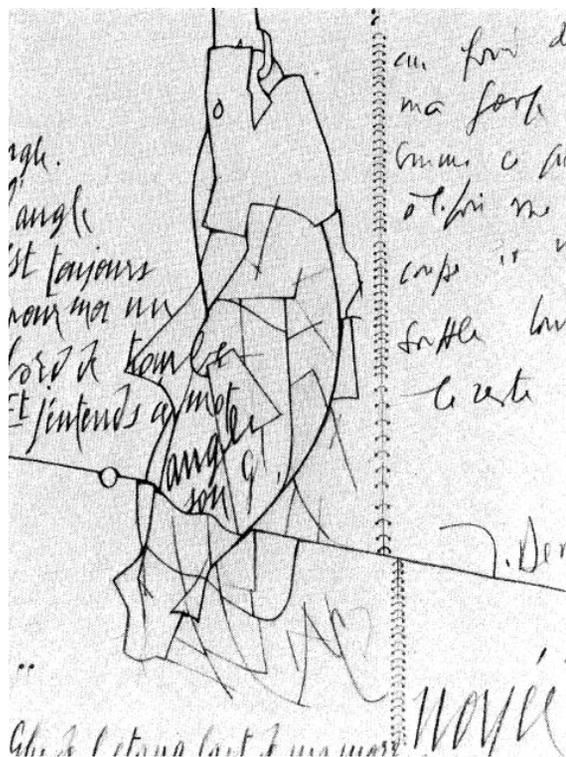
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Illustrations



[fig 1] Valerio Adami, *Study for a Drawing after Glas*, 27 February 1975, graphic pencil on paper (left)



[fig 2] Valerio Adami, *Study for a Drawing after Glas*, 22 May 1975, graphite pencil on paper (right)

국문 초록

미술에 대한 글쓰기는 무엇을 하는가? 본고는 자크 데리다가 발레리오 아다미의 회화 및 드로잉 작품에 대해 쓴 텍스트인 「+R」을 수행적 개입으로 독해함으로써 이 문제를 다루고자 한다. 1950년대에 J. L. 오스틴이 제안한 수행성 개념은 소통에 대한 새로운 사유의 지평을 열었다. 언어가 단지 주어진 사실을 기술하는 데에 그치지 않고 발화 그 자체로 어떤 행위를 수행한다는 점을 부각한 것이다. 데리다는 오스틴의 문제 의식에 동의하지만 화행 이론의 일환으로 제시된 수행성 개념의 전제 조건을 비판적으로 고찰하고 여러 저작들에서 이를 새로이 독해한다. 특히 그는 『회화에서의 진리』의 서문에서 수행성 개념을 재구성할 뿐만 아니라 미술에 대한 그의 글쓰기가 수행성과 밀접한 관련이 있다는 점 또한 드러낸다. 그럼에도 불구하고 미술에 대한 글쓰기와 데리다의 수행성 개념의 연관은 면밀하게 검토된 바가 없었다. 이러한 배경에서 본고는 수행성에 대한 데리다의 이해가 그의 미술에 대한 글쓰기를 이해하는 데에 중요한 연결고리를 제공한다는 점을 밝히고자 한다. 특히 「+R」은 전형성을 벗어나는 방식의 글쓰기로 인해 데리다 철학이나 미술 비평의 영역에서 대체로 주목을 받지 못했다. 이에 본고는 데리다의 수행성 개념에 비추어 「+R」이 미술 비평의 관습을 재고하고 미술에 대한 글쓰기가 무엇을 할 수 있는가의 문제를 사유할 수 있는 장을 열어준다는 점을 보이고자 한다.

이를 위해 본고는 우선 수행성에 대한 데리다의 이해를 분석한다. 데리다에 의하면 오스틴의 수행성 개념은 현전에 특권을 부여하는 형이상학적 전통을 벗어나지 못했다. 화행 이론은 여전히 진지한 것과 그렇지 않은 것, 표준적인 언어 사용과 기생적인 활용을 구분하고 후자를 배제하는 이분법에 근거하고 있기 때문이다. 이에 따라 데리다는 반복가능성, 대리보충의 논리, 사건의 생산이라는 술어들을 중심으로 수행성을 재정립한다. 데리다는 서구 형이상학에 대한 비판적 견지에서, 의미를 규정하는 것은 현전하는 의도나 완전히 규명 가능한 맥락이 아니라고 주장한다. 소통의 가능 조건은 오히려 절대적인 부재, 혹은 직접적인 맥락으로부터의 근본적인 단절에 있는 것이다. 이러한 의미에서 상이한 맥락들 속에서 반

복될 수 있는 능력을 뜻하는 반복가능성이야 말로 수행성의 가능성이 된다. 이러한 통찰에 근거하여 본고는 수행성의 대리보충적 구조를 살펴봄으로써 화행 이론이 전제하는 이분법적 위계가 더 이상 유지될 수 없다는 점을 밝힌다. 수행성 개념에 무한한 대리보충성을 기입하고 본래 구상의 독단적인 구분을 흔들어 놓음으로써 데리다는 언어적인 것과 언어 외적인 것, 그리고 진술하는 것과 수행하는 것의 경계를 넘어 확장된 수행성에 대한 이해를 제시한다. 마지막으로 본고는 사건, 수행성의 제정적인 힘, 해석에 대한 데리다의 독특한 이해를 살펴봄으로써 사건의 수행적 생산에 대해 탐구한다. 의미가 대리보충적 연쇄에 의해 가능해진 것이라면 생산이란 더 이상 무에서 유를 창조하는 작용일 수 없다. 이에 데리다에게 있어 수행적 생산이란 무한한 접목의 가능성을 탐구하고, 해석하는 바를 변화시키는 종류의 해석을 실천하는 것으로 이해된다.

이와 같은 분석을 근거로 본고는 「+R」의 수행적 측면을 살펴본다. 「+R」은 앞선 장에서 다룬 수행성의 조건을 신중히 고려하며 수행적으로 드러낸다. 이에 따라 작품의 현전, 작가의 의도, 기존의 담론과 같이 미술 비평의 관습에 있어서 주요하게 다뤄진 요소들을 중시하지 않는 것처럼 보인다. 「+R」의 수행은 미술에 대한 글쓰기에서 지배적인 가치로 여겨진 요소 중 그 어떤 것도 절대화하지 않는 것이다. 나아가 이 글은 작품의 물리적 특성과 이에 대한 기술, 예술가와 비평가, 그리고 기존의 담론과 미술에 대한 글쓰기의 관계를 새로이 정립한다. 엄밀히 말해 「+R」은 미술에 대한 글쓰기의 방법론이나 모델을 제시한다고 보기 어렵다. 하지만 이 글은 미술에 대해 글을 쓰고자 하는 이로 하여금 작품을 지배하기 위해 절대화된 기준이나 담론을 일방적으로 적용하기보다 각 작품에 개별적으로 접근함으로써 수행적으로 개입할 것을 요청한다.

주요어 : 자크 데리다, 수행성, 반복가능성, 대리보충의 논리, 사건, 미술 비평

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