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Freud and Derrida: Writing and Speculation (or When the Future Irrupts in the Present)

In the documentary film *Derrida*¹, Derrida prescribes to those who say that *Seinfeld* is a deconstructive “sitcom” to do their homework, to read and study, because a sitcom has little or nothing to do with the project of deconstruction. On the contrary, regarding Freud and philosophy, Derrida did his homework and he did it really well. He read Freud carefully and closely studied him, looked into him attentively, examined him and finally established an intellectual relationship with Freud in which his thought began to *speculate with* that of the psychoanalyst’s. (To speculate is the verb that will run through this entire essay). *Freud and the Scene of Writing* and *To Speculate — On “Freud”*, rather than being mere analysis or criticisms of certain Freudian discoveries, are both texts that turn out to be reading and writing exercises, which entail an almost obsessive (ob-scene) observation of the structure, style, and of the marginal of some of Freud’s manuscripts. In both these articles, the creativity of Derrida’s pen has a profoundly theoretical and radically metaphysical sense. What I mean is that beyond his gestures, small signs, *double entendres* and expositive digressions, there is a sage metaphysic meditation.

I said meditation, but in this context, Freud’s and Derrida’s, it seems more appropriate to say metaphysical speculation. *To Speculate — On “Freud”* is fundamentally a reflection on Freud’s speculation in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.² I think the text’s title has more than one meaning. *Speculate* and *specular* – which come from the same Latin root, *specere*, to look, according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, have the following meanings: 1. Specular: relating to, or having the properties of a mirror. 2. Speculate: to think about something and make guesses about it, to form ideas or theories about something usually

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¹ Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, “Derrida,” (USA: Zeitgeist Films, 2000). DVD.

² Chapter IV of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* opens with a sort of confession where Freud says: “What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation...” (Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVIII. Ed. James Strachey. London: Vintage, 1920. p. 24).

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when there are many things not known about it. 3. Speculate: to invest money in ways that could produce a large profit but that also involves a lot of risk. Derrida holds that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is an athletic text, but not because of a limitation, a weakening, or biographical irruption³ in Freud's intellect, but because the object of psychoanalytical thought is specular and cannot be apprehended, named, conceptualized or seen under a microscope. The psychic apparatus does not have a material foundation, and we therefore cannot make an anatomical preparation with views to a scientific analysis *comme il faut*. In this sense, within the questions of psychoanalysis that excited Derrida's philosophical thought, I would point out three as the most fundamental that, in addition, belong altogether to the realm of the "speculative/specular" in its spectral sense as well as in the economic one. These are: the virtuality of the psyche, the idea of the mnemonic trace and that of "deferral" (*après-coup*). As I said before, in *To Speculate — on "Freud"*, it becomes very clear that Derrida's reflexive and critical exercise does not have only one direction, i.e., at the same time that, from a deconstructive interest, he is criticizing the metaphysical assumptions of psychoanalysis, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* reflects on his philosophical thinking an image of Being as economy. But this "story" doesn't end here: this economy is speculative. Moreover, the Freudian psyche is no longer unveiled as an *a priori*, but as a product of the reflection of other mirrors, here more than one (and I am not saying that Derrida and Freud are each an indivisible one, for they too *are* their legacy, so I say "here" for expositive simplicity), for the psyche is a mere link in a larger ecosystem (which is itself an ecosystem of psychic systems) of social, mental, and environmental order, to follow Guattari's topology.⁴ The interactions between the different psychic systems are, according to Freud, economic, but this economy is also speculative in more than one sense: first, the different systems are altered transversally and second, they negotiate in terms of expense, savings and pain/pleasure future projections. Besides, the mnemonic trace is in Freud the outcome of relationships between different forces (more than two, which meet face to face) of irruption and resistance whose result is

³ In *To Speculate — on "Freud"*, Derrida sustains that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* can also be read as an autobiographical text.

⁴ I will not speak of this here, but it turns out to be quite interesting that the French word *psyché* also means "cheval mirror". Derrida speaks at length of this point in his book *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. See Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, 2 vols., Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

never predictable. And finally, psychic time and the time of *hauntological* ontology are both non-linear temporalities wherein the *possibility* of a future overflowing is always at play. In short, Derridian hauntology⁵ and Freudian metapsychology have a specular relationship. The engagement between Freud and Derrida, between psychoanalysis and deconstruction, amounts to two mirrors facing each other producing infinite reflections, where the instant of identity is lost in the very moment of their facing each other.

From this point onward, I will go about exploring those ideas of Freud which, seem to me, “traffic” the most with Derrida’s ideas, in no particular order; for the specular cannot be ordered...

According to Derrida in *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, “the Freudian concept of trace must be radicalized and extracted from the metaphysics of presence which still retains it...”⁶ At this point, the deconstruction of psychoanalysis becomes a pressing matter and one that, besides, awaits a very happy and productive harvest (of course, many fruits have already been reaped). But the reading task of this essay must go in the opposite direction, i.e., we must examine what Freud told Derrida, and not deconstruction to psychoanalysis. In this context, what place does the analogy of the mystic writing pad and the psychic apparatus hold within the history of philosophy? Why, from the standpoint of deconstruction, psyche and Being are considered writing? Why did Derrida write and say so much about Freud?

Just as it was pleasant and scandalously timely for Freud to find the mystic writing pad in the market, such, I imagine, was Derrida’s discovery of the economy of *différance*⁷ in the Freudian psyche. Let us call attention to that fact that the

⁵ See *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 10, and *passim*.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁷ The neographism *différance* tries to shed some light on various problems of the history of thought. This is the very word that encompasses all the preoccupations of deconstruction, and more than a word, this orthographic violence is a drill, a performative act that reveals: ontology as hauntology, the falsehood of the authority of *phoné* over writing that, both in semiotics and philosophy, had been thought of as the bearer and giver of truth, for voice has been thought of as presence, and this latter had been considered condition of possibility for truth, and finally, *différance* shows how an act of speech can transform the history of thought. First, *différance* (with a) tries to convey the sense of spatiality and temporality

psyche does not only work in this economy, but it is an end result of *différance*. This means that the psyche is not an *a priori*, but rather a speculative negotiation. Moreover, this economic relationship is speculative in all the senses of the word cited above. First of all, the psyche is the result of an encounter (by the way violent) between a living organism and an outside. It is also the incorporation of the outside, the other, though of course this incorporation is not total, for psyche and world are not identical. The psyche is the difference resulting from the vital force of the organism that affirms itself in the world plus/minus the incorporation of the outside. The outside can be understood as world, Law, the other, the others, the realm of culture (in the sense of “civilization and its discontents”) or a very long etcetera. The result is not the sum of two things, but a whole ecosystem. In psychic terms we know, on the one hand, that the psyche is more than one registry, and on the other, that the unconscious is the organization that resists the world or otherness in general.

In *To Speculate — on “Freud”*, it is clear that, first, the psyche is, like Being, a speculative economy, and second, that Being and the psyche have a specular relationship in Derrida’s writings on Freud. That is, we are not talking about an analogy between the psyche and Being, but rather, we have to think, on the one hand, that everything that *is* is a speculative/specular economy and, on the other, that the psyche is part of this eco-logy, as an organism in an *oïkos*, i.e., part

that has been forfeited by *différence* (with e). *Différer* in French can be translated as either of two English verbs: ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’. The first indicates that at least two distinguishable entities are not identical, and the second, a spatial and temporal postponement. In French, ‘difference’ and ‘deferral’ are contained in the same word, *différence*, however, Derrida points out that the second meaning has become forgotten, therefore he decides to commit this orthographic violence in order to call attention to the temporality and spatiality that is always at play in any differential relationship. But in French, *différence* and *différance* are pronounced exactly the same, there is no phonetic difference, so the only way to know which one is at play is through its written form. This is fundamental for Derrida, because he thus shows the falsehood in that the voice, in as much as it is presence, is privileged in truthful communication. Finally, in an ontological sense, *différance* is the origin of everything that is: “... [*Différance*] will be the playing movement that ‘produces’—by means of something that is not simply an activity—these differences, these effects of difference. This does not mean that the *différance* that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified—in-different—present. *Différance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. The name ‘origin’ no longer suits it.” [*Différance*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. p. 11]

of a house, a habitat or environment, or as a logic of echo or resonance of otherness. Thus, what we end up with is a “*mise ‘en abyme’*”⁸, in which we become vertiginously lost just in economies (at this point we must open up a parenthesis à la Derrida and ask, which economies are just or pure if they are struck through by more than one force from the get-go). In the more metaphysical points of Derridian thought, what becomes seductive of the Freudian conception of psychic life is that it does not fall outside the economy of life (or *life death*, as he precisely calls this undecidable phenomenon in *To Speculate...*). In short, psychic economy is organized within the economy of finiteness.

It is in this sense that Being is writing. The encounter of different forces is an economy that leaves a trace. What is is in fact a collision between *different* quantities; thus, there is always a stronger one that imprints upon the other leaving a mark. This is what Derrida means when he says that Being is text. Being is *différance* and *différance* is writing. Another timely and scandalous discovery in Freud by Derrida: the psyche, in *A Note upon the “Mystic Writing Pad”* is also writing.

The mystic writing pad is a writing artifact (a toy to be exact) composed of three layers. The bottom layer is made up of dark colored wax mounted on cardboard. Upon it, there is a translucent sheet of wax paper, and at the top, a sheet that serves as a protection for the middle sheet not to get torn. These two sheets are fixed together at the top and loose at the bottom, so they can be separated from each other except at the two lateral edges. The most interesting thing is that in order to write, this device does not need ink, “a pointed stilus scratches the surface”⁹. When one is tracing with the stylus, the layer of wax paper adheres to

⁸ I cite Alan Bass’ translation notes on this term: “*En abyme* is the heraldic term for infinite reflection, e.g. the shield in shield in the shield ... Derrida has used this term frequently. The appearance of *mise en abyme* here is the overlap between what Freud says and what Freud does in *Beyond...*” (“To Speculate—on ‘Freud’,” in *The Post Card. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). p. 304-5 n. 9.) “*En abyme* is Derrida’s usual expression for the infinite regress of a reflection within a reflection, etc. The term originally comes from the heraldic notion of an escutcheon within an escutcheon; Derrida plays on *abyme* and *abîme*, abyss”. (“Du Tout,” in *The Post Card. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 511 n. 10.)

⁹ Sigmund Freud, “A Note upon the Mystic Writing-Pad.” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX, ed. James Starchey, London: Vintage, 1920, p. 229.

the wax and the impression is perceived. But if this contact is broken, the writing disappears. So both the capacity of reception and the capacity of archiving are unlimited, for as Freud describes, the disappearing or erasing of the written trace is a mere illusion. If we lift the celluloid and the wax paper, we can see how all the traces have become recorded on the wax slab. But this slab has a perimeter and limited matter, so each trace that is inscribed on the pad will fill this area and will write on top of what has already been drawn. Furthermore, the old inscriptions will cause what is being written to take certain paths, i.e., they condition the new traces. Freud thought this artifact fitted perfectly as an illustration of the psychic apparatus, which he thought could characterize as a sort of machine. Yes, I am certain that Freud experienced a moment of rejoice when he found this children's toy, but I imagine Derrida was equally happy when he found Freud's text, *A Note Upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"*, for the mystic writing-pad is a machine of hauntology, a machine of an ontology haunted by ghosts (specters) rather than one of the metaphysics of presence. We are not dealing with a camera that registers a live present, full and self-identical, but a machine that is always in the "in between", between life and death, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, between the primary process and the secondary one. The mnemonic trace is always *between* legacy and future. The trace is a trace of writing, trace of a trace, as Derrida says, an *architracé*. There where we find the trace as an effect of writing on a support (wax slab) that is modified with each irruption of the other (another *Derridian* parenthesis is called for: how much of a support is something that is modified *each time* it is effected upon?), there, we can think of Being and the history of Being also with the analogy of the mystic writing-pad. The psyche and Being fit with the image of a wax receptacle that allows itself to be inscribed upon and, at the same time, cannot free itself from this inscription. Let us think of the uppermost layer of this children's toy, the one that Freud compares to the perception/conscience system. Can we think of another mode in which, if they do at all, beings present themselves? Don't they manifest themselves in such a way? Don't beings disappear as soon as the contact with that wax, the mnemonic archive, the archive as/of history is broken? The mystic writing-pad allows us, on the one hand, to think of beings as fiction and as a snapshot within the course of history, and, on the other, of Being as *khôra*. So let us remember Derrida's text on Plato's *khôra*, a text where he also evokes the Freudian psyche.

Khôra is the figure in the ontology of Plato's *Timaeus* that intervenes as an atopic space that is logically prior to the divided world of the sensible and intel-

ligible, but that, at the same time, allows this very distinction. In his study of the origin of the universe, Plato concludes that there is a state prior to the creation of the world. The primary elements are fire, water, air, and soil, but they are only primary in a metaphorical way, for they are really caused principles. Before introducing *khôra*, Timaeus had already put forth two different causes, one originating the intelligible and the other the sensible. But all of this had to have a prior state, a state of chaos and indiscernibility embraced by *khôra*. He thus proposes a more vague and difficult kind of cause for the universe. *Timaeus* reads: “What must we suppose it to do and to be? This above all: it is a *receptacle* of all becoming—its wetnurse, as it were.”¹⁰ And further goes on to say:

We must always refer to it by the same term, for it does not depart from its own character in any way. Not only does it always receive all things, it has never in any way whatever taken on any characteristic similar to any of the things that enter it. Its nature is to be available for anything to make its impression upon, and it is modified, shaped and reshaped by the things that enter it. These are the things that make it appear different at different times. The things that enter and leave it are imitations of those things that always are, imprinted after their likeness in a marvelous way that is hard to describe.¹¹

In this sense, *khôra* can be thought of as a sort of critique of locating things spatiotemporally. *Khôra* is something that can be imprinted upon, but whose inscription exceeds it. We thus speak of an “inscriptionality” that is prior—by economy of discourse and not chronologically—to any binary logic and which calls the heritage of metaphysics into question. The enigmatic and paradoxical nature of *khôra* questions the primacy of the principle of non-contradiction and of excluded middle. *Khôra* cannot be submitted to a logic of participation and exclusion. According to Derrida, we are dealing with a sort of oscillation, of dwelling in the oscillations, but not a movement that goes from one extreme to the other, but of an oscillation “between two types of oscillation: the double exclusion (*neither/nor*) and the participation (*both this and that*).”¹² Sometimes *khôra* is neither this, nor that, and sometimes is both, this and that.

¹⁰ Plato, “Timaeus,” in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, §49

¹¹ *Ibid.* §50c

¹² Jacques Derrida, “Khôra,” in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, *Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 91.

The psychic apparatus, like *khôra*, is neither a space nor a container. Freud says, on the one hand, that it can be a virtual apparatus, and, on the other, that it functions as a writing machine. In other words, we can say it is a virtual apparatus “where” a mnemonic trace can be imprinted.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which is considered the opening text of psychoanalysis, Freud makes use of analogies to optical devices to make it clear that his psychic apparatus cannot be reduced to any anatomically defined component; it is rather an imaginary design. Thus, we must think of the psychic as that which takes place *in-between* the components of a somewhat materially apprehensible support. According to Freud, it is in this *in-between* that the psychic apparatus is located. So we can indeed speak of a location, but an *a-topical* one. The psyche now becomes a sort of *khôra*; it turns into an *a-topical* place, *where*, thus, inscription occurs. The psychic apparatus exceeds the anatomy of the nervous system. Neither *khôra* nor the psychic apparatus are a ground or foundation, for neither are a thing or a being, in fact, we cannot say that either *khôra* or the psychic apparatus *are*. They are not a subject, a substance, nor a substrate of anything.

This is what Derrida has to say of *khôra*:

For on the one hand, the ordered polysemy of the word always includes the sense of political place or, more generally of *invested* place, by opposition to abstract space. *Khôra* “means”: place occupied by someone, country, inhabited place, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory, or region. And in fact, *khôra* will always already be occupied, invested, even as a general place, and even when it is distinguished from everything that takes place in it. Whence the difficulty—we shall come to it—of treating it as an empty or geometric space...¹³

Plato insists that *khôra* is a receptacle, a place of harboring and reception. It is in this sense that *khôra* cannot be an empty space *where* simply imprinting occurs, rather, *khôra* can only come to be, or better said, there can only be *khôra* in as much as something is sheltered in it, in as much as something occupies it, or is invested upon it; the psychic apparatus is—and let us say rather that *there is* psychic apparatus—only when it is occupied, invested upon, imprinted,

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

marked. There is no psychic apparatus prior to or before the so-called psyche. There is a psychic apparatus, something *like* a psychic apparatus because there is a psyche; there is a psyche that functions *as* an apparatus, *as* a machine.

On the other hand, the reading Derrida has of this section of Plato's *Timaeus* does not intend to set forth a word that actually does any justice to *khôra*; he assumes the unavoidability of any geography or topology, but nonetheless shows that "it is structure which makes them thus inevitable, makes of them something other than accidents, weaknesses, or provisional moments."¹⁴ The psychic apparatus and *khôra* are spaces without regularities or essences; there are no full-fledged presences, there is only *différance*. Let us recall how the Freudian psychic apparatus is shown in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* as a difference between breaches,¹⁵ in the *Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad* as a difference

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁵ James Strachey, the editor of the Standard Edition of Freud's Complete Psychological Works, chose "facilitation" to translate *Bahnung*. Alan Bass's translation of Derrida's *Freud and the Scene of Writing* renders *Bahnung* as *breaching* or *path-breaking*. This latter translation is more closely related to the neural model Freud sets forth in his *Project...* The image *Bahnung* evokes is more similar to the opening of a way, or following Derrida, the tracing of grooves, than to the "facilitation" of energy transmission –Q-. Luiz Hanns' *Dictionary of Freud's German Terms* says that "the noun *Bahn* evokes the image of a 'road', 'excavate', 'to install', 'open up' a treadable path" [See Luiz Alberto Hanns, *Diccionario De Términos Alemanes De Freud* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Lumen, 2001.) p. 268.] It also says, "*Bahn* is the beginning of something flat and horizontal, a runway on which one can easily 'slide' or 'transit'. The *Bahnung* is, therefore, something built upon a rugged terrain." I find two main issues in choosing *facilitation* as a translation of *Bahnung*; first, it makes no reference to the "permanent alteration" of the contact-barriers of ψ neurons, which turns out to be the most substantial to the psychic process of memory. Thinking of pathbreaking can render that meaning. *Facilitation* means to make an action possible, to make easier achieving an end, or to give something. These meanings generate confusion and erroneous interpretations, for memory in Freud does not give exclusive account of making the transmission of energy possible, but instead, the fundamental part of the memory phenomenon is the repetition provoked by the exciting of that prior alteration of the neuron contact-barrier, which is rendered by that image of pathbreaking or the tracing of a groove. This is what Freud means by "there is a learning-on based on memory". Second, breaching, pathbreaking or the trace of a groove, also renders the violence *Bahnung* implied for Freud. This groove that opens responds to the difficulty of leaving a trace or inscription due to the resistance or defense the psychic apparatus displays, we might say, of its own nature. The breaking of this path always implies difficulty and violence. On the other hand, pathbreaking or breaching also refers to the tie between two elements, which the notion of facilitation does not confer. In English, the term facilitation does not

between the force of impression and that of the resistance of the wax slab, and how this difference is also, as Derrida states, a spatiotemporal game, making space in time and/or time in space. The space that is opening is a never-ending openness to alteration; more over, this openness brings with it the formation of new spaces. Thus we can speak of an openness that temporally projects future and differed openness. In fact, more than a-topic spaces, the psychic apparatus and *khôra* are actually *spacings*.

Just like the Freudian psyche, which lacks a material reference, *khôra* “does not have the characteristics of an existent, by which we mean an existent that would be receivable in the *ontologic*, that is, those of an intelligible or sensible existent. There is *khôra* but *the khôra* does not exist”¹⁶. Derrida says it is more a “setter” than settled.

From the standpoint of deconstruction, ontology is hauntology.¹⁷ That which is and “presents itself” is traversed by that which is not, and this occurs in both ways, that is, by that which is no longer there and by which is not yet there. The ghost haunts by inhabiting a place without occupying it. This is how a specter inhabits what *is*, it does not overfill, but it is nonetheless there, it makes itself noticed without presenting itself, without showing itself, but it makes things and produces effects. Just like the ghost that does not *present* itself in the room, but moves objects, and in so doing, makes noises. The ghost can also come from the past or from the future, but the threat of his haunting is always that it *will* present itself. In other words, it is a promise that will be fulfilled in the future. Here the temporality of the future becomes the protagonist in deconstruction. It is a time that philosophy has forgotten or that has been at least denied a proper place. But psychoanalysis has done so too. There seems to be an impossibility to read the

evoke anything related to the physical interrelationship between two elements, it does refer to a process of removing obstacles, however, these difficulties are figurative; on the contrary, *Bahnung* holds a concrete quality of these obstructions.

¹⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” p. 97.

¹⁷ It is important to point out that in French *hauntologie* and *ontologie* sound almost exactly the same. The fact that Derrida did not choose a complete different word to indicate the urgent necessity to do a new ontology (or no ontology at all) deciding for one than in speech is impossible to distinguish, seems to me a gesture that, besides stressing the ungrounded privilege of voice over writing (like in *différance*) within the history of metaphysics, acknowledges the insurmountable significance for philosophy to think ontology, thus one that thinks Being haunted by absence.

future in Freud and in philosophy. It has been there, nonetheless, written out fully. For reading the future is not guessing it, nor is it the case with the past, despite what we might have thought all this time. The metaphysics of presence has deceived us because the past is not a present past, and thus, cannot be read as something that is there inalterable in its full manifestation and material nature. Neither is the present. The metaphysics of presence has told us that the future is not at play, but it in fact haunts us like the past; its ghost has an effect, albeit a deferred effect... This future that opens up and that at the same time alters (each time) what *presents* itself is the future of speculation, i.e., an unpredictable time that is always and radically to come, waiting to happen without it doing so, for it is a time that takes place without happening. This is the time Derrida calls *l'avenir* (that which is “to come”) and which is different from the *future*: the future is what we know because it is predictable because we can be certain that it will occur. *L'avenir* is the time that haunts as a *possibility* of imminence or irruption, and that is what alters. Thus it cannot be presence, not even future presence, it is a promise, a *perhaps* that moves and does without coming to be.

Derrida states in *Freud and the Scene of Writing* that the irreducibility of the “effect of deferral” is, no doubt, Freud’s greatest discovery.¹⁸ According to Freud, the trauma is a scene that does not happen in a precise time, but is rather an irruption that “falls” upon the “already happened” within the story of a subject, and whose catastrophic or disorganizing effects do not occur once and for all. In this sense, the trauma is always radically yet to be fixed, yet to come. This temporality of the trauma does not trigger the re-signification of an event by itself traumatic, but instead, the irruption of the signification of an episode. I do not mean to say that there is no repetition (as in re-signification), but rather that there is always a re-presentation. In other words, the temporality of trauma is neither linear, nor harmonic in any way. The traumatic scene builds up with repetition. According to Freud, as a traumatic episode to come, its own registry in memory can be due to two different causes: either one force is at once excessive or the force of repetitions is added on. Nonetheless, we must be careful not to look for a direct and horizontal causality:

The structure of delay (*Nachträglichkeit*) in effect forbids that one make of temporalization (temporization) a simple dialectical complication of the living present

¹⁸ Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” p. 203.

as an originary and unceasing synthesis—a synthesis constantly directed back on itself, gathered in on itself and gathering—of retentional traces and protentional openings. The alterity of the “unconscious” makes us concerned not with horizons of modified—past or future—presents, but with a “past” that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a *production* or a reproduction in the form of presence. Therefore the concept of trace is incompatible with the concept of retention, of the becoming-past of what has been present. One cannot think the trace—and therefore, *différance*—on the basis of the present, or of the presence of the present.¹⁹

Certain strength irrupts (by addition or intensity) and the trauma is “to come” in the psychic archive by association with other forces and other registries. Moreover, the registry as trace is modified, just like the wax slab, by new traces.

The temporality of hauntology is that of the haunting of **absence**. I cross out absence since the ghost has been thought of as an absence that presents itself and that can be conjured, however, if there is something radical in Derrida’s and Freud’s assessments regarding the spectral, is that what is absent becomes present in its effects and never “in person”. All the phrases where I have said “presence” or “absence” have, each time, the exact same meaning if absence is substituted by presence and vice versa. For the ghost is, as Derrida says, an undecidable²⁰, an operation rather than a concept. It cannot be a concept because it cannot be defined, we cannot decide whether it is an absence or a presence, nor is it an oscillation or tension between two providences. The undecidable is the experience of the alien irrupting in that which we consider our own. Thus, it puts into crisis the experience of what is our own, of what is one, unified, ruled, predictable, and autonomous. I remember here Freud’s gripping statement:

¹⁹ Derrida, “Différance,” p. 21.

²⁰ Undecidables are indeterminate concepts that point out where the classificatory order falls down. That is, they mark the limit of ordering and disturb the logic of binary oppositions. Undecidables do not have a proper or determinate character; we are talking about possibilities, of movement in and out the oppositions. The supplement, for example, is an undecidable because it is, *at the same time*, something that replaces, that can be en lieu de and something that adds up or complements. It is important to make clear that, on one hand, for Derrida, philosophy can not go beyond undecidables and, on the other, deconstruction is not an attempt to take over undecidability.

"the ego is not master in its own house"²¹, not because there is a hypo-mnemonic archive that inhabits the ego, for that would be as innocuous as an encapsulated benign tumor, but because that archive irrupts in the ego and makes us do things. Ghosts, though they may not present themselves, they do in fact produce effects, they do things and make us do things, thus they have existence, a-typical, if thought from the perspective of the metaphysics of presence, but an existence nonetheless.

The temporality of deferral in Freud and of the opening to the *avenir* of deconstruction is that which displays and makes writing possible, it is the temporality of the trace of grooves on a bottomless depth, an *archi-writing* says Derrida. There is a speculation between psychoanalysis and philosophy, which translates into a hauntology. Being is speculative and thus what is is writing; it is ghost. The *un-founding* is paramount to understanding, on the one hand, why the origin is always displaced (delayed) and, on the other, why *l'avenir* never comes to presence. Derrida says in *Différance*:

And it is this constitution of the present, as an "originary" and irreducibly non-simple (and therefore, *stricto sensu* nonoriginary) synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protentions (to reproduce analogically and provisionally a phenomenological and transcendental language that soon will reveal itself to be inadequate), that I propose to call *archi-writing*, *archi-trace*, or *différance*. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporization.²²

What is "present" (Derrida would write ~~present~~) to perception is caught between at least two absences that, as if it weren't enough for the dislocation of the metaphysics of presence, make it possible. At this point it is worth recalling that Freud thought, in more than one occasion,²³ that the origin of perceptions

²¹ Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, ed. James Starchey, London: Vintage, 1917, p. 143.

²² Derrida, "Différance," p. 13.

²³ See Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVIII, ed. James Strachey, London: Vintage, 1920, p. 28; Sigmund Freud, "Negation". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX, ed. James Strachey, London: Vintage, 1925, p. 238; Sigmund Freud, "Note upon the Mystic Writing-Pad". *The Standard Edition of the Complete*

was in the discontinuous excitation of the cathexis that reached out from the unconscious into the conscience. This means, in the first place, that there is no presence at conscience (there is no conscience) without memory (unconscious), and second, Freud says so explicitly, that the rhythm of excitation and interruption gives the quality in perception (and the sense of time, he adds in the *Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad*). What is present to the conscience is a sort of hallucination or, best-case scenario, so that we are not overwhelmed with this vocabulary of the pathological, the result of an equation between the other (the thing or the phenomenon) and our hypo-mnemonic archive.²⁴

We can then ask the question: “How much of a presence is that which is traversed, pierced by absence?” Or with a slight variation: “how much of a conscience is that which needs the excitation of the unconscious and which, thus, cannot be radically differentiated from a hallucination?” This present and this conscience must be crossed out. We speak of ~~present~~ and ~~conscience~~. Both keep a trace of the past and allow themselves to be inscribed upon, from the get-go, by the relationship with the element that is yet to come. We must stress, that likewise, both elements never presented themselves. The abyss... again, each time... These times are not modified presents:

An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject. In constituting

Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XIX, ed. James Strachey, London: Vintage, 1925, p. 231.

²⁴ I must clarify here that I have indistinctly said memory, unconscious, or hypo-mnemonic archive to refer to what Freud calls “unconscious”, because, though there might be a problem or even a contradiction in thinking memory as hypo-mnemonic or the unconscious as anamnesis, in Freud memory excludes conscience, and it takes place *in place* of consciousness. Contrary to tradition, for psychoanalysis, memory is another system from perception. The unconscious is therefore a mnemonic–hypomnemonic archive. Freud attempts to salvage this contradiction with his topologies. We must then question Freud’s compulsion to locate things, we would do better in thinking (or if we are even more radical, stop thinking...) in economies, or as Guattari says, ecologies, where connections are transversal and, in as much as the origin of every phenomenon is heterogeneous, the different registries, regions or territories are the product of transversal relationships that can never be linear.

itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (temporization).²⁵

The grammatical tense of hauntology is that of the middle voice. Conscience *arrives*, *it becomes* present, nothing, and no one presents itself or becomes present. There is no transitivity. These *presences* are inhabited, struck through, haunted by an alterity that alters them every moment. Hauntology is an ontology of heterogenesis, an ontology of processes and not of substances with a linear temporality. There is a superposition not only of agencies and spaces, but also between times. What we have is a conflictive and non-harmonic temporality, an implosive temporality.²⁶ A temporal implosion means that the present is modified by history as much as history is modified by the present and that the future, *at the same time*, impresses as a possible (always possibility, never present) modification to come. This pressure, just as any other that finds resistance, creates an inscription. The future is written in the sense of *presenting itself*. In other words, this openness, as an expectation, modifies, alters, the trace at every moment. Let us note two more things: first, that which resists the new inscriptions is memory or history as text, and second, that the cavity, which “contains” the implosion, can be thought of as *khôra* or as the psychic apparatus, for both are bottomless depths that make writing possible without being “primal writing”. Neither *khôra* nor the psychic apparatus are text. They are nothing. *Khôra* is prior to what *is*, it is the wetnurse of being. The psychic apparatus has no anatomical delegate, it has no place, is not even prior to the psychic. Both of them hold writing, yes, but only virtually. We could also say that in a specular way, since this kind of relationship makes Being as a specter, and not as a manifestation that is fully present.

²⁵ Derrida, “Différance,” p. 13.

²⁶ An implosive temporality is the temporality of writing. The *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* says that to implode means: “to collapse inward as if from external pressure”. In written text, the grammatical tenses of past, present and future are fragmented, except not dispersing outward, but rather amalgamating. This is not an explosion because the tenses do not bust out, they are not separated into different paths, since the breaking is inward-bound, the tenses mix up and even, in some cases, become fused together. Here they overlap with each other, making it impossible to differentiate exactly the events of the past, the present, and even the future.

The temporality of deferral is also that of constructions in analysis and of historical truth. What I mean to say is that this is the temporality of the myth of the totemic feast (or act, Freud never actually made up his mind in *Totem and Taboo*), of the reconstruction of the history of Moses that Freud expounds in *Moses and the Monotheist Religion* and that of the clinic of the *Wolf Man*. In all of these texts Freud underlines the irrelevance of the materiality of acting out or of the act that is actually witnessed. It does not actually matter if the primitive horde ate their father, it is irrelevant whether the Jews actually murdered God or not; or whether the *Wolf Man* could have seen his parents making love. The strength of the virtual, of the intangible, is capable of having the same psychic or historic effects. The sole desire to assassinate, the sole fantasy of being in the middle of an oedipal scene can have the same traumatic effects as the actual experience. All of civilization is grounded on the guilt of parricidal and incestuous desires. All of the Judaic culture revolves around the attempted murder of Moses. The madness of the *Wolf Man* has an etiological explanation in the desire-fantasy of witnessing a sexual scene between his parents. Although in some cases we can distinguish between material and historical truth (I would say that this is only in terms of the “amount” of testimony, the number, and the “quality”, understood as a corollary of power relationships, of the witnesses), when it comes to the effects and passages to act or materializations, this difference turns out to be unimportant. As I said before, grammatically, deferral occurs in the middle voice, for the trauma is not formed nor does a subject suffer it. Evidently, we must not understand this statement as “nobody has a trauma” or “no one is responsible of having traumatized someone else”. Following Derrida, the subject is fundamentally the subject of right²⁷ and, in this sense, must respond (take responsibility) of even that which does not respond within or to him. There is no subject means that *there is (il y a)*²⁸ or *it may* become a traumatic event. In psychic terms, in order for an episode to become traumatic more than *one* and/or more than once are needed. More than one subject is required means, firstly, that the trauma exceeds the subject, for subject and psyche do not correspond, and secondly, that the subject may not notice what is building up in his psyche. Judith Butler makes a very clear distinction between subject and psyche: “It is

²⁷ See the interview with Derrida in 1992 for the *Oxford Amnesty Lectures*, available in written form as Barbara Johnson, ed. *Freedom and Interpretation: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992*, London: Basic Books, 1993.

²⁸ The French voice “*il y a*” implies no subject, it only points out that *there is* something, but without an agent or cause.

important to distinguish between the notion of the psyche, which includes the notion of the unconscious, and that of the subject, whose formation is conditioned by the exclusion of the unconscious”²⁹. Therefore, psyche and subject are notions that refer to different psychic functions. The subject is subject to Law, while psyche is the product of exclusion (repression) of the undesired within the subjective organization.

If we could think of something such as “The Freud method”, this conception of deferred trauma would be its spinal column. It is true that Freud, as Derrida rightly states in *Archive Fever*, traversed two itineraries, that is, without forfeiting his archeological interests, he always had a rebel gesture against his positivist “self-demands”. *Totem and Taboo* is a good example of this double program. On the one hand, when he points out that the history of civilization has kept secret crimes of incest and parricide, he sets it forth as a hypothesis and as necessary deductive speculation; he states, one day in the history of homo-sapiens, these violations must have been perpetrated materially, for, otherwise, they would not have left so many traces in history and in the collective as well as the individual psyche. Nonetheless, he then holds that the passage to act makes no difference; desire is enough, in the psychological realm it “actually” happened. So it is a historical truth, a construction. In psychic terms, desire and fantasy have the same strength as act. Thus, despite the fact that the Jews did not kill Moses, they are responsible for his “assassination”, for they were not able to commit the crime because of the external will of God that put a cloud between them. In this same sense, the guilt caused by the parricidal desire is as strong as if the assassination had actually been perpetrated. There is a phylogenetic guilt that is originated in desire and passes through the entire history of the psyche. The crime that is actually “committed” as well as the repressed memory of it, i.e., the negation of it, which preserves it in the unconscious; both are equally important in thinking the origin and conservation of social order. Let us not forget that the most radical hypothesis in *Totem and Taboo* is that these prohibitions take place in as much as both incest and cannibalism are desires inherent to human nature. The argument here is very simple, if they were not desires there would not be any reason to prohibit them.

²⁹ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 206. n. 4.

If we follow the “Freud method”, the symptoms must be analyzed only as the union of events that have fallen together. Some chance and coincidence are at play. This is precisely what the sense of the word symptom points to: “*symptom* comes from the Greek *sympiptein* to happen, from *syn-* + *piptein* to fall, coincide. It refers to something as simple as two things falling together, side by side, two things that coincide, and that may or may not happen “properly” (without leaving this family); also what falls forth, what is precipitated symptomatically, which means, fortuitously.”³⁰ Psychoanalysis does not unveil histories, it constructs them; and Freud explains it clearly in his text “*Constructions in Analysis*”.³¹ The memory and history of a subject are always and radically to come (what is memory if not a recollection to come?) There is no past present because the mnemonic traces have been altered “already and always”. The mark has been modified from its *origin*, at the very moment in which it came into contact with the mnemonic tissue that hosted it. An event “falls upon” a psyche and this creates a symptom. The trauma is a coincidence to come, a trace expecting new carving. In this previous paragraph, we could substitute trauma with historical event.

For Derrida and for deconstruction, to think in speculative/specular and not metaphysical terms has implied, at the same time, a critical interpretation of culture and a political strategy (without an end, for as Derrida himself states, teleology and speculative economy cannot be thought of together) in which the stress has been put on the impossibility of the big projects of humanity, fundamentally, political work itself, democracy and justice. However, within this mode of dwelling in thought, impossibility is precisely and paradoxically, the only way for democratic or just events to take place, to happen or to fall symptomatically. When what is opened in time is the possibility and space for a possible irruption of radical alterity (the other), all these projects must remain—and even be thought of as—suspended, i.e., awaiting to overflow, for example, of other subjective positions or other living forms. This possible irruption will

³⁰ Paco Vidarte, “Derriladacan: Contigüedades Sintomáticas. Sobre El Objeto Pequeño J@Cques,” in *Conjunciones: Derrida Y Compañía*, ed. Cristina de Peretti and Emilio Velasco, Madrid: Dykinson, S.L., 2007, Derriladacan: Contigüedades Sintomáticas. Sobre El Objeto Pequeño J@Cques; in *Conjunciones: Derrida Y Compañía*, ed. Cristina de Peretti and Emilio Velasco, Madrid, Dykinson, S.L., 2007. Translation ours.

³¹ See Sigmund Freud, “Constructions in Analysis”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXIII, ed. James Strachey, London: Vintage, 1937.

need for it to be recognized and that a place be opened within the organization that hosts it, i.e., the “host organism” must be modified. Democracy and justice, states Derrida, are what they are, if and only if, they are always and radically to come. To wave, triumphantly, the flag of a successful culmination of the democratic and/or justice project (in this case it can be thought of as a constitutive text) would be THE actual proof of its failure. Democracy and justice only are when they are open to the possible untimely arrival of the other. All of this is not primarily an ethical prescription, it is a phenomenological description of the befalling of Being and then, yes, deconstruction acts as a political strategy that seeks to find a certain kind of harmony with the economy of Being (or the economy that Being is), its implosive time, its spectrality and its lack of completeness.