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# Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* and Its Deconstructive Ontology

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Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* and Its Deconstructive Ontology

by

Rachel A. Naor

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

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*Dedication*

For Millie, Ariel, and Asaf

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Deconstructive Ontology

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ABSTRACT

I intend to showcase Suzan-Lori Parks's repetitious, supplemental virtuosity, which is a testament to the fluid, indeterminate condition of her concepts. I seek to demonstrate that in textualizing the quality of absence in the written dialogue, Parks's *The America Play* becomes uniquely deconstructive. For indeed, through the absent "presence" of an historically mythified president and a gravedigger's skewed identity, the play becomes a stage for splinters of historicized, differentiating, repeating signifiers that supplement, even as they redefine, their referential signified. Performing deconstructive thinking, Parks's textuality is accommodated by a content through which she calls attention to the structures of metaphysics in our discourse, stressing our inability to erase them, and our need to question them through continual self-reflexive thinking. I hope to show that Parks's genius is apparent in her unique mastery of language. This kind of mastery is revealed through her drama's connection to conceptual possibilities, which are hypostatized, staged through the materiality of her drama's textual configuration. In consciously imbuing her pages with representational temporal spaces akin to Derrida's *différance*, Parks shows how the supplemental perpetuity of metaphysical signification phenomenally attests to the conceptual, idealized absence it supplements. I speak here of idealization that underlies the structural signified, always already a supplemented absent, which carries metaphoric trappings of phenomenological substance in a form of the

signifier, returning through a morphemic ideality in the assuredness of its infinite return.

I read Park's intent in *The America Play* as inherently deconstructive because Parks dramatizes the enigma of the trace; that is, the enigma of its impossible, yet, relentless repetition. In examining the trace and its historical "genesis" through the Idea in the Kantian sense, I will show how Parks's Rep & Rev, repetitions and revision, textually performs its impossible repetition, which is always metaphysical. In self-reflexively showing the impossibility of metaphysical presences, Parks establishes a need for a persistent practice of deconstructive interrogation, questioning self-assured, metaphysical, dogmatic thinking.



## Part I

### Introduction

The crux of my research concentrates on what I identify as Suzan-Lori Park's dramatization of deconstructive poetics in *The America Play*. Specifically, I intend to show how she manipulates Jacques Derrida's understanding of spatiotemporal<sup>1</sup> elements of language production. I will place particular emphasis on the elements that make possible the production of metaphysical<sup>2</sup> discourse in the play, a discourse which, as Derrida suggests, is always substantiated through processes of idealization<sup>3</sup> and its reemergence in the economies of the "trace."<sup>4</sup> Parks, I argue, creates structure and context in which she embeds the trace so as to perform the ways in which it propels the differential impetus of *différance* itself.<sup>5</sup> What we gain through an analysis such as this is an understanding of the ontological qua temporal and spatial lingual structures of thinking in the play, which, as Derrida shows, are never unearthed at their primordial topology<sup>6</sup>. This point of origination is the absence that Derrida identifies as "presence."<sup>7</sup> According to Derrida, this absence is what the discourse of metaphysics supplements.

I seek to demonstrate that in textualizing the quality of absence in the written dialogue, Parks's play becomes uniquely deconstructive. For indeed, through the absent "presence" of the mythified president and the gravedigger's skewed identity, the play becomes a stage for splinters of historicized, differentiating, repeating signifiers that supplement, even as they redefine, their referential signified. Performing deconstructive thinking, Parks's textuality<sup>8</sup> is accommodated by a content through which she calls attention to the structures of metaphysics in our discourse, stressing our inability to erase them, and our need to question them through continual self-reflexive thinking.

Hence, demonstrating sensibility to textual deconstructive performance, Parks manipulates her signs in showing the inherent absence of their signified. In consciously imbuing her pages with temporalizing spaces akin to Derrida's *différance*, Parks shows that the physical-poetic-ecstatic of signification is both phenomenal and metaphoric in staging the absent, incomplete dialectics of idea/idealization, which make metaphysical signification possible. I speak here of the idealization that underlies the structural signified, always already a supplemented absent, which carries metaphoric trappings of phenomenological substance in a form of the signifier, returning through a morphemic ideality in the assuredness of its infinite return. This kind of idealization and the impossibility of its tenable hypostatization mark Parks's textual impulse.

I read Park's intent in *The America Play* as inherently deconstructive because Parks dramatizes the enigma of the trace; that is, the enigma of its impossible, yet, relentless repetition. The undecipherable origin of repetition, or, for that matter, the untenable presence of all philosophical aporetics<sup>9</sup>, is the deconstructive nexus—the undecideable. What I will attempt to do is show how Parks creates textuality that comments on a content, which reveals the abyss of the unknowable in the bottomless structure of the genesis of origin. In this, I will necessarily encounter difficulties of course. Yet, it is impossible to analyze Parks's oeuvre, in discerning a consciousness to problems of metaphysics, without examining her practices of Rep & Rev (repetition and revision),<sup>10</sup> which underlie the problematic of revealing the origin of the trace or, rather, repetition as such. An analysis of Derrida's core notions proves to be invaluable: *différance*, play, the supplemental, all propelled through the temporal and spatial pathology underlying the enigmatic repetition of the trace. I intend to show how, through

a rigorous textual economy, in a collapsing dialectic to content, Parks succeeds in accommodating a deconstructive way of thinking.

Moreover, I identify a-traditional textuality in the writing of both Parks and Derrida as their “ethical moment;” that is, an attempt at what Wittgenstein describes as our “urge to thrust against the limit of language . . . .,” which is for Wittgenstein the first demand on our ethical awareness: “This thrust against limits of language is ethics.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this project is to demarcate textual activity, which hypostatizes temporality, through the sign’s idealized spatiality in showing how ontological structures of metaphysical discourse occur.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, when we consider the kind of dogmatic thinking that metaphysics perpetuates, an economy of ethics becomes significant. Both Parks and Derrida, I argue, fissure an opening for an ethic that is demarcated by heterogeneity of possible resolutions within the limit of the irresolvable; that is, through the energy of “play.”<sup>13</sup> “Play” is the impetus that pervades Parks’s writing in *The America Play*. I find that a discussion of Parks as participating in the postmodern parlance might be invaluable in showing the necessity of averting inculcation of metaphysics while creating a subversive metaphysical model.<sup>14</sup>

My interest in Parks’s work is a response to what I perceive to be an affirming and disaffectingly vicarious, seemingly precarious lingual expression, antithetical to fundamentals of traditional prescriptions of thinking. Although Parks’s works are exercises in performative rebellion against traditional dramaturgy and its philosophical heritage, her works also attest to the insurmountable presence of a combination of the same self philosophical heritage and specimen of black consciousness. It seems as if Parks’s works are marked by a-traditional intensity that gains its energy through a

pathological relation to persistent specie of metaphysic. Further, the irreconcilable dialectic of heterogeneity of possibilities, represented through any structure of change, on the one hand, and consciousness to lingering ontological heritage, on the other, situate Parks's early works on the differential, liminal space divulged through the practice of deconstruction. This space is crucial in exploiting the possibilities within the impulse of a sustained opening, a fundamental state of ethics, which ultimately results in structures of suggested uncertainty.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, being cognizant of difficulties in demanding a state of incertitude must be concurrent with a realization that such a state might offer a vital opening for persistent inquiry. Hence, I view Suzan-Lori Parks's works as readying the ground for questioning, an activity that arguably is not foreign to Jacques Derrida.<sup>16</sup> My intention is to consort Suzan-Lori Parks's works with Jack Derrida's deconstructive understanding, which is already, so I argue, inherent in her work.

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger's statement in *Being and Time* that when talking "about Dasein's having a 'spatio-temporal' character, we could not mean that this entity is present-at-hand 'in space and also in time'" (418), is sufficient to set the locum within which Derrida complicates Husserl's understanding of pure ideality, of untainted, spatiotemporal conceptuality. In *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, Derrida shows that paradigmatically pure idealities such as geometry are revealed through "bound" idealities such as language, making any claim to gaining an opening for spatiotemporal possibilities problematic. Nonetheless and as we are about to discover, Derrida's indebtedness to Husserl begins at the same *spatiotemporal locum* (my emphasis).

<sup>2</sup> Traditionally metaphysics refers to those principles or events that are unexplainable and whose reality we must assume, as Emanuel Kant does for example, with the notion of God. For Derrida, metaphysics constitutes concepts that philosophy has never been successful in disambiguating, "(essence, existence, substance, subject,) . . . . transcendental, consciousness, God, man . . . ." (Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" [SSPDH hereafter] in *Writing and Difference* [WD hereafter] Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University Press, 1978. translation of *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1965) p.280. Forth coming is an extrapolation on Derrida's "metaphysics of presence," which, in effect, defines the deconstructive project. I intend to prove that *The America Play* is deconstructive insofar as it attempts to interrogate our perception of inculcated, normative notions of history and our participation in historicity as a perpetuity within which identities are acquired. History for Parks, as I think it is for Derrida, is a metaphysical fountainhead. However, the fact that her protagonist is black complicates the totalities with which American metaphysics is propagated and internalized.

<sup>3</sup> A very quick and introductory note here on a term that in actuality makes philosophy as such possible: ideality is the process through which individuals explain an event or a principle in which case the origin, the constitutionality of this phenomenon or principle, is unknown. In critiquing Husserl's phenomenological project, Derrida shows that idealization, the process through which phenomenological (eidetic) reduction occurs, is far removed from the origin it attempts to reveal and, hence, doubly removed from non-ideal, that is, the Idea. In his *Husserl's Origin of Geometry: an Introduction* as well as in *Speech and Phenomenon*, Derrida shows how the non-ideal, as that which Derrida identifies in the *Origin* as the Idea in the Kantian sense (a thought of complete, unified, transcendent reality, which is never phenomenal but gives phenomenology the gift of its propagation) never gains substantiation, and always remains the absence through which idealization is perpetuated. For example, geometry is the empirical effect of the Idea, while its proto-constitution, the way it came into being, is never known and therefore must be explained or idealized. Moreover, idealization is the discursive sustenance promulgating, through spatiotemporal structures, in a movement of self-constitution and collapse, the relentlessly repetitious reemergence of the Derridean trace. Our proposition focuses on idealization as pervasive, pathological structure of all metaphysical discourse. We will, in effect, side with Derrida's ultimate verdict: idealization rather an objective, ideal "presence" as such is at the core of phenomenological conceptual absences. In the body of my dissertation I intent to explicate on how the Idea and the ideal are connected in underscoring the problematic of origin as such. The absent origin is crucial to our understanding of Parks's drama, even as it underlies her consciousness to temporal and spatial elements seminal to her textual innovation.

<sup>4</sup> Since it is the structural element with which deconstruction functions and with which *différance* recovers its spatiotemporal elements, the trace is significant to any poststructural understanding insofar as it attempts to historicize ontology itself. The trace is the element through which Derrida deconstructs Husserlian phenomenology. For indeed, idealization is the sustenance that the trace—a none-empirical, metaphoric sedimentation of the Idea—needs to reassure its "ad-infinity return." Moreover, as it repetitiously returns, it supplements the lack of presence, a desire for which it was perpetuated in the first place; supplementation, it must be stressed here, occurs through signification that substitutes as it displaces the absence of "presence." Yet, the trace is not a phenomenological intentionality ordered by consciousness, or an absence inherent in "any gesture of ideation or perception, but the necessary temporal relation of the non-phenomenal content of the Kantian idea to its representation" (Alexander Argyros, "The Seam of the Trace," *Boundary 2* 10.2 (1982): 59-76) p. 63. The complexity of the trace is due to its temporal divisionary complication through which impetus it perpetually collapses and reemerges, a condition attesting to its own metaphysical state. Since in *The America Play*, as I argue, Parks's repetitions and revisions emulate the repetitious behavior of the deconstructive trace, the trace is the element on which I

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intend to base my argument, explaining extensively the conditions of its arrival and its activity within the corpus of my dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> A neologism of the amalgamation of difference, the spatial dynamic through which signifiers are added to what is already there, and deference, the temporal dynamic through which signifiers are added to something that is missing, is the “stage, *scène*” on which Saussure’s structural differential gains ontological dimensions. The production of language and its differential impulsion is introduced through the dual temporality of its signifiers and these signifiers’ multiple referential relation to their signified. The absent present is the third dimension which *différance* supplements. In this dissertation, its inscription will vary in concert with the ways Derrida’s translators and interpreters present it; for the most part, however, we shall be following David Allison’s translation in inscribing the word as difference. Decisively for Derrida, the letter “a” reigns at the top of a conceptual pyramid in announcing that its temporal and spatial differentials are irreducible to their elements in isolation and/or conjointly. The anomalous inscription of difference as *différance*, calls our attention to the supplementary nature of the sign through an inscriptional expression, in intending a certain disturbance of “metaphysics [which] treats the sign only as . . . a site of the transition, the bridge between two moments of full presence” (“The Pit and the Pyramid” in *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p.71. As we shall see, supplementation, rather than presence defines Parks’s dramaturgy in *The America Play*. In fact, she creates the environs within which she can stage the Derridean spatiotemporal differential to its onto-lingual potential.

<sup>6</sup> Here yet again the consideration is the origin of a phenomenon, grasped through the Idea, which, as Derrida proves, never comes before ideality even if its effect is present. The “proto-ness,” that is, constitutionality as such, is never recoverable. Insofar that it attempts to reveal the origin of a phenomenon, phenomenological reduction finds its definition through the non-phenomenal (Idea), which is said to be “prescription of complete givenness for a content which itself is infinite” (“Seam of the Trace” 63); that is, irreducibility which finds its definition only through the reducible, or, vice versa, reducibility that finds its definition through the irreducible, of which completeness (presence) is tenably lacking. I plan to prove that through incomplete dialectic of textuality and content, Parks’s play-text complicates core epistemologies of concepts such as history and identity in performing their always already absent origin.

<sup>7</sup> The term “presence” is the ultimate referent in Derrida’s interrogation of metaphysics. Derrida identifies “presence” as “the metaphysics of presence,” claiming that determining being as presence will ultimately result in metaphysics. The problem with philosophy is—Derrida echoes Heidegger here—that it always attempts to comprehend the structures of being as in their full presence, that is, as having all of their substances present. Since a fullness of a phenomenon or a principle is not attainable, philosophy created structures of thinking so as to supplement the lacking reality (presence) of those phenomena or principles to become the discourse of metaphysics. Parks shows the unlikelihood of presence as such in structures of history and identity.

<sup>8</sup> In analyzing the fabric (*textum*) of Parks’s textual drama through the “play” of her signifiers, we follow Derrida’s understanding of the textual. For Derrida, textuality is an abstraction, a paradigm, an idea, which, through its intelligible design, affects an explanation of the possible performativity of the textual as referential, differential phenomenon. Hence, when Derrida declares, “there no outside the text,” he means that the textual, the abstractive mode as a system of references, as a “general text,” underlies multiple possibilities of interpretive references in rejecting a concept of the text as limited to the sum of its signifiers—that is, substantiating meaning through a singular referral to any referent. Rudolph Gasché explains it in this way: “‘There is no extra-text’ means just this: nothing outside the text can, like a last reason, assume a *fulfilling function* (*Erfüllungsfunktion*) of the textual referrals. It certainly does not permit the conclusion that there is nothing else but the text, or for that matter, that all is language” (*The Tain of the Mirror*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986) p. 281. Derrida vents his frustration on the same point: “the concept of a text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, not to the book, not even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call ‘text’ implies all the structure called ‘real,’ ‘economic,’ ‘historical,’ socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. . . . That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naïve enough to believe and to have accused me of believing. But it does mean 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. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring. That’s all” (*Limited Inc* [hereafter LI], Ed. Gerald Graff. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988) p. 148. We hope to show that Parks’s *The America Play* exemplifies

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a deconstructive, textual, *written performance* of the differential, supplemental impulse inherent in metaphysical language.

<sup>9</sup> According to classical philosophy, the word *aporia* denotes a state of puzzlement, while when understood rhetorically, *aporia* denotes a state of doubt. Derrida's works are rife with *aporias*, with philosophical concepts for which total reduction, answer, is not viable. In "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology," Derrida says, "The question of the possibility of the transcendental reduction cannot expect an answer" (WD 167). In fact, Derrida never answers the multiple questions he raises, "the question of the text," "the question of writing," "the question of language," "the problem of metaphor," "the question of the margin," "the question of ontological subordination," "the question of history. . . ." (Ralph Shain, "Situating Derrida between Hegel and Kierkegaard" *Philosophy Today* 44.4 (2000): 388-403) p. 388. Derrida's deconstructive project is not an attempt to propound a theory in solving philosophical questions or, for that matter, doing away with them. Rather, at the outset, deconstruction puts forth questions, suggesting that although its reductive efforts are impossible, that is, unlikely to succeed, a possibility of a positivist turn is embodied in its mere attempt. Parks's dramaturgy is deconstructive insofar that her play-texts are informed by an open endedness in rejecting possibility of defined resolutions to questions of history and identity by disquieting her own innovative attempts to try.

<sup>10</sup> Rep & Rev or repetition and revision are at the heart of Parks's early work. She adopts the repetition with slight revision "integral to the jazz esthetic" whereby "with each revisit the phrase is slightly revised" (Parks, Suzan-Lori. "Elements of Style" in *The America Play and Other Works*. New York: Theater Community Group Inc, 1995) p. 9. Parks explains: "I'm also asking how the structure of Rep & Rev and the stories inherent in it—a structure which creates a drama of accumulation—can be accommodated under the rubric of Dramatic Literature where, traditionally, all elements lead the audience toward some single explosive moment" (ibid). Akin to deconstructive philosopheme, Parks's textual and dramatic aesthetic seeks to depart from the monolithic prescription of suggested resolutions, marking illusionist and representational drama. That is, in perpetually repeating words, phrases, and structures, minutely revised through textual and contextual differentials, Parks's text performs (stages) the inherent plurality engendered in a changing repetition. The impulse is multiple because the effect is change; says Parks, "it's not just repetition but repetition with *revision*. And in drama change, revision, is the thing. . ." (ibid). I plan to show how Parks's repetitious textuality is akin to Derrida's idea of iterability and how Parks creates a dramatic *mise-en-abyme* in staging heterogeneity of possibilities.

<sup>11</sup> From *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis* p. 68, in Richard Rorty's "Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of language." (*The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Ed. Guignon, Charles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 337-353.) p. 351.

<sup>12</sup> I am aware that considerations of space and time readily lend themselves to identifying structures of theatrical performance. Moreover, there is very little doubt that Derrida's trace can be potently identified as the element that impels theatrical performance to its constitutionality, even as it plays upon sustained temporal absences. What is more, Parks's dramatic texts map the ways in which temporality can be substantiated in the theatrical space in undercutting the putative purity with which Western thinking upholds its conception of temporality as "presence." To be sure, Derrida's ground breaking essays on Antonin Artaud, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" and "La Parole Soufflée" (WD 232-250, 169-195 respectively) transform theater from its conventional anticipation of pure presentation to its acceptance as a necessarily self- reflexive process, which comments on its inability to obtain the purity of its own presentation as such. As I have stressed, however, in this dissertational project I intend to treat the idea of performance not as a process through which theater becomes; rather I mean to relate Parks's play to the offshoot of the term's conventional understanding; that is, to its evolutionary reemergence within literal theory in emphasizing structures of performativity. Hence, I intent to investigate *The America Play's* textual performative economies in attempting to show how the play's contents dialectically accommodate its textual schemes, which dramatize the spatiotemporal structure of Derrida's *différance* on the page. W. B. Worthen traces performativity to Parks's noticeable textual play, which is always, so he argues, performance's volatile "antecedent" ("Citing History: Textuality and Performativity in the Plays of Suzan-Lori Parks." *Essays in Theatre/Etudes Théâtrales*, 18.1 (1999): 3-22) p. 4. My proposition focuses on the insurmountable difference between conceptuality, which underlies textual structures, and materiality, which evidences such textuality. From its inception, the textual for Derrida is an outcome of the performative.



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<sup>13</sup> Play is always a play of absence and presence, says Derrida. A statement that seems to underlie the repetitious perpetuity that marks *The America Play* with a rigorous substitution of presences through signs that always already evidence the absences they supplement. This is, in effect, the deconstructive practice in which reducibility of absences in a quest to reveal presences is declared as impossible and, yet, through which such practice an inherent possibility of reduction is revealed. However, more than anything else, Derrida attributes the notion of play to Nietzsche whose “Over-man’s” forgetful exuberance escapes the metaphysical forcefulness of the definition of “man and humanism . . . [participating in] the joyous affirmation of . . . a world of signs without fault . . . without security” (SSPDHS, 292-3) and with “laughter . . . ‘beyond’ metaphysics . . . [and] the house and the truth of Being” (“The Ends of Man” in *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 163. The reference here is to Heidegger, who views language as “the house of being.” As we explicate the deconstructive understanding of language, we shall notice that Derrida shows language as a house of cards with persistent resilience.

<sup>14</sup> As Derrida shows us, subverted metaphysics can occur only as, yet, another specimen of metaphysics. Just as postmodern thinking, according to Jean-Francois Lyotard, must precede modern worldview with its consciousness of challenges to the tradition. When I claim that Parks participates in the postmodern ethos by creating a subverted metaphysical model, I intend to stress the fact that her drama is a dialogue of self reflexivity and “skepsis.” According to Rayment-Pickard, skepsis is a deconstructive activity that although borrows its persistent questioning of philosophical aporias from the tradition, it rejects the Skeptics’ anticipation of resolution. (Hugh Rayment-Pickard, “Derrida and Fidelity to History.” *History-of-European-Ideas* 28 (2002): 13-20). In this way, Parks questions metaphysics of history and identity, even as she self-reflexively comments on her inability to offer resolutions. Concurrently, Parks’s art can be viewed as representing postmodern avant-garde as that which leaps over both hurdles of the representational impetus of mimetic naturalistic theater and the extreme response of Artaudian modern theater. She, in effect, comes closer to the intelligent epistemological economy that Matei Calinescu sees Umberto Eco as identifying in postmodern avant-garde. That is, Eco’s “insistence that the postmodernist rediscovery of the past or of the ‘already said’ cannot be innocent and that this lack of innocence must be fully acknowledged. Irony, playfulness, parodic and self-parodic nostalgia are some of the ways of doing so” (*Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) p.277. The kind of pastiche Parks recreates in *The America Play* erodes self-valorizing American nostalgia by parodying the memory of a president.

<sup>15</sup> Forwarding Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* in ascribing postmodern architecture as a “commitment to surface and to the *superficial*,” Fredric Jameson denotes that “It was . . . precisely to the superficial . . . that a certain French poststructuralism invited us . . . this is the moment . . . in which aesthetics gives way to ethics . . .” (Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) p. xvii. I connect Parks’s seeming playful “superficiality” to an economy of heterogeneity, which is, to my view, at the cusp of ethical practice.

<sup>16</sup> In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida argues that within “A community of the question . . . [in assuring that] the discipline of the question . . . previous to irony, to maieutics, to *epoché*, and to doubt, an injunction is announced: the question must be maintained. As a question. The liberty of the question must be stated and protected. A founded dwelling, a realized tradition of the question remaining a question. If this commandment has an ethical meaning, it is not in that it belongs to the *domain* [Derrida’s emphasis] of the ethical, but in that it ultimately authorizes every ethical law in general” (*Writing and Difference*, [WD hereafter] Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University Press, 1978) p. 80. Similarly, in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger contends that, “The answer to the question, like every genuine answer, is only the final result of the last step in a long series of questions. Each answer remains in force as an answer only as long as it is rooted in questioning” (*Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. Harper San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993) p. 195. Maybe this is why Derrida stresses that “. . . the question is always enclosed; it never appears immediately as such, but only through the hermetism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question. The purity of the question can only be indicated or recalled through the difference of a hermeneutical effort” (WD 80). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida is emphatic in saying that “the question of the meaning of being, the being of an entity and of the transcendental origin of the world . . . must be patiently and rigorously worked through, the critical movement of the Husserlian and Heideggerian questions must be effectively followed to the very end, and



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their effectiveness and legibility must be conserved” (*Of Grammatology* [OG hereafter] Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. (translation of *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967) p. 50. In *Speech and Phenomenon* (SP hereafter), Derrida stresses, “old signs, enjoining us to continue indefinitely to question presence within the closure of knowledge. . . . heard in the openness of an unheard-of question that opens neither upon knowledge nor upon some nonknowledge which is a knowledge to come. In the openness of this question *we no longer know*. This does not mean that we know nothing but that we are beyond knowledge (and its ethical, aesthetic, or religious system). . . . Such a question will legitimately be understood as *meaning* nothing, as no longer belonging to the system of meaning” (Trans. David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) p. 102-3. Going through the breadth of Parks’s dramaturgy, approaching it with an inherent need to “look for answers,” we immediately realize that answers to questions as those concerning history and identity, if viable at all, remain open.

## *Deconstruction*

Forthwith, we must understand the philosophical elements that impel Suzan-Lori Parks's dramaturgy. We must first identify the absence of originary detritus marking the textual matrices of Parks's *The America Play*, which, arguably, can be recognized through the deconstructive precepts of Jacques Derrida. Yet, at the outset, I must stress that I see Parks's texts as *performing* the deconstructive discontent, making a stark, pathologically deconstructive critique of her work superfluous and unnecessary.

Deconstruction, Derrida's project, calls our attention to the production of metaphysical language by problematizing the schismatic, paradoxical state of its textual materiality and its lexicological immateriality therein. Yet, before I expatiate on Parks's work through the textual, yet, philosophical enigma deconstruction reveals, let me discuss, some philosophical rudiments guiding its practices cursorily.

I think that Jonathan Culler describes deconstruction best when he argues that "[deconstruction] is a practice of reading and writing attuned to the aporias that arise in attempts to tell us the truth. It does not develop a new philosophy framework or solution but moves back and forth, with the nimbleness it hopes will prove strategic, between nonsynthesizable moments of a general economy."<sup>1</sup> "Nonsynthesizable moments" are those occurrences in a life of a concept escaping the grip of centripetal thinking; for Derrida's deconstruction such thinking is logocentric.<sup>2</sup> Christopher Norris explains Derrida's neologistic coinage by observing that "To think logocentrically is to dream of a

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<sup>1</sup> (*On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1982) p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> For Derrida, the term underlies the pervasiveness with which the voice of reason, phonocentricism, the logic within the voice, the essence of all presences, the "absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and ideality of meaning," functions within the philosophical tradition (OG p.12).

‘transcendental signified,’ of a meaning outside and beyond the differential play of language . . . . Deconstruction defines its own project by contrast as a perpetual reminder that meaning is always the sign of a sign, that thought cannot escape this logic of endless supplementarity.”<sup>3</sup> Specifically, deconstruction is about shattering Hegelian completing dialectic, dreaming its origin in Plato’s binaries: “Derrida also claims that deconstruction, as a process applied to the text ‘leaves a track in the text,’ opens up the dialectics of closure, and results in the placing or revealing of a ‘fold’ in the *Aufhebung* of the concept itself.”<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, Derrida argues, meaning for philosophy is always already invested in and restricted to reason, which is idealized<sup>5</sup> therein. Derrida reveals these structures of idealization as metaphysical; that is, not as meaningless, but, as Emmanuel Kant points out, never truly discernible and, hence, never truly knowable, demanding, therefore, inquiry as to their absent, yet, idealized presence; for indeed, for every idealized, absent concept there is an opposition, which is ultimately marginalized. Hence, deconstruction interrogates the hierarchies defined through kinds of idealization that metaphysical thinking promulgates, exposing while de-legitimizing the privileged status a concept has in a binary relation. Yet, unlike Hegelian systematically reconciling dialectics (gained through the movement of *Aufhebung*<sup>6</sup>), deconstruction as a specie of interrogation rejects

<sup>3</sup> (Derrida, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) p. 85-86. The deconstructive supplement as I see it materializing in Parks’s *The America Play* is significant to my thesis and will be discussed at greater length therein.

<sup>4</sup> (Irene Harvey, “The Différance between Derrida and de Man.” Silverman, Hugh J., and Aylesworth, Gary E. eds. in *The Textual Sublime: Deconstruction and Its Differences. Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and Literature*. Vol. 1. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Processes of Husserlian idealization are significant to Derrida’s deconstruction of phenomenological reduction. As I progress, I intend to elaborate on the meaning of the ideal and its propagation in both phenomenological and deconstructive discourses.

<sup>6</sup> This is Hegel’s “famous speculative concept of ‘sublation’ or ‘supersession’ in which each new element ‘lifts up’ and retains what is valuable in what comes before at the same time that it surpasses it . . . . the system fulfills itself in concepts of totality—the Absolute . . . . [in] connect[ing] to its beginning, giving itself the circular shape of reconciliation” (Ralph Shain, “Situating Derrida Between Hegel and Kierkegaard.” *Philosophy Today* 44.4 (2000): 388-403) p. 398.

the possibility of a complete reduction of an aporia, an irresolvable philosophical problem but, which makes evident, in the practice of interrogation itself, that a reduction, an answer, is viable. I think that John Caputo is accurate in saying that “Deconstruction . . . is the endless, bottomless affirmation of the absolutely undeconstructible,” even as he “gathers,” if possible at all, the impetus of deconstruction: “Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away . . . . A ‘meaning’ or a ‘mission’ is a way to contain and compact things . . . . gathering them into unity, whereas deconstruction bends all its efforts to stretch beyond these boundaries, to transgress these confines, to interrupt and disjoin all such gathering.”<sup>7</sup> When in *Speech and Phenomena* Derrida contends that “‘the look’” cannot “‘abide’” and that “‘the thing itself always escapes’” (104), he suspects the whole of phenomenology, in fact, the whole of philosophy for its metaphysicalization of “‘meaning’”; that is, the metaphysicalization of presence. I extrapolate on Derrida’s understanding of metaphysics as “‘the metaphysics of presence,’” the determination of being as presence, to greater degree therein. For now, it will suffice to say that the anticipated tenability of deconstructive disquietude, as that which Caputo identifies, marks deconstruction beyond the limits of its practices.<sup>8</sup>

Derrida’s understanding of binary opposition is an elementary point.

Nonetheless, it is significant in understanding Derrida’s deconstructive departure point.

Derrida explains, “. . . for contrary values (good/evil, true/false, essence/appearance,

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<sup>7</sup> (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell: a Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1997) p. 31-32, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida explains: “Far from being a methodical technique, a possible or necessary procedure, unrolling the law of program and applying rules, that is, unfolding possibilities, deconstruction has often been defined as the very experience of the (impossible) possibility of the impossible . . . .” (*On the Name*, Ed. Thomas Dutoit, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 43. The dialectic cannot abide and is indeed impossible, making deconstruction unique in realizing its success in its failure.

inside/out etc.) to be in opposition, each of the terms must be simply *external* to the other, which means that one of these oppositions (the opposition between inside and outside) must be accredited as the matrix of all possible opposition.”<sup>9</sup> Inside/outside is the metaphoric, metaphysical inscription in defining essence, center, in short, the core of concepts, their substantive, and therefore, privileged presence, which deems its opposite, its supposed exteriority, as margin. Plato’s dual conception, in which intelligible essences transcend the phenomenal world, pervades western thinking, forcing a discourse that must supplement the interiority it can only assume as having. Although deconstruction always already resides within the opposition itself in “dislocating displacing, disarticulating, disjoining, putting ‘out of joint’ the authority of the ‘is,’”<sup>10</sup> residing within and overturning the binaries, Derrida stresses, falls short. In *Positions*, Derrida emphasizes that he is “. . . attempting to pursue . . . a kind of *general strategy of deconstruction*. The latter is to avoid simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* within the close field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it . . . we must traverse a phase of *overturning*. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with a peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis* (Derrida’s emphasis), but rather with a violent hierarchy.”<sup>11</sup> Yet, the metaphysics of the in/out hierarchy, although displaced through Derrida’s explication on the nature of structure,<sup>12</sup> pervades Derrida’s own thinking.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> (“Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination*, Trans. Barbara Johnson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> (“The Time is Out of Joint, Trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Deconstruction is/in America*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp. New York: New York University Press, 1995, pp. 14-41) p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> (*Positions*, Trans. Allen Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981) p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> Derrida argues that the center of the structure is, in effect, outside the formal elements of the structure, prompting “classical thought . . . [to] say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*.” (“Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the

Derrida admits that all elements of a deconstructive intervention reside in the “neglected cornerstones”<sup>14</sup> of an already existing system. A quintessential binary for Derrida’s deconstructive paradigm (this word, as it is uttered or written in referencing deconstruction, must be simultaneously qualified) is that of speech and writing, reemerging in Derrida’s discussion of Saussurean structural linguistics and the binarization of the sign itself in *Of Grammatology* and Derrida’s critique of Husserl’s understanding of speech (specifically as the voice) and writing in *Speech and Phenomenon*. In fact, Derrida contends that from Plato to Saussure the valorization of the spoken word as a-representational, intentioned, unhindered, natural, birthed of the soul, the reigning monarch of all insides, was situated in antithetical dialectic to the written sign, the prosthetic, “the exteriority that one attributes to utensils; to what is even an imperfect tool and a dangerous and maleficent technique.”<sup>15</sup> The assumed purity,

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Human Sciences,” 278-93 (SSPDHS hereafter) in *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University Press, 1978) p. 279.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Kates argues that Derrida’s discussion of binaries in *Of Grammatology* functions itself as logocentrism and phonocentrism. (“Deconstruction as Skepticism: The First Wave” *Journal-of-the-British-Society-for-Phenomenology* 33.2 (2002): 188-205) p. 202. Derrida, of course, admits to the unlikelihood of escaping the metaphysical grip: “There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history” (SSPDHS) p. 280. For the purpose of our proposition, we shall soon find out that the deconstructive trace finds its tenuous space within a stratum of exteriority, defined, according to Derrida, through the opening of a concept upon its non-self, delimiting a possibility of interiority altogether. As we introduce the trace, we shall attempt as best we can to elucidate its pathologically problematizing behavior.

<sup>14</sup> (*Memoires: for Paul de Man*, Trans. Lindsay, Culler, Cadava, & Kamuf, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) p. 72. Derrida continues to argue that “the spot for efficiently inserting the deconstructive lever is the cornerstone . . . this one derives its privilege from the fact that it is indispensable to the completeness of the edifice” (ibid). If deconstruction finds its sustenance in the weaknesses it reveals in the putatively complete systems it claims to undermine, its own a-systemic system can hope for nothing more than self-deconstruction. Thus, it comes to no surprise that on more than one occasion, Derrida discusses the unlikelihood of escaping metaphysical discourse; that might amount to admittance that his own philosophical discourse is metaphysical thereof.

<sup>15</sup> (OG 34), the “maleficent” in the written sign, according to Derrida’s reading of Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, is due to its kinship to “the fatal violence of political institution,” and the bringing about of “a break with nature” and apparent “fall” into culture. What is more, the “natural” *phonic* mark was replaced by the “artificial” *graphic* mark so “that the latter managed to *usurp* the main role” (OG, 36).

truthfulness of speech is the byproduct of the perennial inside, the essence, philosophy historically attributes to its aporetics.<sup>16</sup>

We must remember that the inside/outside dichotomy is already inherent in the structure of the Saussurean sign as signified/signifier (*signatum/signas*), which, although are said by Saussure to be the “two sides of the same leaf,” are historically fissured by an insoluble breach that is as ancient as Heraclites. Simply put, at the outset, the signified, a sign’s putative meaning, resides in arbitrary relation to the signifier, the empirical, phenomenological component of the sign, even as it gains its definition through differential perpetuity. Derrida notes: “Arbitrariness can occur only because the system of signs is constituted by the differences of the terms and not by their fullness. The elements of signification function not by virtue of the compact force of their cores but by the network of oppositions that distinguish them and relate them to one another. ‘Arbitrary and differential’ says Saussure ‘are two correlative qualities.’”<sup>17</sup> There is very

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<sup>16</sup> In dislodging the speech/writing opposition in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida’s references Socrates’ oxymoronic depiction of speech in *The Phaedrus*, in showing that Socrates himself views writing as primal. Socrates tells Phaedrus that he is thinking of a “discourse that is brother to the written speech . . . better and more effective than the other . . . the sort that goes together with knowledge and is written in the soul of the learner” (*Dissemination* 148). Inscription in the intelligible, phenomenon disembodied through the transcendent, empirical episteme that propounds revelation in the infinite are all servile subjects in the supplemented kingdom of Logos.

<sup>17</sup> (“Différance” in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* [SP hereafter], Trans. David B. Allison. Evanston : Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 129-160) p.136. Derrida does away with the duality of the sign altogether: “Every signified, he claims, is already a signifier, and any entity or point of fixity outside the differential economy of language that would somehow exceed the chain of signs and arrest the movement of freeplay is prohibited by the trace” (Michael MacDonald, “Jewgreek and Greekjew’: The Concept of the Trace in Derrida and Levinas.” *Philosophy Today* (1991): 215-25) p. 222. Discussion as to the trace’s “prohibiting” properties is forthcoming. For now, let us mention that conjoint to Saussure’s structural thinking and just as crucial in overturning the logical positivist view of language is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s game theory. Language games are games, so he argues in his later writings, through which language performs within contexts affectuating a desired end. In the end of his *Logical Investigations*, admitting to his failure in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein emphasizes the relational and arbitrary nature of language in this way: “So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound. –But such a sound is an expression only if it occurs in a particular language game . . .” This is a far cry from Wittgenstein’s summation in the *Tractatus* that “what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (Richard Rorty, “Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of language” in *The Cambridge Companion*

little doubt as to Saussure's influence on Derrida's thinking. To be sure, when considering structural influence, the "post" in the term post (structural) testifies both to indebtedness and to dissimilitude; however, we need realize that the latter manifests through the monumentality of the structural signified: "There has to be a transcendental signified for the difference between signifier and signified to be somewhere absolute and irreducible" (OG, 20). Hence, the fundamental structure of the Saussurean sign hinges on the immutable, transcendent meaning that its signified upholds, that is, "an undecomposable unity," which emerges through the understanding that "The formal essence of the signified is *presence . . .*" (OG 18).<sup>18</sup> As we continue to explore Derrida's early thinking, we shall notice that the "formality" he attributes to definition of certain concepts is seminal.

We need, therefore, remember that my proposition predominantly concentrates on the spatiotemporal economies underlying the textual appearance of signs, that is, both in their metaphoric ideality (presence) and their empirical reality as they materialize on the page in a reiteratively simultaneous movement of semantic, morphemic, and syntactic "primordial" supplementation, even as they reverberate with absent phonemic echoes.<sup>19</sup>

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to Heidegger. Ed. Guignon, Charles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 344, 353. When Samuel Beckett's Clov fulminates Hamm for asking him the meaning of the word "yesterday"; the allusion to Wittgenstein is uncanny: "That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any moer, teach me others. Or let me be silent" (*Endgame, The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, Ed. W. B. Worthen, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2004) p. 560. Philosophy of language is first philosophy for both Wittgenstein and Derrida. The difference is, as Shain proposes, in Wittgenstein's attempt to "dissolve philosophical questions" and Derrida's posture that such attempts are doomed to fail (388).

<sup>18</sup> Derrida connects the transcendence of Husserl's speech [voice] to the "signified, which is always ideal by essence . . . [and which] is immediately present in the act of expression. This immediate presence results from the fact that the phenomenological 'body' of the signifier seems to fade away at the very moment it is produced . . . It phenomenologically reduces itself, transforming the worldly opacity of its body into pure diaphaneity. This effacement of the sensible body and its exteriority is for consciousness the very form of the immediate presence of the signified" (SP 77).

<sup>19</sup> We must not forget that phonemes are both utterances and written linguistic units. Derrida's deconstruction is that of the privilege of the former in showing the textual pertinence of the latter. In



Hence, in addition to its manipulation of Saussure's structural thinking, the deconstructive trajectory includes an epistemological inquiry into ontological rudiments qua temporality and spatiality inherent in metaphysical signification as such. In fact, in explaining Derrida's poststructural, deconstructive philosopheme, I aim to demonstrate how time, space, and signification contribute the differential basis of the metaphysical concepts deconstruction interrogate. Moreover, the emphasis rests on those concepts' origin in demonstrating that there is an insurmountable rupture between origin of a concept and its regeneration as a metaphysic. Structures of origin or "pure presence," as Derrida examines and critiques them, specifically, through considerations of Husserlian phenomenological eidetic reduction,<sup>20</sup> "substantiate" the core of Derrida's deconstruction of western metaphysics. Hence, the teleology, yet as it must be, non-teleology of the deconstructive project finds its "non-originary origin" in the sustained temporal and spatial openings inherent in the idea of signification as predominantly textural. I intend to connect this conceptual opening to what I believe is deconstruction's viable/nonviable teleology, which is, in my view, its ethical preparedness.<sup>21</sup>

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viewing textuality as fundamentally spatial, inasmuch as it is contiguous to Husserlian intersubjective temporality (of which discussion is forthcoming), Derrida structurally imbues signs with ontological elements that mark investigation of language as prerequisite to all philosophical thinking. Indeed, in discussing indication, (that component in the Husserlian theory of language schemata, antithetical to the univocal, intersubjective "pure expression," which, when I discuss Derrida's critique of Husserl's expression/indication hierarchical binary, I intend to explain) we discuss the impulse that assures the sign's temporal connection to its topological, thus, spatial realities. As Argyros remarks, "That the sign is always indicative means that it never escapes the spatiality of its actual or imagined inscription, proclaiming its phenomenality" (71).

<sup>20</sup> It might be worth differentiating here between Edmund Husserl's eidetic reduction, aiming to reduce a phenomenon to its origin, and his transcendental reduction, a phenomenological reduction that brackets considerations of origin and concentrates on what is shown.

<sup>21</sup> Yet again the same conceptual openness needed for "the question," is applicable to consideration of decision making, or, lack thereof, "undecidability." Derrida describes three cases: "that which resists binary or even triplicity. . . . The other defines the *limits* of decidability, of calculability or of formalizable completeness. The third remains *heterogeneous* both to the dialectic and to the calculable . . . [it] opens the field of decision or decidability. It calls for decision in the order of ethical-political responsibility . . . . A decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all

## Presence

“Pure presence,” a Husserlian fundament, is a pervasive tenet in the metaphysic, or rather, philosophy of the occident. For Derrida, presence is metaphysic’s first condition. In *Speech and Phenomenon*, he says that philosophy “is always a philosophy of presence” (63). The emphasis is on what Derrida coins as “the metaphysics of presence,” which is the “matrix” of philosophy and “is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidōs, archē, telos, energeia, ousia*, (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man and so forth.”<sup>22</sup> In listing a litany of philosophical core concepts, Derrida suggests that presence is the conceptually

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responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes. There can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and this passage by way of the undecidable. . . . a decision is structured by this *experience and experiment of the undecidable*. . . . In none of these three meanings is any completeness possible for undecidability. The effect of the latter is precisely to render all totalization, fulfillment, plenitude impossible” (LI 116). Therefore, openness in the indeterminable space between undecidability and the not-yet-made decision seems to be the condition for Derridean ethics. Derrida’s is an adamant decision about the significance of indecision. In “The Ends of Man,” Derrida speaks of the impossibility of deciding between two viable deconstructive structures: either that of the Heideggerian deconstruction of ontotheology in using the lingual rubric of its own discourse or that of structural differential schismatic strategy. Moreover, synopsisizing his memorable breakthrough talk at John Hopkins, SSPDHS, Derrida points to the irreconcilable binary of interpretation of interpretation “The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin . . . [while] The other . . . affirms play and tried to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who . . . has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play” (292). Deciphering is a rudimentary prerequisite for constructing a decision; hence, deconstruction is a sustained consciousness to pitfalls of decision construction and adherence to its lack thereof; specifically, through non-decision-making practices in rejecting the justifiability of tenable choice altogether and reinforcing the heterogeneity inherent in practices of “play.” It might be necessary to stress here that Derrida works within the institution of philosophical and political realities and that raking incalculable havoc is not part of the deconstructive design. Thus, the political possibilities of deconstruction must not be limited to specie of anarchical postmodernism. I think that Norris is apt in saying, “I would err that we err more grievously by assimilating Derrida to a strain of post-modern irrationalism whose effects he has done nothing to endorse” (*Derrida*, 169). I intent to pursue this limitedly in showing that the textual spaces Suzan-Lori Parks manipulates are inherently deconstructive, that is, spaces resistant to homogenous conceptualization. This kind of resistance is akin to deconstructive contestation, which functions within philosophical and dramatic tradition, and is, consequently, ethical.

<sup>22</sup> (SSPDHS 279)

ubiquitous, yet, absent, represented-as-self-evident totality, which deconstruction ultimately attempts to reveal and disquiet.<sup>23</sup> Derrida proposes that in determining being as presence, that is, in viewing reality as having all of its properties continuously present, we, in effect, ascribe phenomena and principles substances that they cannot sustain.<sup>24</sup>

Richard Rorty claims that Martin Heidegger is Derrida's "anxiety of influence." Indeed, there is no assessing the significance of Heidegger's assault<sup>25</sup> on Western metaphysics and on presence as such, disclosed in his explication on the temporal structures of being, which, in effect, reveal presence as the philosophically privileged mode of temporality. In discussing the privilege of presence, Derrida emphasizes, "From Parmenides to Husserl, the privilege of the present has never been put into question. It could not have been. It is what is self-evident itself, and no thought seems possible outside its element. Nonpresence is always thought in the form of presence...or as a

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<sup>23</sup> Derrida identifies such totalities, presences, in the imbrication of constructed binaries, marking a privilege of the inner, essential as rudiment to metaphysical thinking. He notes that "All metaphysicians from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded in this way, conceiving good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just *one* metaphysical gesture among others, it is *the* metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent" (LI 93).

<sup>24</sup> Dorothea Frede uses the term "substance ontology" in describing a kind of ontology that propounds a view in which "what is real is that which underlies properties, what "stands under" (*sub-stantia*) and remains continuously present throughout all change" ("Introduction" in Charles Guignon Ed. *The Cambridge Companion for Heidegger*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> In discussing "decentering" and rethinking the "structurality of a structure," really in rethinking presence, Derrida squarely attributes the assault on metaphysics to Heidegger in addition to "the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of Being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without present truth); the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of Being as presence" ("SSPDHS") p. 280. And then again in "Differance," Derrida traces his interrogation of presence to Heidegger, "The latter [Heidegger] provokes us to question the essence of the present, the presence of the present" (155). Nonetheless, we must also stress that indebtedness to classical ontology does not escape Heidegger, who emphasizes that in "taking *the question of Being as our clue*, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since . . . we have nothing to do with a vicious relativizing of ontological stand point . . . We must, on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that traditions . . ." (*Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1962) p. 44.

modalization of presence. The past and the future are always determined as past presents or as future present.”<sup>26</sup> Echoing Heidegger’s enterprise in attempting the *destruktion* of metaphysics in his own processes of deconstruction, Derrida, indeed, follows by concentrating his offensive on presence, even as he alters Heidegger’s ontological project in permeating presence as such with structural linguistics’ concept of differentiation. Nonetheless, Heidegger initiates the suspicion of “presence” in identifying the impulse guiding the whole of Western ontology as theological, renaming it onto-theology.<sup>27</sup> Since the conceptualization of tenably immutable presence, be it an event or a principle, is impossible and the discursive meditation on such absent and lacking concepts is, as it must be, theological. Hence, when dealing with metaphysical concepts, *absence* and not presence structures their meaning, their signified, and ultimately their transcendental state. What is more, the site of the absent presence is always already deluged with the “over abundance of the signifier.” Thus, the centrality, or, if you will, the totality of presence is putative at best; for it “could not be thought of in the form of a present being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a-fixed locus but a function a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitution came into play” (SSPDHS 278-80). The point is, Derrida stresses, that “From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. *We think only in signs*” (OG 50, Derrida’s emphasis). The absent presence is the absent reality of fulfilled desire for “full presence,” for “fundamental

<sup>26</sup> (“Ousia and Gramme in *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press) p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> In his introduction to Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomenon* David B. Allison notes, “Ontology and theology are united in their insistence upon a common ground and universal account of being, a first cause and a final reason to things. For the tradition of Western metaphysics, this unity has always been asserted under the title of absolute and non empirical reality, a transcendent being of principle that would subvert the empirical order by virtue of its role as cause and form . . . . Despite the impurity of language and communication, the possibility of an ideal and identical meaning has always been absolute referent in the form of an ideal content of signification, what Derrida elsewhere calls a “transcendental signified” (SP xxxix).

immobility and reassuring certitude” (SSPDHS passim). “Certitude,” “fundamental” centrality are components of the discursive impetus through which metaphysical thinking hypostatizes within the pathologies of dogmatic thinking; for indeed and as Heidegger propounds, as soon as we are self-assured in the homogeneity of our understanding, that is, that the phenomenon revealed to us is revealed in its totality [in its total substantive presence], concealment occurs. Worth noting here is the fact that coinciding with the adamant conviction that complete “unconcealment” [revealing] of an event occurs, is the calcification of thinking, which is, as it must be, dogmatic.<sup>28</sup>

It is that self-assuredness, a natural gesture to all dogmatic thinking, that Derrida is out to dismantle; the kind of self-assuredness, a resolute adherence to the meaning of metaphysical signified, which is always transcendental. The deconstructive “strategeme” is, therefore, to self reflexively call attention to sustained absences philosophy promulgates, by “call[ing] *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence” (OG 50, Derrida’s emphasis). Thus, in the deconstructive

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<sup>28</sup> In explicating the possibilities of thinking, the dialectic of “clearing” and “concealing” is germane to Heidegger’s understanding of how a work of art is meaningful for a community in establishing “open region . . . truth” as basis for uncalcified, self-reflexive thinking, significant to deconstructive understanding and to our own proposition. Henceforth, discussing the “clearing” or an “open region” a work of art creates for a community, Heidegger explains that “World and earth [the “world” feature propounds cultural mastery in making the work full faceted and consistent; in contrast, the “earth” feature resists human mastery and possibility of coherence in remaining hidden] are always intrinsically and essentially in conflict, belligerent by nature. Only as such do they enter the strife of clearing and concealing” (“The Origin of Work of Art” in *Basic Writings*, Ed. David Farrell Krell. Harper San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993) p. 180. In so thinking, clearing, the movement that assures that things are revealed to us “as such and such,” gains a self-reflexive dimensionality in understanding that such openness, “truth,” is available to us only when we realize that its hidden totalities remain concealed. The upshot is that lack of self-reflexive pathologies, will invariably create a kind of thinking that is self-assured and dogmatic. Don DeLillo’s “postmodern” sunsets are such community defining Heideggerian events, through which a community gains opening to the possibility of thought and contemplation. As the community gathers to view the sunset, Jack Gladney, DeLillo’s doomed protagonist, tells us, “The sky takes on content, feeling, and exalted narrative life . . . some are scared . . . some determined to be elated but most of us don’t know how to feel, are ready to go either way . . . the spirit of these warm evenings is hard to describe. There is anticipation in the air . . . but it is not . . . with coherent precedents, a history of secure response . . .” (*White Noise*, New York: Penguin Books, 1985) p. 324.

trajectory, “Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always of absence and presence” (SSPDHS 292).<sup>29</sup> It might be necessary to add here that the signification that “orders the displacement and substitution . . . .” of a point in time that “has always already exiled, [with] the overabundance of the signifier,” is supplemental. Notably, this signification’s “supplementary character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say the result of a lack which must be supplemented . . . .” a kind of signification, which “vicariously stands in for presence due to its primordial self-deficiency” (ibid 280, 290), pervasive to all metaphysics.

If we persist with the ontological sensibilities of my argument in suggesting that the undercurrents of textuality are, indeed, temporal and spatial, we can, at the get go, discern that Derrida’s idea of the supplemental nature of discourse is indispensable. For indeed the supplement “stands in” *place* of “presence,” a temporal impossibility; thus, the supplement substitutes temporal absence, even as it adds, through written inscription, to a topology of perpetually growing signification. In *Of Grammatology*, deconstructing Rousseau’s assertion that “Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as supplement to speech,” Derrida explain the double life of “the concept of the supplement . . . .”

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<sup>29</sup> Semiotically speaking, the notion of play is used in Derrida’s early writings restrictively. He does not mean, as he mentions in *Limited Inc*, “this notion of ‘free play,’ [which] is an inadequate translation of the word *jeu*, which I used in my first texts, but sparingly and in highly defined manner” (115-16). Rather, he speaks of play in a system of conceptual absences and presences before their opposition occurs. Per our n13, “play” is also related to Nietzsche’s participation in an unbridled process of becoming, different from participation in traditional processes of Being.

The supplement adds itself, it is surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplement to nature . . . . This kind of supplementarity determines all conceptual oppositions within which Rousseau inscribes the notion of Nature to the extent that it *should* be self-sufficient.

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.

(144-5)<sup>30</sup>

In discussing presence as such and in understanding the deconstructive disenchantment antithetical to it, we must adhere to its philosophical (historical) conceptualization as immediate, complete, essential, and, most of all, interior to the “*exterior* addition,”<sup>31</sup> of the supplement. Thus it comes to no surprise that Derrida’s vanguard attack on presence per se was initiated through his interrogation of Husserlian phenomenology. Let me note here that when I discuss Derrida’s analysis of origin and

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<sup>30</sup> To be sure, Derrida here discusses his morphemic, semantic and conspicuously non-phonemic neologism *différance*. For now, so as to adhere to a certain cohesively and progressively developing argument, I choose to refrain from introducing Derrida’s notion of the supplementary impetus. Let us just take note that the movement of *différance* supplements signs that are already there spatially and that it also supplements signs’s temporally deferred primordial absence.

<sup>31</sup> This is a definition of the supplement from “(Robert’s *French Dictionary*)” (OG 145).



repetition, I will touch upon Husserl's understanding of the retentional and protentional elements marking the temporality of the subject and the significance of his understanding of the presence of the "living present," which is a crucial referent in Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl's phenomenological reduction and, in effect, the deconstructive project itself. For now, however, keeping in mind the spatiotemporal structures the supplemental activity of a concept demands and as we persist with our investigation of how spatial and temporal rudiments underlie language production in assuring its conceptual and empirical textual regeneration, it might be sufficient to mention that when discussing sense as an intersubjective phenomenological dynamic, we are indeed dealing with the temporality of the subject. That is, inasmuch as processes of perception are temporal—whereby the subject relates to past experiences, even as it anticipates others through teleological impulse—attempts to attribute to them a durational temporality, which we can identify as "presence" will fail. What is more, although seen as isolated, Husserl's subject is always conscious of something outside itself, pointing to a persistent temporal exigency, propelled, and this is decisive, by signification, which radicalizes temporal nondefinition through its spatial, metaphoric and ultimately empirical, possibilities.<sup>32</sup> Although Derrida sides with Heidegger in viewing Husserl's

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<sup>32</sup> Discussing Husserl's "absolute subjectivity," Derrida contends that such impenetrable conception of the subject falters as soon as "we conceive presence on the basis of difference and not the reverse" (SP, 84n9); that is, if in constituting a concept of a subject we first, as we must, partake in language's structure of differences, any conception of the subject as presence must be questioned. As we shall see, Derrida persists in following Husserl's view in showing that subjectivity can be strictly understood through intersubjective analysis of the subject's intrinsic temporal differential to a temporality other than its own. Hence, I am hoping to set the stage here in showing the process through which the self affecting nature of the subject's differentiated temporality becomes the engendering, repeating nexus from which subjectivity springs forth as the ultimate *effect* of signification. Derrida's *différance* and its repeating trace are the inextricable, quasi-transcendental impulses on which I will be focusing in attempting to discuss the simultaneous association of time, space and signs. If only perfunctorily, let me add here that Husserlian understanding of historicity also functions on the basis of sense as fundamentally temporal. Husserlian historicity is understood as emerging from the teleological dictates of "origin and traditions of ideal objects [as] process of handing down and the endurance of this process, a heritage, [which] guarantee 'the



transcendental ego as, yet, another form of subjective idealism, Derrida departs from them both by imbuing the temporality of the subject with signs. Hence, when propounding, even as he analyzes “originary” absences, Derrida spatially, or, if you will, textually subsumes them with signs that comment on their conceptually absent content. The upshot is that the empirical, phenomenological appearance of the text dramatizes its textually supplemental nature, performing as the orphaned offspring of its own floating, absent lexicological values.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, through concentrated self-reflexive economy, deconstruction adopts Heidegger’s “as”<sup>34</sup> structure in explaining the metaphysical impulse; yet, deconstruction differs by actively calling attention to its suspicion of the tools of its own trade—language. The effect is massively important because it forces any analysis of philosophical aporetics to consider the problematic of the referential and differential nature of language, even as the said analysis must consider the ontic and

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possibility of historicity, i.e., the always intersubjective consciousness of history’ . . . . In other words, historicity is always a *sense-history*. It operates on the level of sense and is related to the problems of language, ideality, truth and humankind in its Living Present—the source of all sense and history” (Preface to *Edmund Husserl’s the Origin of Geometry: An Introduction (Origin hereafter)*, Trans. John P. Leavey JR. New York: Nicolas Hays, Ltd., 1978) pp. 10-11. The key word is “Living Present,” Husserl’s term for enduring, intersubjective self-presence, immersed in structures of handed down, determining heritage that is always already processed intersubjectively, or if you will, temporally. The emphasis is on the spatiotemporal movement underlying thinking, that is, the sustained, spatial gap between thinker and thought, the object of its thinking. Historicity, therefore, must involve the consciousness of the subject to something outside itself, processed, according to Husserl, within the subject, yet, determined by processes outside the subject. When relating Parks’s work to the concept of historicity, I will discuss historicity once more and will present Heidegger’s understanding of it. For now, however, we must adhere to an understanding that when we consider thought and language, we must be aware of primordial lingual, referential, differential performative parameters within the onto-phenomenological scheme of things.

<sup>33</sup> In “The Supplement of the Copula,” while arguing that Nietzsche’s attack on language as arbitrary and supplemental still leaves him entrapped in metaphysics such as “the arbitrariness of the sign in order to posit the contingent and superficial exteriority of language to thought, the secondariness of the sign in relation to the idea,” Derrida also calls our attention to the textual exigency of Nietzsche’s text. He stresses: “At any given moment, then, Nietzsche has to appeal to philosophical schemes, (for example, the arbitrariness of the sign, or the emancipation of thought as concerns a language), in his critical operation against metaphysics. This is not an incoherence for which a *logical* solution is to be sought, but a textual strategy and stratification that must be analyzed in *practice*” (*Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp. 178-9. For Nietzsche’s ground breaking piece “On Truth and Lying in the Extra Moral Sense,” look in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, Eds. Sander Gilman, Carole Blair, David Parent. New York: Oxford UP, 1989, 246-57.

<sup>34</sup> “As” for Heidegger is the prerequisite construct for all extrapolation, which, so he argues, is ultimately metaphysical.

ontological elements of its own discourse, facing, as it must, an insurmountable, irreconcilable abyss between its signs and their supplemented semantics therein. If it can viably exist, the emerging deconstructive paradigm is that metaphysical language is supplemental and that its supplementarity always already occurs in a temporality that is never recoverable, or, if you will, irreducible. Radically, therefore, an aporia such as subjective transcendence (presence) is irreducible to its elemental state.

Markedly, like the metaphysical structures that Derrida attempts to agitate, the concept of the supplement,<sup>35</sup> inasmuch as it impels conceptual oppositions, is quasi-transcendental and is, therefore, aporetic. However, unlike the presences metaphysicians from Plato to Husserl and beyond have been promulgating, Derrida calls attention to the temporal impossibility of his deconstructive concepts,<sup>36</sup> and in so doing, sustains an opening in “show[ing] the interiority of exteriority,<sup>37</sup> which amounts to annulling the ethical qualification and to thinking of writing beyond good and evil” (OG 314).<sup>38</sup> In

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<sup>35</sup> Representing metaphysical discourse as supplemental does not in any way foil the genesis of the supplement *par excellence—differance*, of which discussion is forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup> Discussing Rousseau’s understanding of language—speech as its “natural” authentic component, writing as supplemental and as “changing the spirit of language”—Derrida explains his understanding of the supplement, “It is the strange essence of the supplement not to have essentiality: it may always not have taken place. Moreover, literally, it has never taken place: it is never present, here and now. If it were, it would not be what it is, a supplement, taking and keeping the place of the other . . . Less than nothing and yet, to judge by its effects, much more than nothing. The supplement is neither a presence nor an absence. No Ontology can think its operation” (OG 314). To be sure, Derrida discusses a formidable void, which, as we shall persistently see, is the primordial spatiotemporal movement marking his and Husserl’s understanding of ideality as such.

<sup>37</sup> Again, the inside/outside binary is a pervasive metaphor in the deconstructive interrogation of Western metaphysics. Dichotomized concepts in their essential, interior purity, on the one hand, their inessential exteriority on the other are deconstructed in showing that definition of the privileged concept inextricably hinges upon its marginalized other, simultaneously making the latter just as crucial, disquieting, finally, their juridical status and, hence, causing the collapse of classificatory hierarchies.

<sup>38</sup> Thus, in interiorizing the metaphysical perennial margin (the outside), that is, in creating conceptual outside’s own spatial inward distance, in effect, essentializing it, Derrida displaces the hierarchical dichotomy of the traditional binary, reinventing a space resistant to the concept of stagnating thinking—presence. Hence, considerations of ethics away from a value laden hierarchy, readjusts, reassesses the whole of the project of ethics. Derrida’s choice of words, “beyond good and evil,” is not accidental. In my view, Derrida purposely echoes Nietzsche here in affirming the a-traditional practice of textual exuberance, as that which ultimately results in agitating given, metaphysical thinking. The question is of the textual as

comparison, the totalities put forth through conceptually hierarchical binaries such as intelligible/phenomenal, nature/culture, essential/accidental to name just a few, impossibly hold a conceptually enduring, immutable temporality in the present. Henceforth, metaphysical signification substitutes essential temporal improbabilities of the lexicological tenets it carries, promulgating them as self evident. For indeed, metaphysics is always “metaphysics of presence,” that is, metaphysics of topological and sequential absences, represented through textual, “general language” and phenomenal, written, supplementarity, which precariously stands in for their temporally indeterminate origin.

#### *Origin, Repetition, and Spatiotemporal Sign/Life of the Trace*

Here we continue to delineate the deconstructive trajectory in revealing temporal and spatial pathologies as they manifest through textual dramatics—all aiding in revealing a conceptual and phenomenal edifice within which deconstruction interrogates the temporal economies underscoring Western metaphysics, or, if you will, the privilege of presence in conceptual philosophical aporetics. Derrida staunchly connects western writing to a temporal impulse by arguing that its inherent phenomenal linearity is accommodated by an understanding that a word such as “history [for example] has no doubt always been associated with a linear scheme of the unfolding of presence, where the line relates the final presence to the original presence . . . .” To be sure, in relating

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evidencing the supplemental nature of philosophical discourse: “No matter how much philosophy may try to suppress its textuality, in other words, it can never avoid being ‘a kind of writing’ (as argued famously by Richard Rorty)” (Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p. 85.

“final presence to original presence,” the phenomenon of language’s textual linearity relates to its lexicological content as they both partake in a specific temporal design:

If one allows that the linearity of language entails this vulgar and mundane concept of temporality (homogeneous, dominated by the form of the now and the ideal of continuous movement, straight or circular) which Heidegger shows to be the intrinsic determining concept of all ontology from Aristotle to Hegel, the meditation upon writing and the deconstruction of the history of philosophy become inseparable.

(OG 85-6)

Following Derrida’s ‘meditation upon writing,’ our sensibilities must persist in investigating signification as a fundamental ontological structure, that is, in its temporal and spatial underpinnings as it reveals the instabilities of presence as a deconstructive absence, or, better yet, an absence as the genesis of a conceptual site of uninterrupted substitution of ‘the original presence.’ In effect, the problematic of the absent origin is at the heart of deconstruction and for that matter at the heart of all of philosophy;<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Derrida proves that phenomenology bases its philosophical exigency, in effect, its philosophical livelihood on “an irreducible nonpresence as having a constituting value, and with it a nonlife, a nonpresence or nonself-belonging of the living present, an ineradicable nonprimordiality” (SP 6-7). This is, as we shall continue and see, the pervasive proto-absence at the spatiotemporal defining locum of sense. Hence, at the outset in *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida sets the stage for the deconstructive critical core, if indeed we can term it as such, claiming that not only is reducibility of a phenomenon to its origin unavailable for the busi-ness of phenomenology, the origin’s non-origin, its non-primordial reality, is irreducible to its former likeness, even as it defines it. Yet, stresses Derrida, this is exactly the lifeline of the phenomenological enterprise, its inability to obtain the reduction it seeks first of, repeatedly and concurrently failing and birthing its teleological impulse: “Teleology is the threatened unity of sense and being, of philosophy and ontology. However, this teleology, which never ceased to ground and animate Husserl’s thought, cannot be *determined* in a philosophical language without provisionally breaking this unity for the benefit of phenomenology” (*Origin* 151). When discussing the intricacies of origin in line with Derrida’s discourse of the trace, I will clarify the significance of the so called “non-origin” to the deconstructive critique of phenomenological reduction. For now, we may keep in mind that difference and deferral are the *predetermining*, quasi transcendental movements underscoring the definition of origin (nonpresence) through its non-origin (nonself), even as they are both absent and simultaneously make reducibility of a phenomenon to its presence improbable.

however, deconstruction's emphasis is on relating 'originary' absences to signification and its underlying spatiotemporal structures to economies of metaphysical thinking.

In discussing structures of a phenomenon's origin—as the ultimate specie of immutable, durational “pure” presence—we must consider several key elements in Derrida's critique of Husserl's phenomenological investigation and how, in turn, these propel deconstructive interrogation, even as the latter fails to purify its own discourse from the intrinsic transcendence it uncovers in the former.<sup>40</sup> For that, we must discuss the trace—its primordial kinship to origin, the intriguing enigma of its perpetual repetition, its inherently spatiotemporal relation to signification, and, finally, its simultaneous precipitating influence and emergence in the discourse of metaphysics in the form of idealization—all elements, as I shall attempt to illustrate, thematize Suzan-Lori Parks's drama.

### *Origin and the Idea in the Kantian Sense*

To understand the way deconstruction, the system of the trace really, functions, we must understand Derrida's de-eliding of the Husserlian quest to reveal the origin of a

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<sup>40</sup> As we progress in understanding the deconstructive project, I believe that we shall have very little doubt as to deconstruction's quasi transcendental tendencies, particularly when taking into account the enigmatic reemergence of Derrida's *différance*. Just the same, when considering the teleological projects of both phenomenology and deconstruction, dissimilarity prevails. The reference here is to deconstruction's self-referential practices. Hence, it comes to no surprise when in “Ousia and Gramme” Derrida categorically states that “To criticize the manipulation of determination of these [metaphysical] concepts from within the system *always amounts*, and let this expression be taken with its full charge of meaning here, *to going around in circles*: to reconstituting, according to another configuration, the same system” (MP 60, Derrida's emphasis). Thus, at the outset, Derrida warns us that we will end up doing metaphysics; yet, the difference is in deconstruction's persistent self-reflexivity in admitting that a viable teleological variant for its own enterprise is unlikely.

For purposes of our proposition, the self-referential impulse is neither foreign to Parks nor to the ultimate interrogatory concept of all theatrical performances—the dichotomy of reality and representation. That is, it might be helpful to mention that when relating the self-referential impulse of deconstruction to Parks, we must also meditate upon theater as a persistent state within which performances, in a meta-theatrical impetus, comment on their state self-referentially in treading upon the cusp of representation and its irreconcilable, yet, inseparable relation to reality.

phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> In so doing, we must unfailingly adhere to the defining onto—spatiotemporal—logical sediments that assure the regeneration of metaphysical and deconstructive discourses both. We are yet again dealing with the mammoth-like notion of presence—its purity, and above all its primordial viability, that is, its source, or, if you will, its “origin.” The idea of origin, we must also keep in mind, and as we have already made clear, births the impetus through which the philosophical conception of temporality is invariably connected to the concept of presence as continuous and unchanging. The spatial addition to the nonoriginary origin of the temporal schemata is gained through both metaphoricity and empirical materiality of signifiers, functioning in the world, outside the purity of intersubjective temporality, as the actuality that births the possibility of all ideal purities whatsoever.

In *Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, Derrida calls attention to the fact that although geometry is created in an empirical event, its “proto-constitution,” the

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<sup>41</sup> Even as full conception of origin as such remains a phenomenological unknown in conditioning, as we shall see, phenomenology’s teleological project, I believe that Argyros is accurate in observing that it was through phenomenology that Derrida “first conceived the project of criticizing the whole of Western philosophy as the systematic repression of a certain kind of irrationality which, far from being accidental and therefore excisable, is the very condition of possibility for thought” (64). Calling attention to weaknesses in Husserl’s phenomenological project is by no means an attempt to deem phenomenology or for that matter “all of philosophy” irrelevant. On the contrary, “the respect for the great texts. . . .” says Derrida, “is the condition of [my] work. . . . the way I tried to read Plato, Aristotle and others is not a way of commanding, repeating or conserving the heritage. . . . [rather] it is an analysis which tries to find out . . . the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within their own corpus” (“Villanova Roundtable,” in John D. Caputo ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: a Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997) p. 9. What is more, throughout *Speech and Phenomenon*, Derrida once and again expresses his veneration for Husserl’s, “tormented . . . . contested from within by its own description of the movement of temporalization,” phenomenology (6). Since Derrida’s own deconstruction is heavily indebted to Husserlian “tormented temporalization,” Derrida’s admiration should not surprise us. Parks’s reverence to philosophical and literary heritage is just as distinct. Commenting on the topic of American theater, she conspicuously and auspiciously echoes T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in saying that “we should embrace the Great Tradition warmly and thoroughly reading . . . . Aristotle . . . . immersing ourselves in Shakespeare . . . . [while caring for] the Tradition of the Next New thing . . . . Each tradition always has the sound of the others within its earshot, the color of the other’s within its light, the smell of the others within its own intoxicating scent . . . . [Yet, Parks emphasizes] . . . . a great piece of writing is a revolutionary act” (“Tradition And The Individual Talent” *Theater* 29.2, 1999) pp. 26-7, 31.

history of its creation, is concealed to phenomenology; in fact, Husserl invites us to re-historicize geometry's constitutionality through phenomenological retrospection. Hence, it is significant to note that Derrida's critique in the *Origin* is of the viability of uncovering the constitutionality of an origin such as that of a familiar empirical gesture as geometry. The difficulty is rooted in any attempt to connect imperceptible origin to its emergence as an ideal. As it touches our argument, Derrida is out to complicate the idea of "the production of geometrical exactitude by idealization" (106).<sup>42</sup> Yet, he must, as must I, take a short detour through Husserl's explication on the line between non-geometry and geometry; that is, what are the transformational processes that instituted geometrical reality in the first place? If, as Husserl claims, geometry occurs through "pure thought" and "a passage to the limit (my emphasis)" how, Derrida asks, are we to understand a passage to the limit as both simultaneously creating geometry and distinguishing it as such? As we shall see, "passage to the limit" is paradoxically a-temporal dynamic, which finds its "origin" in conception of infinitude—the mother of all temporal definition. As we shall also see, the Husserlian "passage to the limit" is at the heart of phenomenological ambiguity, a metaphysical shrug resolved, at best, through the language of the ideal; that is, the language that is said to perpetuate matrices of origin-al purity, even as its own status as belonging to categories of the ideal is questioned. Complicating geometry's status as pure ideality in discussing geometry's "exact ideality [which] has been produced without the essential aid of sensibility or imagination [and

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<sup>42</sup> It might be worth remarking here that when we discuss the concept of phenomenological ideality, we are indeed in step with our investigation of temporal and spatial rudiments marking both deconstruction and phenomenology's discourses. In fact, we need realize that in discussing the problematization of origin-al economies in concepts such as history and identity in the plays of Suzan-Lori Parks, we are in effect dealing with structures of discursive idealization, which, as we shall see, are propagated through the repeating impetus of the deconstructive trace in the temporal and spatial flux of différance.



which] broke away by a leap from every descriptive mooring, [Derrida remarks:] It is ‘pure thinking’ [the first philosophical thought] that is responsible for the leaping advance of idealization and for geometrical truth as such . . . . [nonetheless] In its most *concrete* [my emphasis] determinations, the operation is always presented as a ‘passage to the limit’ [which] . . . . hides the idealizing act from a genealogical description” (*Origin* 133-34). Thus, in evidencing the becoming of geometrical presence, the impeding irreconcilability mounts through the absence of intuitable sensibility of the leap and the passage, resulting in lacking integrity of its “genealogical description,” culminating in phenomenological paralysis.

Hence, concerning the origin-al world and according to what in Husserl’s view is “apodictic,”<sup>43</sup> Derrida observes “*That* [my emphasis] this pregeometrical world is a world of *things* disposed of according to an exact<sup>44</sup> space and time . . . . *That* these things must have been ‘corporeal’ . . . . but since culture already had to have left its mark on the world (*because language and intersubjectivity must have preceded geometry* [Derrida’s emphasis]), corporality does not exhaustively overlap thinghood . . . . space and time . . . . *That* material qualities . . . . must be necessarily ‘related’ to the pregeometrical spatiotemporal shapes by a supplementary eidetic determination” (*Origin* 122-3).

Derrida methodologically undermines Husserl’s conception of transcendent, ideal (pure)

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<sup>43</sup> For Husserl, when assuring the reality of a phenomenon, apodictic evidence is a specie of evidence that manifests through a phenomenon’s complete, substantive presence, showing of itself to consciousness. In this context, Derrida details things in the protogeometer’s (the first geometer’s) world, which, according to Husserl, are beyond question. In fact, we might recount three phenomenological orientations: apodictic, certainty registered in the experience of the subject; the second phenomenological orientation, which concentrate on discovering essences through eidetic abstraction, and the third level of phenomenological orientation in which things move toward transcendental phenomenology, culminating in bracketing problems of origin and in the connection of the ego’s consciousness through intentionality to constitutionality of a phenomenon.

<sup>44</sup> As I understand it, the semantic value of “anexact” is unlike that of inexact. The former suggests, I believe, an intuitive rather than scientific inexactitude.



mathematical objects<sup>45</sup> in showing that the thing's "thinghood," its objective reality, is contingent on element outside its purity. And so, in claiming that "the protogeometer always already had at his disposal an exact spatiotemporal shapes and essentially 'vague' morphological types<sup>46</sup>, which can always give rise to a pregeometrical *descriptive* science" (123, Derrida's emphasis), Derrida reveals the constitutionality of geometry as a discourse about geometry and argues that as such it should be called "*geography*" instead.<sup>47</sup> Appropriately, the suggested word-play here is on spatial/lingual inscription

<sup>45</sup> We can, I believe, accept Leonard Lawlor's assertion that "Husserl's privilege of the mathematical object is the source of Derrida's concept of presence, being as presence, as it appears in *Speech and Phenomena*: object that is close by or in front of a regard (a *Vor-stellung*)" (*Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) p. 105. For our explication on the problematic of origin, I see Derrida's *The Origin* as specifically isolating the conceptual purity of presence through its objective ideality par excellence—geometry. Furthermore, we must follow Derrida, who points to possible weaknesses in Husserl's view of "objective idealities" as isolated from all subjective, psychologistic empirical intervention. Hence, according to Husserl, the differences are between "ideal objectivity and real object . . . . The objectivities of the understanding are on 'higher level' than those of receptivity . . . . the real object has its individual place in the objective time of the world, the irreal object is, with respect to the other, totally free, i.e., 'timeless'" (*Origin* 71). We mention here the core of Husserl's transcendental philosophy, which is, in effect, phenomenology and its modes of idealization. In scrutinizing phenomenological transcendental design, Derrida is out to show the impossibility of sustaining feasible divisibility between Husserl's transcendental and psychologistic view of the subject and its "understanding/receptivity" of objectivity. Moreover and as it specifically pertains to our proposition, Derrida shows that although Husserl discounts language as having objectively ideal pathologies, any understanding/constitutionality of objective ideality comes to its possibility through language first of all. We might also note, as does Derrida, that "This ideality of the object, of the *mathematical thing itself*, is not the non-reality of the noema [which] characterizes the type of intentional inclusion of every noema in conscious lived experience [of both ideal and empirical intended existence]." Derrida goes as far as to suggest "that this non-reality of the noema may be what permits the repetition of the sense as the 'same' and makes the idealization of identity possible" (*Origin* 66-7, Derrida's emphasis). Our intention in mentioning the Husserlian noema here is in stressing that it is unlike the "non-reality" of the absent constitutionality of ideal objects, an absent constitutionality of which explication is forth coming.

<sup>46</sup> The semantic measure of the expression "'vague' morphological types" itself suggests viable ambiguities in the discourse of the pre-geometrical world whereby "Every morphological, i.e., pregeometrical, determination works according to the qualitative gradations of sensible intuition: *more or less smooth* surface, sides, lines, or *more or less rough* angles [all, Derrida argues, emanating from Husserl's "somewhat enigmatic" remark that] before exactitude emerges, 'proceeding from the factual, an essential form becomes recognizable through a method of variation.' [Derrida then connects the term 'variation,' as mentioned in *Origin of Geometry*, to its appearance in contexts of other Husserlian works, arguing that] By imaginary variation we can obtain inexact but pure morphological types: 'roundness,' for example, *under* which is *constructed* the geometrical ideality of the circle" (*Origin* 123-24, Derrida's emphasis). Derrida persistently attempts to relate ideas of "purity" to "'vague'"-ness as manifested through all morphological possibilities, which, as we shall see, is the underlying impulse of the language of ideality, or if you will, the language of metaphysics.

<sup>47</sup> Derrida is emphatic about the "geographical" designation here in saying that this analysis is particular to the "origin of what precedes and conditions geometry, it is not to be confused with the origin of geometry

reinvested in the compounded term, geo-grapheme. The ready to hand cultural field within which “the philosopher”<sup>48</sup> performs “the passage to the limit” is accessible to phenomenological conception only through “the thought of infinity as an Idea in the Kantian sense” (SP 101).<sup>49</sup> For now, as we progress in our attempts to discuss the temporal and spatial rudiments underlying deconstruction consciousness and how, in turn, these, aid in destabilizing the metaphysical structures deconstruction interrogates, several questions must be considered: what is “passage to the limit”? Moreover, what makes the protogeometer “leap” from non-geometry to geometry?<sup>50</sup> And most significantly (as it concerns our proposition), what makes that non-phenomenal passage,

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itself and all of its related possibilities; it only authorizes what we earlier called a ‘geography’” (*Origin*, 125). Earlier in *Origin* Derrida preemptively leads us to the origin of his suspicion, which is not geometry per se but the discourse of its ideality: “No doubt geometrical truth is beyond every particular and factual linguistic hold as such, one for which every subject speaking a determined language and belonging to a determined cultural community is in fact responsible. But the objectivity of this truth could *not* be constituted *without* the *pure possibility* of an inquiry into a pure language in general” (76-7, Derrida’s emphasis). Hence, insofar that we are dealing with objective ideality (the possibilities of objective truth), we must contend, Derrida argues, with the possibilities of the ideality of language as such. Although Husserl views language as absolutely necessary for the indiscernibly transformational passage to the limit to occur, he rejects language as having objective possibilities and views its ideality as limited to its anticipated repeating behavior, identifying it as “morphological ideality.” The conceptuality of language as viably infinitely repeating is crucial to the Derridean trace and, thus, to our proposition—the repetition of the trace, “strangely” manifesting through its signifying dramatics, which are promulgated through its inherent spatial and temporal lack.

<sup>48</sup> According to Husserl, the protogeometer is “the philosopher who did not yet know geometry but who should be conceivable as its inventor” in response to which Derrida remarks that “Thus the institution of geometry could only be a *philosophical* act [as Husserl relates it to and much in step with] “‘Platonizing geometry’ . . . ‘the school of Plato’ . . . ‘Platonic idealism’” (*Origin* 127). That Derrida calls our attention to semblance of Husserlian idealization to Platonic *eidōs* (ideal forms) is not surprising; to be sure, such transcendence is the defining impulse guiding philosophy’s conception of being as presence, which is the absent core defining phenomenology and as such, both Heidegger and Derrida note, phenomenology is the only possible philosophy.

<sup>49</sup> Derrida brings Husserl’s own words, from *Ideas I* §143, p. 366, in pointing out that by Husserl’s own admittance, reconcilability of consciousness’s conceptual finitude and any account of objective ideality must take a detour through the Idea in the Kantian sense: “Although the transcendent thing belonging to Nature cannot be given ‘with complete determinacy and with similarly complete intuitability in any limited finite consciousness,’ ‘as *Idea* (in the Kantian sense), [its] *complete givenness* is . . . *prescribed* . . .” (*Origin* 139). And still from *Ideas* as quoted by Derrida, Husserl discusses differences between exact and descriptive concepts in arguing that “‘Exact concepts have their correlates in essences, which have the character of ‘*Ideas*’ in the Kantian sense’” (*Origin* 134, Husserl’s emphasis)

<sup>50</sup> In the *Origin*, Derrida quotes Husserl as asking: “‘how does geometrical ideality (just like that of all sciences) proceeds from its primary intrapersonal origin, where it is a formation produced within the conscious space of the first inventor’s soul, to its ideal Objectivity?’” (76).

the seeming genesis of the movement of idealization, affect, through spatiotemporal structures, the metaphoric hypostatization of the Derridean trace? For possible answers, we must discuss, even as we attempt to *elucidate*, Derrida's suggestion that Husserl's phenomenological project finds its definition and its conceptually teleological completion through its fundamental connection to the Idea in the Kantian sense.

First, of importance is Derrida's contrast between Kantian intuitive and Husserlian constitutive understandings<sup>51</sup> of "ideal objects of mathematics," the paradigm for all ideal objectivity, stating that, "Undoubtedly, Husserl's production (*Leistung*) also involves a stratum of receptive intuition. But what matters here is that this Husserlian intuition, as it concerns the ideal objects of mathematics, is absolutely constitutive and creative: the objects or objectivities that it intends did *not* exist *before* it; and this "*before*" [Derrida's emphasis] of the ideal objectivity marks more than the chronological eve of a fact: it marks a transcendental prehistory" (*Origin* 40).<sup>52</sup> At the outset, it is the

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<sup>51</sup> Necessary clarification here, even when discussing deconstructive thinking, no matter if at issue is a philosophical constitutive or intuitive conceptuality of reality, it all functions within the framework of *Logos*, an understanding of universally initiating and self-initiating reason. For Derrida, as Lawlor notes, it is "sense" which without "existence would be without order; it would be merely chaos, merely wild" (*Derrida and Husserl* 27). We must stress that the deconstructive attack is on *logos* inasmuch as traditional metaphysicians, language positivists, view language as evidencing the preeminence of logic, failing, henceforth, to question the legitimacy of any epistemology that avoids considering the complicated relation of logic and language. For indeed, "how can we justify the *decision* which subordinates a reflection on the sign to logic? What gives a theory of knowledge that authority to determine the essence and origin of language" (SP 7)?

<sup>52</sup> What is at issue, are objective/subjective epistemological perceptual antitheses. That is, do we discover what is already there or do we, at every turn, constitute it? Better yet, if we constitute it how can we account for our conscious participation in it? Cormac McCarthy's cosmic figure, "the judge," reveals the aporia: "The universe is no narrow thing and the order within it is not constrained by any latitude in its conception to repeat what exists in one part in any other part. Even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than within and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way. For existence has its own order and that no man's mind can compass, that mind itself being but a fact among others" (*Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West*. New York: Vintage International, 1985) p. 245. The intricate connection between determinate, objective universe and openings for subjective teleology is the crux of Heidegger's concept of *Ereignis*. For our immediate concern, however, we must emphasize that the phenomenological shift is constitutive. In examining Derrida's "interpretative itinerary" in the *Origin*, Argyros is correct in observing that "Husserl rejected totally the possibility that geometry descended ready-made from a *τότιος*

non-phenomenal state of “transcendental prehistory” that Derrida attempts to complicate, showing, in effect, that *an absent* is the impulse through which the phenomenal project becomes manifest.<sup>53</sup> Yet, as Derrida argues in *Origin*, absent “pre-history” culminates, as already mentioned, in concrete, substantive empirical event such as geometry; whereby an account of its constitutionality and possibility reveals itself as “idealization, which has for its correlate an infinite Idea, [and which] always decisively intervenes in the difficult moments of Husserl’s description. The phenomenological status of its evidence remains rather mysterious” (106). It is this “idealization,” the language describing the *mystery* of the transcendental “prehistory” and possibility of geometry that is shown by Derrida to be sanctioned by the Idea in the Kantian sense.<sup>54</sup> Thus, our questions, as to what validates Husserl’s claim that “pure thought” or “passage to the limit” produced geometry, will

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*ούράνιος*, that it did not share, with the rest of the transcendental world, constitution by the transcendental ego. That this original constitution maybe shielded from our eyes because of the rampant growth of science and philosophy, which forgetting their origins, build conclusion upon unfounded conclusion, that is what Husserl called the crisis of European thought. For Husserl, only phenomenology could purge science and philosophy, and by restoring them to their proper course, check their headless proliferation. Only phenomenology is capable of descending the layers of sense deposited by science, of which geometry is paradigmatic, and by illuminating its origins, of relocating its telos” (62-63). In the *Origin*, Derrida shows that such phenomenological de-sedimentation of “European” thinking falls prey to the same ambiguous sedimentation of western thinking. For indeed, constitutionality of geometry is always relegated to the cryptic “passage to the limit,” while, at the same time, phenomenology’s teleological impulse is complicated by the viability of its completion, which will ultimately prove to have a terminable affect on the phenomenological project.

<sup>53</sup> As it concerns deconstruction and its defining absences, we must stress here that deconstruction “simulates” Husserl’s crucial understanding of “the movement of temporalization and of the constitution of intersubjectivity [the core of which is] irreducible nonpresence as having a constitutive value” (SP 6). In his introduction and at the outset, Derrida is clear as to the definitive, constitutive task absences are designated in creating intersubjective temporal purities for Husserl and *essential* differences that are problematically pure for Derrida. Already in *Origin* Husserlian intersubjective temporality as the presence of the “living present” is pervasive in understanding the ideality of the transcendental subject. Temporality looms grand, unavoidable, and formidable. We follow the development of the Idea in showing the juridical, formative economies its absent temporality carries.

<sup>54</sup> Derrida is very clear about the Kantian Idea’s influence on Husserl’s teleological design: “What this idealization of anticipation at once authorizes and prescribes is the presence for consciousness of an *Idea in the Kantian sense*” (*Origin* 134, Derrida’s emphasis). We might need to add a cursory note here that although Derrida views sustained Kantian structural antinomies such as immanence (intuition) and transcendence as irreconcilably aporetic, both Derrida’s own disturbances of ‘presence’ and Kant’s notion of the inaccessibility to the noumena (the thing in and of itself) seem to suggest that a complete epistemological elucidation as to the nature of reality is unlikely, arguing, in effect, that the supplemental nature of perception and thinking make it so.

arrive at a “mysterious” impasse, commencing through Husserl’s association of “passage to the limit” with the Kantian Idea. What is more, and this is a decisive point for Derrida, the language propagating “the content of the idea,” that is, the possibility of geometry, is, as it must be, specie of ideality *in the first place*. Therefore, the pure, non-contingent mathematical ideality, “paradigmatic” to the objectivity of geometry, is *always already* contingent on repeating pathologies specific to language of the ideal, which is, as we shall see, the point of departure for the Derridean trace.

As we discuss the language of the ideal, we must understand the impact of the Idea in the Kantian sense on phenomenology and, most importantly, on our understanding of the deconstructive trace. Certainly, at stake is a concept of the infinite as a teleological gesture in assuring the completion and viable repetition within the boundaries of the subject’s conceptuality of the finite in, finally, underlying the temporal mooring of the subject’s experiences. Discussing the Idea in the *Origin*, Derrida observes: “. . . for Husserl, as we know . . . finitude can *appear* precisely in its primordially only given the Idea of an infinite history” (105-6, Derrida’s emphasis). However, Derrida contends, “Husserl never made the Idea *itself* the *theme* of a phenomenological description. He never defined its type of evidence within phenomenology, whose “*principle of all principles*” and the archetypal form of evidence is the immediate presence of the thing itself ‘in person’ . . . the finite thing. Phenomenology would thus be *stretched* between the *finitizing* consciousness of its *principle* and the *infinetizing* consciousness of its final institution, the *endstiftung* indefinitely deferred [*différée*] in its content but always evident in its regulative value. . . . But this evidence of the Idea as regulative possibility is absolutely exceptional in

phenomenology . . . . nothing appears in a specific evidence. What does appear is only the regulative possibility of appearing and the finite certainty of infinite phenomenological determinability, i.e., a certainty without corresponding evidence” (137, 138, 139, Derrida’s emphasis). The Idea’s “regulative”<sup>55</sup> impetus is essential to the completion of any phenomenological shrug; however, the Kantian Idea is persistently, though enigmatically un-evidenceable, a state contributing to and, paradoxically, obviating any possible complete phenomenological reduction.

In “‘Genesis and Structure’ and Phenomenology,” Derrida pronouncedly delimits phenomenology’s inherently paradoxical indissoluble finite/infinite dialectic in demarcating the Kantian, programmatic, yet, imperceptible Idea as the absent core of Husserlian phenomenology, which without, the phenomenological language, the supplemental language of the Idea, ultimately, the language of idealization, will cease to exist:

It is the infinite opening of what is experienced, which is designated at several moments of Husserlian analysis by reference to an Idea in the Kantian sense, that is the irruption of the infinite into consciousness, which permits the unification of the temporal flux of consciousness just as it unifies the object and the world by anticipation, and despite an irreducible incompleteness. It is the strange presence of this Idea which also permits every transition to the limit and the production of all exactitude.

(WD 162)

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<sup>55</sup> As to the “regulative,” principle, juridical, or, its Derridean coinage, *de-jure* structure of phenomenology, the inside/outside binary suffuses Husserl’s analysis in “this separation between *de facto* and *de jure*, existence and essence, reality and intentional function . . . . which defines the very space of phenomenology” (SP 21), which culminates through the Idea as the formal, yet, non-empirical edifice of all idealities. We here speak of Heideggerian ontic/ontological binary, which overtakes, even as it fractures all binaries.



In my view, these might be some of the most important words in the Derridean canon insofar as we admit to our<sup>56</sup> sustained kinship to metaphysics; that is, to our conception of non-phenomenological infinitude as the ultimate condition for our comprehension of finitude and, therefore, the plausibility of any given conceptual completion.<sup>57</sup> We are indeed again dealing with absences; here, however, the significance lies in the defining perpetuity such an absence provides and, most importantly, the language substituting the putative intelligibility of “infinite” “pre-history.” Here we are reaching a limit, or, if you will, the language that sanctions “the passage to the limit” altogether—the language of idealization.

In *Speech and Phenomenon*, discussing the concept of the supplementation of an origin, Derrida notes that the supplementary, “this substitution . . . is ideal. As the ideal is always thought by Husserl in the form of an Idea in the Kantian sense, this substitution of ideality for nonidentity, of objectivity for nonobjectivity is infinitely *deferred*” (100). Here the unsettling query persists: what causes deferment’s “*ad-infinitum* return?” And, yet again, in concert, if deferment as such is always already infinite, how can we explain

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<sup>56</sup> We must unfailingly admit, as does Derrida, that deconstruction dwells within the discourses it interrogates and, albeit self reflexively, internalize the weaknesses and contradictions it divulges through persistent resistance to the viability of closure. As Barbara Johnson emphasizes in “Nothing Fails like Success,” the success of deconstruction is revealed in its failure. (*SCE Reports*, No. 8, fall 1980).

<sup>57</sup> Derrida explains, “It is not by chance that there is no phenomenology of the Idea. The latter cannot be given in person, nor determined in an evidence, for it is only the possibility of evidence and the openness of “seeing” itself; it is only *determinability* of every intuition in general, the invisible milieu of seeing analogous to the diaphaneity of the Aristotelian Diaphanous, an elemental third, but the one source of the seen and the visible: ‘by diaphanous I mean what is visible, and yet not visible in itself, but rather owing its visibility of the colour of something else.’ It is thanks to this alone ‘that the colour of a thing is seen’ (*De Anima*, 418b). If there is nothing to say about the Idea *itself*, it is because the Idea is that starting from which something in general can be said. Its own particular presence, then, cannot depend on a phenomenological type of evidence” (*Origin* 138-9, Derrida’s emphasis). Defining yet non-definable, absent yet regulating, the rigor of the Idea will become both suspect and indispensable as we progress in our exploration of the deconstructive self-referential entrenchment, resulting from the temporal and spatial genesis of language and thought. In fact, we will observe that the indeterminable status of the Idea is never reconciled within phenomenology’s “principle of principles” and that the Idea’s relation to the non-Idea (idealization) seems to be the spatiotemporal “strange” occurrence Derrida identifies as the absent “core” of *différance* itself.

the genesis of its spatiotemporal transformation from non-ideal to ideal, that is, from proto-constitution to its objective possibility as geometry. For this, we must explicate on the self-engendering and the repetitious dynamic of the discourse of the ideal *both*; that is, first, how the ideal, always already a substitute, can be topologically located in any originary structure and, second, what makes the ideal— “this substitution of nonidentity (the Kantian Idea)” —emerge temporally (infinitely and repetitiously) through form of signification.

Here, in a self-reflexive nod, we must make mention of our proposition whereby differentiated ontological and lingual rudiments propel the deconstructive trace within the formative trajectory of the language of idealization or, if you will, the language of metaphysics, in staging their textually supplemental dramatics on the page. For indeed the enigma of “passage to the limit” as such is never truly reconciled in the discourse of both Husserl and Derrida, who must, as we shall see, consign to the movement of *différance* the same moot, quasi transcendental non-resolution.<sup>58</sup>

Arguably, the only possible, yet inexplicable and thus aporetic, response to the irreconcilable dilemma of “passage to the limit,” in this case from non-geometry to geometry, is the indeterminable locum at the heart of phenomenological and for that matter of all philosophical potential reduction—“auto-affection.” Derrida views

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<sup>58</sup> Henceforth, discussing the behavior of the supplement, the congruently filial movement of the temporal flux embodying *différance*, Derrida declares: “Somewhere, something can be filled up of *itself*, can accomplish itself, on by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always a supplement of the thing itself” (OG 145). For now as we are yet to discuss Derrida’s morphemic and semantic neologism and as we are about to expatiate the movement of self-engenderment as “affecting” the “passage to the limit” from non-geometry to geometry, we must pay heed to the structurally unknown pathologies entrenched in both phenomenological and deconstructive thinking. That is, the inexplicability inherent in the state of being deferentially and differentially once removed from “the thing itself” by sign supplement, a state which can be nothing more than representational. Thus, it is here that the deconstructive “unknowable,” or if you will, “undecidable” finds its ambiguous “nonoriginary origin”—in the liminal space between non-presence and representational impulses, rising, as it must, from a repetition of the sign’s signifier and its indeterminately, temporally deferred, idealized signified.



Husserl's understanding of the genesis of self-affecting processes as burgeoning from a familiar ground, speech or, if to be precise, *voix*<sup>59</sup> as the contrivance within the bodily, spatial vassal, wherein the uttered phonemic signifier "transforms the worldly opacity of its body into pure diaphaneity [simultaneously] effacing the sensible body and its exteriority [presenting] for *consciousness* the immediate presence of the signified." Hence, the conceptual scheme functions within interior/exterior, soul/body, speech/writing philosophical conventional matrix whereby "Writing is a body that expresses something only if we actually pronounce the verbal expression that animates it . . . if it is animated by an act of meaning which transforms it into spiritual flesh." The auto affective moment is marked, therefore, by "This absolute proximity of the signifier to the signified, and its effacement in immediate presence [which allows Husserl to] accord himself the right to reduce the totality of language . . . in order to recover the sense of its primordially." What is more, the concept of immediacy *and* tenability of presence is the very movement from which and within which "the subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing the external detour, the world, the sphere of what is not 'his own' . . . This is why hearing oneself speak [*s'entendre parler*] is experienced as an absolutely pure auto-affectation, occurring in a self proximity that would in fact be the absolute reduction of space in general" (SP 77-81).<sup>60</sup> Hence, according to Husserl, the voice in the world is, in effect,

<sup>59</sup> Specifically, as in the French title of *Speech and Phenomenon*, *La Voix et le phénomène*, whereby the stress is on the voice, its immediacy and its sustainability as the singular state of the subject's presence to itself.

<sup>60</sup> However, total temporal purity, that is, complete reduction of space as such falters as soon as Derrida posits his trace as a regenerative representation of the instantaneous absence of the speaking voice in what is always already a repetition for and within the "outer" realm of hearing (one hears one's self through a repetition of the spoken). In this way, the auto-affective temporality within which one is "hearing one's self speak," is fissured by repeating phonemic signification, which as repeating and, therefore, conceptually inscribed signs, stand delivering their inscription infinitely, as "general text" and/or "general

transcendent to it [does not have spatial mooring] and, paradoxically, sustains the subject's auto affective temporality<sup>61</sup> apart from the elements, i.e. signifiers [spatial, impure], which create it. Indeed, the concept of the auto-affective ideality of the voice staggers as soon as we consider its phonemic signification as writing, that is, as a phenomenon, which is spatially outside the purity of the subject's "sphere of oneness," and which, again, agitates all claims of sustained temporal integrity. Still, as we continue to investigate temporality at its outmost purity, in its self-affecting state, we may observe that although transformational, for it underlies the initial passage to the limit from the Idea (concealed constitutionality as such) to its content (the possibility of its ideal objectivity as such),<sup>62</sup> auto-affectation's participation in the temporal flux is

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language," beyond temporal presence causing "Space [to be] 'in' time; [which] it is time's pure leaving itself" (SP, 86). We are here, in fact, following Derrida in dislocating the metaphysically juridical binary of in/out, in showing that the temporal purity of presence [the voice, inner substance] is always already exiled by a re-generating re-petition that re-establishes temporal purity as spatiotemporal and, thus, impure [the written, outer as incomplete auxiliary]. Both its metaphysical hold and the precarious nature of the voice is charmingly related by Thomas Pynchon's Mucho Maas, who tells his wife, "Oedipa, the human voice, you know, it's a flipping miracle" (*The Crying of Lot 49*, New York: Perennial Classics, 1966).

<sup>61</sup> For Derrida, the temporality of the subject is best conveyed through his auto affective movement of différance of which discussion is forthcoming. However, Derrida is in total agreement with both Husserl and Heidegger about the auto-affective nature of temporality: "as soon as one takes the movement of temporalization into account . . . the concept of pure auto affection must be employed as well . . . The 'source point' or 'primordial impression,' that out of which the movement of temporalization is produced, is already pure auto-affectation. First it is a pure production, since temporality is never the real predicate of being. The intuition of time itself cannot be empirical; it is a receiving that receives nothing. The novelty of each now is therefore engendered by nothing; it consists in a primordial impression that engenders itself" (SP 83). As is relevant to our argument, moreover, the self engendered, "pure spontaneity" create nothing . . . it is not a being, it is not a produced object; and every language fails to describe this pure movement other than by a metaphor . . . [but since, as Husserl says,] 'names fail us'" Derrida radicalizes Husserl's statement by pointing to the fact that Husserl does name the auto affective "strange 'movement'" as "an 'absolute subjectivity,' . . . a being conceived on the basis of presence as substance . . . what is said to be unnamable is not . . . a substance modified into subject, into an absolute subject whose self-presence is pure and does not depend on any external affection, any outside. *All this is present, and we can name it, the proof being that its being as absolute subjectivity is not questioned*" (SP 84, Derrida's emphasis).

<sup>62</sup> The working differential impulse here is of origin and its anticipated teleological re-materialization, which might be what Caputo means when he says, "Husserl wants to rescue the *arché* and the *telos* by reinstating them as ideas in the Kantian sense . . .," arguing that Derrida differs by treating them as structural components in systems of "altering repetitions" (*Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p. 131. What is significant to our argument is the indelible reality in which the movement, temporal as it must be, exists in both philosophical trajectories, exemplifying the differential nexus Derrida propounds, even as he shatters the inexplicable absoluteness with which Husserl views his phenomenological *arché/telos* design.

anomalous at best because, according to Derrida and as we have already made mention, its lineage is of self-engenderment, radically generated through the subject's contact with its totally other.<sup>63</sup> Hence, in addition to the inexplicable auto affective transformation of objective ideality, auto-affectation is also the self-manifesting movement, which marks intersubjective temporal flux and recovers its energies through a differential "primordial impression [which] is here affected by nothing than other itself, by the absolute 'novelty' of another now" (SP 85). If auto affection embodies the self-engendering movement of intersubjective temporality and each auto affective moment is defined by what it is not, "it is pure movement," that produces nothing and, therefore, must be articulated through a metaphor; for indeed, "every language fails to describe this pure movement other than by a metaphor" (SP 84).<sup>64</sup> In being defined through metaphorical, supplemental

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<sup>63</sup> Here we must inhabit the temporal, self-engendering "moment" of Husserlian intersubjectivity, which is crucial to Derrida's own deconstructive understanding of ideal differences. Derrida identifies Husserlian ultimate presence, "the presence of the *living present* . . . the self-presence of transcendental life" (SP 6), that is, the presence of the subject to itself "unchangeable in itself and always other in its content" (*Origin* n90) as the definitive locum of intersubjectivity. Hence, the definition of the subject as an ideal [that is, repeating here and always], must be located in its self-affecting temporality, which propagates it: "Intersubjectivity is the relation of an absolute origin to other absolute origins, which are always my own, despite their radical alterity [hence] The Living Present constitutes the other as other in itself and the same as the same in the other [which really means that] the same thing can be thought through absolutely other moments and acts" (*Origin*, p. 86). We must stress here that although Derrida views Husserl's understanding of the monolithic temporal state of the transcendental subject as necessary component in expounding his understanding of the differentiated state of the subject, he nonetheless questions it: ". . . incidences of primordial nonpresence [as those] whose repress[ed] differences Husserl could not fail to recognize . . . [in] the process by which the living now, produced by spontaneous generation, must, in order to be a now and to be retained in another now, affect itself without recourse to anything empirical but with a new primordial actuality in which it will become a non-now, a past now—this process is indeed a *pure* [my emphasis] auto-affectation in which the same is the same only being affected by the other" (SP, 82, 85). We here speak of self affecting temporal flux as the constituent of differentiated, yet, durational intersubjective temporality. The aporia is situated on the "liminal" nonspace of auto-affective differentiation; Derrida points to the impossible state in which when the immediate-to-his-own-consciousness temporality of the subject, in differentiating movement to its totally other, redefines itself as the other, while regenerating the same as itself in the other; in this case, therefore, the subject's self—consciousness, present to itself—is always already other, always already a lack, a nonpresence. We must also stress that Derrida re-metaphysicalizes as he conceptually re-sojourns in the volatile impulsion of auto-affectation in 'grounding' his post-structural, deconstructive nonconcept *différance*, identifying self-affectation as its paradoxical fluid core.

<sup>64</sup> It is crucial to understand that with auto-affective temporality, we must consider the parallel spatial event occurring simultaneously. That is, if Husserlian ideal subjectivity is thought to be the constituting agency

pronunciation of what it is already not, the auto-affective product can never sustain the purity of its transformation. Hence, as always, the stress is on a lack; that is, lack of presence [purity], which eminently occurs through the thing's differing contact with its totally other.<sup>65</sup>

In the same vein, as we persist with deconstructive sensibilities to inherent absences, we need realize that when in the *Origin* Derrida discusses "passage to the limit," as occurring auto affectively in creating geometric objectivity, he emphasizes that the self-affecting momentum affects itself through its contact with *non-presence* (as that of the Kantian Idea). Thus, since auto-affection is predicated upon a lack, it is predicated upon a "nonderived re-presentation," and is, therefore, non-reducible. Now, as we

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of all idealities, it must, when partaking in the movement of sense, break from its auto-affective temporality into signification's indicatory, representational dynamic within which signs both metaphorically and empirically materialize a space outside the subject's self presence: "Intersubjectivity is inseparable from temporalization taken as the openness of the present upon an outside of itself, upon *another* absolute present. This being outside itself proper to time is its *spacing*: it is a proto-stage [*archi-scène*]. This stage, as the relation of one present to other present *as such*, that is, as nonderived re-presentation (*Vergewärtigung* or *Rpräsentation*), produces the structure of signs in general as 'reference,' as being-for-something (*für etwas sein*), and radically precludes their reduction" (SP 84-5, n9). There is no maintaining the purity of the subject within the "undivided unity of a temporal present so as to have nothing to reveal to itself by the agency of signs" (SP 60). As we are about to mention Husserl's expression/indication binary, let us stress here that signification in the form of *impure* indication, inborn, according to Derrida, in the "expressive" state of the subject, is its proto-spatial movement.

<sup>65</sup> Although Derrida reveals western metaphysical concepts as defined through deferred, differed, and referential response to their totally other, I think that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* says it in the bard's succinct poetic best: "And nothing is but what is not" (*Macbeth* 1.3.143). Better yet, Shakespeare's arch-villain, Iago, is less universal in applying the differentiating process to himself: "I am not what I am" (*Othello* 1.1.67), while Claudius (brother/unlike brother, uncle/unlike uncle, father/unlike father, husband/unlike husband) resonates Polonius' "... that with devotion's visage/And pious action we do sugar o'er/The devil himself" in complete agreement with the seeming nature of what is, defining himself by differentiating his "deed to [his] most painted word" (*Hamlet* 3.1.47-48, 54). Similarly, Regan, Lear's remised turned villainous daughter, also problematizes metaphysics of definition in differentiating what is self-consciously known as what is not. She comments on her father's enraged behavior saying: "Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself" (*King Lear* 1.1.96-7). That according to Shakespeare processes of differentiated definitions gain such underhandedness must not surprise us; for if deconstruction purports to contribute to our understanding of what is/not, it must do so by calling our attention to inherent conceptual openings in identifying the potentially insidious. All plays appear in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. David Bevington Ed. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992. One might also wonder as to the meaning of Samuel Beckett's play's title *Not I*; for indeed it seems as if the protagonist, MOUTH, is gaining self-consciousness by uttering a chain of words and fragmented sentences in describing all that she never was (*Ends and Odds: Dramatic Pieces by Samuel Beckett*, New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1976).

expatiate on absences in their non-temporal, non-spatial, non-substantial states, even as we are recurrently aware of the supplemental, repetitious textual dramatics they auto-affectively perpetuate, we must understand the significance of the idea of nonderived representational field, which a contact with a the thing's other establishes. For indeed if objective and subjective idealities are constituted through a non-derivational origin, then the viability of their phenomenological reduction is unlikely at best.<sup>66</sup> Thus, we need recognize that lack, absence is the primordial element of any assumed original gesture, making economies of "presence" and its ensuing representation unlikely thereof. Nonetheless, at the outset, a pertinent point must be made: as soon as we consider signification and its reproductive economy, representational pathologies pervade.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> We might be well advised to note that Husserl follows philosophical tradition in viewing the objective and subjective realities as ontologically dual and as presence; whereby the object exists only insofar as it can present itself fully to intuition or thought and whereby the subject is fully present "only insofar as it is self-present, present to itself in the immediacy of a conscious act" (SP xxxii). Derrida shows that in addition to the fact that objective and subjective idealities find their origin in a-representational hinterland, reduction will always already be fraught with differential and referential contingency.

<sup>67</sup> That is, we can anticipate representational impulse as soon as we discuss signification as mode of differences and referrals. In fact, in his assault on Husserl's understanding of subjectivity as "presence," Derrida problematizes the subject's status as "absolute" by pointing to the fact that the subject gains its "absolute subjectivity" only in its "opposition to the object," deriving its definition "on the basis of difference." If relational dynamic defines subjectivity as such, then referentiality rather than the subject's "absolute properties" must underlie its "nonderived" representation. Thus, according to Derrida, as we have already mentioned, "the proto-stage [*archi-scène*] . . . as the relation of one present to another present *as such*, that is as nonderived re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*), produces the structures of signs in general as 'reference,' as being-for-something . . ." (SP 84n9). The representational mission of signs, their structure "as being for something," that is, their referential impulse is best described through Derrida's analysis of, yet, again, another Husserlian dichotomy, birthed of the inner/outer metaphorical prototype—thing's essential interiority in opposition to its porous, insubstantial exteriority. In effect, in demonstrating the unlikelihood of Husserl's conception of the univocal, pure expressive state of the subject whereby "in inward speech [one] communicates nothing to [one's self] . . . indicate nothing to [one's self]," Derrida agitates one more Husserlian sacrosanct binary: expression and indication. These two forms of Husserlian signification underscore the ideal status of his subject and language's non empirical state in assuring that such ideality is viable. Expression conveys meaning content, "*Bedeutung* or *Sinn*" (SP 17), within which "there is no speech, nor does one tell oneself anything: one merely conceives . . . in a monologue in no need of signification *a priori* pure" (SP 48), that is, through a-intuitive, a-empirical processes. In response, Derrida *thinly* interjects, "Husserl demonstrates that speech then is still speech with its full set of rights *provided* [my emphasis] that it obey certain rules which are not immediately given as rules of knowledge" (SP 90). In fact, Derrida readily shows that "absolute pure expression [rather than be] free from all indicative contamination" (SP 94), at the outset and so as to function, must have an indicatory dynamic. Derrida brings Husserl's own words form *Logical Investigations* in saying that "signs in the sense of indication *do not express anything*, unless they happen to fulfill a meaning *as well as* an indicative

However, as we are about to designate language as the matrix of repeating ideality, we also must emphasize that primordial “nonpresence” is engendered auto-affectively through repeating momentum in differentiated temporalities of past and future, eradicating any viability of sustained “presence” thereof. Thus, from ideal objectivity in the *Origin* to ideal intersubjective temporality in *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida persist with his offense on the integrity of Husserl’s concept of presence in showing that structures of self-engendering movement, revealed as auto-affective, propel any “passage to the limit” through primordial temporal absence, the Idea, as a non-presence, defining its other, the ideal, a non-self (a possibility), to reproduce non-representational impulse, which, paradoxically, is the “strange” environs, enigmatically created by or creating the ultimately definitive, structural representation—signs.<sup>68</sup>

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function [stressing that] Meaning (*bedeuten*) in communicative speech is always interwoven with such indicative relation” (SP 20 Husserl’s emphasis). Derrida in fact proves “that the discursive sign is *always* involved *always caught up* in an indicative system” (ibid). As we have seen in effect, “Husserl wants to grasp the expressive and logical purity of meaning as the possibility of logos . . . [making] communication a stratum extrinsic to expression” (ibid) in asserting that expression is a “solitary mental act,” experienced in the immediacy of “the very moment (*im selben Augenblick*)” (SP 49). We are of course dealing with yet another form of presence, which cannot help but be representational; here, however, the implications are decisive: there is no representation without indicatory signification; that is, “the look’ cannot ‘abide” (SP 104) because expression, as all other idealities, is dependent upon the repetitious, regenerating indicatory system of signs first of all.

<sup>68</sup> In this paradoxical condition the whole of Husserlian theory of language is invested. As Lawlor summarizes: “Derrida notes that the difference between expression and indication is, for Husserl, an ‘in principle’ or ideal distinction [however] Husserl’s very ability to speak of ‘the principle’ or ideal distinction between expression and indication has its condition of possibility in language” (*Derrida and Husserl*, 234). Derrida expounds on “the status of *representation* in language [stressing that] . . . Representation can be understood in the general sense of *Vorstellung*, but also in the sense of re-presentation, as repetition or reproduction of presentation, as the *Vergegenwärtigung* which modifies a *Präsentation* or *Gegenwärtigung*. And can be understood as what takes place of, what occupies the place of, another *Vorstellung* . . .” (SP 49). Hence, “What in the two cases is called a modification of representation . . . is not something that happens to presentation but rather conditions it by bifurcating it *a priori*” (ibid 7). For our purposes, the Derridean sensibility is directed to the reproductive impulse of representation rather than to representation that purports to represent presentation as *Vorstellung*. The inherent significance is revealed in Derrida’s understanding of ideality as emerging through the teleological (expected) reproductivity of language *via* intentionality, which is itself supplementary, rather than that of transcendent objective and subjective possibilities, which, in turn, are metaphysically thought to be represented by language. In Tony Morrison’s *Paradise*, representational dynamic, in this case, of keeping, “8-R. an abbreviation of eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people . . .” (193), keeping unadulterated, pure black blood as ideal, is rigorously inscribed through a family tree by Patricia, who is taking it to representational virtuosic



Henceforth, it is through the inexplicable dialectic of the primordially non-representational (nonpresence) and what is representation par excellence (signs) that we might discuss what is most significant to our proposition in laying the ground for the non-objective, non-hylētic,<sup>69</sup> non-phenomenal, iterateble and, as it must be, ideal Derridean trace. Non-phenomenal here refers to the trace's own status as proto-writing, propelled through the discourse of idealization's primordial spatiotemporal absences and the teleological task of its own metaphorical and ultimately phenomenal performative textuality. For indeed, the trace is the non-material sediment of an absence, created through its contact with the Idea and proliferated through its own supplemental, repeating regeneration within the discourse of idealization in from of ontic<sup>70</sup> metaphor, which,

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degree, with one caveat—her mother was a “sandy haired, honey speckled eyed girl from Virginia” (195) and was let to parish during Patricia's birth. The defining ideal, the originary pure blood of the nine black settlers of Ruby, sustained “Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. That was their deal. For immortality . . . everything that worries them must come from women” (*Paradise*. New York: Penguin Group, 1999) p. 217. According to Morrison, the original nine families of Ruby upheld ideology of racial purity through idealized, metaphysical discourse, propagated through and invested in the differential representational dynamic of language. As is well known, the spaces between ideology and its proliferation as metaphysics gain materiality through ritualized practices, neo Marxists such as Louis Althusser identify as being underscored by ISA's (ideological state apparatus). (“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation.” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New Left Books, 1971) pp. 123-173.

<sup>69</sup> Relevantly, at the get go, this distinction presents, even as it assures, the trace's resistance to the ubiquitous, yet, potent philosophical inner/outer classification. Thus, the term non-hylētic means that the trace, in its non-substantive state, is by no means a defining inner essence to some outer shell of a concept or phenomenon or an exteriority defined by inner essences. As we shall see, the perpetual historicity of the trace cannot be delimited to either interiority or exteriority of any conceptual scheme; sojourning on the cusp of exteriority, fissuring conceptual inner purity, in effect, marks the trace as a deconstructive impulse.

<sup>70</sup> For Heidegger, Dasein's (subject's) condition is “ontico-ontological.” Unlike references to ontology, the investigation of universal structures of being, ontic refers to specific elements concerning beings (entities). Heidegger categorizing his investigations as existentiell (ontic) whereby “Dasein is an entity whose Being has a determinate character of existence,” that is, possible ways to be; and as existential (ontological) whereby “Dasein is in itself ‘ontological’, because existence is thus determinative for it,” that is, ontological structures are of any human whatsoever. (*Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1962.) p. 34. In the context of our own investigation, we follow Derrida who contends that when we attempt to substantiate metaphysical concepts, we must laps into some form of “ontic metaphor” (SP 85). For example, time is just a name we ascribe to a movement, which we yet again name as such. This is partly the paradoxical structure of the trace, whereby, although insubstantial, it hypostatizes through the idea of the reproductive regeneration of signification, which is conceptually and hence formally directed through its state as “proto-writing,” its ontic metaphor.

again, is partly hypostatized through phenomenal dramatization of signifiers’ regenerative, mimetic dramatics, which performs the primordial supplemental nature of metaphysical discourse.

My task at hand is to represent as best I can the irreconcilable condition of language as a textual, written phenomenon, on the one hand, and its spatiotemporally bifurcated lexicological origin<sup>71</sup> on the other, even as we emphasize, as Suzan-Lori Parks does, the performative<sup>72</sup> textuality this kind of strife produces. The idea is that when discussing deconstructive consciousness to textuality, we need remember that deconstruction views textuality as both metaphoric and phenomenal dramatization of discursive supplementation, testifying to signs’ simultaneous insufficiency and promise; insufficiency, in their inability to fully represent the putative plentitude of their concepts; promise, in their potential to relentlessly and repetitiously sustain gossamer, insubstantial

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<sup>71</sup> Here we must pause in saying that meaning, semantics, lexicology are all synonymous to presence in the immediacy of speech, which is already absent in its phonemically textual representation, making its deferred temporality reemerge in the spatial materiality of its representation.

<sup>72</sup> We must stop and deal with this loaded term, which I, in effect, attribute to Derrida’s understanding of the always already-ness invested in the primordial regenerative reality of signification, or if you will “general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc. would be only an effect . . . a labor—metaphysical or not—performed on a conceptual system” (“Signature Event Context” in LI) p.21. We have yet much to cover in explicating on the regenerative primordality of language and its fundamental connection to space and time. For now let me mention that the term “performance” became synonymous with deconstructive, queer theorist Judith Butler, who, although attributes the term to its conventional origin specific to the historical idea of theater, views performance as the outcome of discursive structures “whereby bodies performatively enact sexed or gendered identities according to socially sanctioned codes,” emergent through cultural expectancies (Julia A. Walker, “Why Performance? Why Now? Textuality and the Rearticulation of Human Presence.” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16.1 (2003): 149-175) p. 162. In fact, in this way, we might trace performance theory through the Heideggerian view of the subject’s embeddedness in its cultural context and processes of historicity. Hence, rather than view theatrical performance through Aristotelian understanding of mimesis, representational presences, enclosed within logos, performance theory proponents see forms of performances as open-ended processes, defined by their contextual conditions. Performance art is just one of the off shoots of Antonin Artaud’s violent attempt to reject the text as the repressive agent of representational naturalism. Deconstruction propels the subversion of Artaudian already subversive force as a process of “amortization” of the theatrical experience as thought by Herbert Blau whereby “The postmodern theory of a performance [is] that [which] escapes the museum, the script, or the recording, [and] is the discursive form which precisely legislates the conditions of that escape” (Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p. 155.



relation with the same self concept, revealed through metaphorically materializing textuality.<sup>73</sup> Hence, the spatial, physical *mise-en-scène* is set on the page first of all. I intend to show that Susan-Lori Parks partakes in this kind of textual, supplemental histrionics, which, as her play-texts abundantly evidence, emanate from her sensibility to a kind of radicalized form of ontology, that is, a quasi hypostatization of space and time through perpetually repeating signification. Repetition, or, if you will, the term in its Derridean coinage, iterability, is the economy of the trace to which we shall direct our investigation next.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Thus, while interrogating meaning (the signified), Derrida views, albeit within the system, signifiers as potentially disquieting elements. In fact, in “Infrastructure and Systematicity,” Rodolphe Gasché suggests that we must understand Derrida’s play of signifiers as a pre-semantic syntactical economy as a “syntax of a syntax” (12), which, as John Caputo states in “The Economy of Signs in Husserl and Derrida,” frees the signifier from “the oppressive regime” (105) of viewing being as presence. (both essays appear in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*. Ed. John Sallis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Propounding on Derrida’s textual consciousness, Shain remarks: “Through relentless reflexivity, and constant awareness of the various “others” repressed or devalued by metaphysics—writing, physicality, sexual difference, death, metaphor, plurivocity, historicity, context—he tries to produce a different kind of discourse, one which points in new direction. He produces texts that cannot be understood without taking this into account, because the texts embody/enact the suppressed others . . . . Understanding Derrida’s texts therefore requires attention to the materiality of the signifier, rather than its dismissal in favor of some supposedly pure ideal signified” (391). It may be adequate to mention here that sensibilities as to the materiality of language mark Suzan-Lori Parks’s dramatic texts of which discussion as to their performative materiality is forth coming.

<sup>74</sup> It is that in Alexander Argyros’ “The Seam of the Trace” I first found the connection between the Idea in the Kantian sense and Derrida’s conception of the trace as most intriguing. Argyros, however, fails to mention that Derrida does point to auto-affective moments in his own deconstructive discourse, never, though, directly connecting them to the primordially absent Kantian Idea. Rudolph Gasché, in fact, points to the difficulty of viewing Derridean quasi-transcendental movements in correlation with the Idea in the Kantian sense, arguing that Derrida’s thinking fails to subtend a kind of syntheses, which permits conceptual unity (*The Tain of the Mirror* 275). Conversely, John Caputo contends that in *Origin* Derrida views the Idea as the basis for originary differences as *différance* (*Radical Hermeneutics*, 131). In *Origin* Derrida indeed speaks of differences, never mentioning *différance*, never deliberately connecting them to the primordial absence of the Idea as such. Nonetheless, we are still dealing with auto-affective movements, which, as I argue, do account for Derrida’s concepts’ “strangeness,” even if Derrida’s conceptual core is of differences. In fact, rather than identifying his auto-affective concepts as “mysterious,” the term he uses to describe Husserl’s self-engendering, auto-affective passage to the limit, Derrida opts to call his auto-affective impulses (aporias such as *différance*, supplement, trace) “strange.” This, of course, comes to no surprise because Derrida never renounces metaphysics; thus, “mysterious” is just as ineffective as “strange” in identifying inexplicable, quasi-transcendental, non-empirical, yet, spatiotemporal movements such as idealities. Nevertheless, as we have stressed before, Derrida calls our attention to the so called “strangeness” metaphysics conceals: “All the concepts of metaphysics . . . . *cover up* [Derrida’s emphasis] the *strange* [my emphasis] ‘movements’ of this difference” (SP, 85); discussing his own “difference’s” neologistic coinage, *différance*, Derrida asks, “how the concept we have of it is

*The Trace—Its Repetition, Its Spatiotemporal [différance-ial]Life*

In investigating the performance of the Derridean trace, we hope to show the aporetic state of deconstruction, even as it pursues an intriguingly viable, and, in my view, necessary, interrogatory path in examining processes of [discursive] idealization, pathological to the state of metaphysics. And so, in extrapolating on conceptual inadequacies of metaphysical discourse, we will attempt to show how the trace's perpetual reemergence is inextricably concatenated to the sustained repeatability of idealities, finding their conceptual sustenance as presence in the "re-turn *ad-infinitum*" of their possibilities.<sup>75</sup> What is more and as we have stressed before, returning possibilities

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divided by *strange* [my emphasis] separation" ("Differance" 150); expounding on the dissimulative state of Being, conceived as 'sense' in beings, Derrida argues that "in a particular and very *strange* [my emphasis] way, difference (is) 'older' than the ontological difference or the truth of Being" (ibid., 154); and then again, discussing the absences underlying his own thinking, Derrida observes and as we have quoted before, "it is the *strange* [my emphasis] essence of the supplement not to have essentiality . . ." (OG 314); moreover, explicating on his notion of "iterability," which is, in effect, the iterating movement of the trace and, for that matter, of all idealities, Derrida remarks: "Such is the *strange* [my emphasis] logical logic of what I call "iterability"" ("Afterwards" in LI 119). To be sure and just as Derrida tells us, aporias persist. At the same time, revealing metaphysics's "cover ups" is phenomenology's teleological scheme; whereby as part and parcel of its adherence to its *principle of principles*, entailing the investigation of "the immediate presence of the thing itself 'in person' . . . the finite thing," Husserl's inquiry is marked by *epoché*, an interrogatory quest to make the self-evident suspect. All the same, Derrida shows that phenomenological investigations fail in their own interrogatory *epoché* by blindly succumbing to metaphysical economy saying, "despite the minute detail, the rigor, and the absolute novelty of his analyses, Husserl always describes all these movements in a metaphysical conceptual system" (SP 81). As we close our section on origin and the Idea's uncompromised status in defining the phenomenological design, we need mention that suspicion of its legitimacy as contributing to epistemological agency is cast by Nietzsche, whose rendering of the Idea in "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable. The History of an Error" (in *The Twilight of the Idols*) poignantly demarcates the insurmountable gap between perception and phenomenon. Nonetheless, I agree with Lawlor that Nietzsche's idea about the Kantian Idea marks deconstructive reflexivity ("Letter to Claude Evans." *Philosophy Today* 42.2 (1998) p. 202). A photocopy of Nietzsche's "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable. The History of Error" may be found in our Appendices p. 204.

<sup>75</sup> "For the ideality of the form (*Form*) of presence itself implies that it be infinitely re-peatable, that its return, as return of the same, is necessary *ad infinitum* . . ." (SP 67). Although repeatability is the condition for the possibility of all idealities, Derrida's deconstruction shows that for their regenerative and, thus, repeating impulse, Husserlian ideal concepts depend on the impurity of writing rather than on the purity of intersubjective, expressive voice, which is for phenomenology the locum of all transcendental subjectivity. Derrida explains: "The speaking subject [psychologistic, phenomenal] among the protogeometers is not sufficient to give ideal objectivities their 'continuing to be' and 'persistent factual existence' . . . To be absolutely ideal, the object must still be freed of *every* tie with an actually present subjectivity in general . . . it must perdure 'even when no one has actualized it in evidence.'" Hence, the fact that for Husserl speech does free "the object of *individual* subjectivity" is insufficient to evade the

in their quasi hypostatized, metaphoric state are perpetuated through an absence, lack such as that of the Idea; as Derrida, when interrogating the likelihood of complete phenomenological reduction, emphasizes, “phenomenological consciousness is indicated every time that Husserl speaks of the *Idea in the Kantian sense*.”<sup>76</sup> Hence, we must turn our investigation to the indicatory movement, birthing the discursive structures of metaphysical language. However, and as both Husserl and Derrida concur, the genesis of objectivity and its teleological accomplishment as an ideal, [corresponding to primordial processes making transcendental subjectivity viable], is indicated through language and its possibility of infinite reproductivity and return.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is through language in its regenerative impulse that we encounter ideality first of all; it is in language, as is well deconstructively substantiated, that we find the iterating pathology of the trace as the impetus of “this ultra transcendental concept of life,”<sup>78</sup> that is, as enfolding differential

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inevitable reality in which the object is bound to “*institutive community* . . . [therefore] writing [for Husserl] will assure the absolute traditionalization of the object, its absolute ideal Objectivity—i.e., the purity of its relation to a universal transcendental subjectivity.” Such written communication is, Husserl contends, “virtual [because] it makes communication possible without immediate or mediate address [while Derrida point to the paradox that although] *virtuality* [Derrida’s emphasis] is an ambiguous value. . . . [it still manifests through] *scriptural spatiotemporality* [my emphasis] [that] sanctions and completes the existence of pure transcendental historicity” (*Origin* 87). Moreover, “By means of this written inscription, one can always repeat the original sense, that is, the act of *pure thought*, which created the ideality of sense [however] to reactivate writing is always to reawaken an expression in an indication. . . .” (SP 81). As we traverse the continuum between speech and writing, we shall soon discover that “scriptural spatiotemporality,” *différance* as such, takes some of the attributes that characterize Husserl’s transcendental treatment of expressive speech.

<sup>76</sup> (“Genesis and Structure” 167, Derrida’s emphasis)

<sup>77</sup> Yet, differences become incommensurable when Derrida points to weaknesses in Husserl’s treatment of language. In fact, though not explicating on specifics, Caputo is correct in observing that “by choosing “The Origin of Geometry” Derrida [shows] that the whole project of a transcendental, *a priori* history is inherently dependent upon language and signs, [which is indeed] a point Husserl makes . . . . But that of course is all the better, for nothing pleases Derrida more than to show just how boldly metaphysics has recourse to what it excludes” (*Radical Hermeneutics* 123-4).

<sup>78</sup> (SP 15) Indeed, what, we might ask, does “ultra transcendental concept” mean, the ultimate state of transcendence? That is, the transcendental beyond Husserl’s psychogenetic and transcendental states of the ego, that is, its intuitive and intentional states, wherein, as Derrida argues, must reside, paradoxically unbeknownst to Husserl, the ethereal movement of Husserlian “parallelism,” or, shall we name it for what it deconstructively is, *différance*? We intend to discuss how the immergence of the Derridean trace both insinuates and problematizes this deconstructive movement in establishing, in effect, the only constant in Derridean thinking. Hence, for now let us stress that for differences to emerge, they must do so against

and deferral primordially, exemplified through Derrida's conceptual neologism—différance.<sup>79</sup> It comes to no surprise that Derrida identifies the auto-affective movement as a movement of difference; that, furthermore, he follows Husserl in gaining a crucial temporal nucleus to his deconstructive philosopheme is also not surprising. Nonetheless, the deconstructive point of departure, as we have stressed once and again, is self-reflexivity, which is gained, at every turn, through the deconstructive implication/complication of language—the unique status of its signs as *phōnē* and its representation as grapheme, engaged in regenerative, spatiotemporal differential movement that disquiets the conceptual closure of metaphysics. Yet, the question is how deconstructive analysis of language diffracts the metaphysical fortress that geometrical ideality is, seen by Derrida as the paradigm for all incidences of metaphysics of presences? Derrida brings Husserl's own reflection:

Ideality comes to its Objectivity 'by means of language, through which it receives, so to speak, its linguistic flesh . . . how does linguistic incarnation make out of the merely intrasubjective formation the *Objective*, that which, for example, as geometrical concept or state of

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constitutive consistency, which is, as it must be, the "ultra" referent as such. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida contends that "The unheard of difference between the appearing and the appearance [*l'apparaissant et l'apparaître*] (between the "world" and "lived experience") is the condition of all other differences, of all other traces, and *it is already a trace*. This last concept is thus absolutely and by rights 'anterior' to all *physiological* problematics concerning the nature of the *engramme* [the unit of engraving], or *metaphysical* problematics concerning the meaning of absolute presence . . ." (65). Nonetheless, Derrida contends, "no language can cope with the operation by which the transcendental ego constitutes and opposes itself to its worldly self" (SP 12). Indeed as Husserl contends, "names do fail us" and Derrida agrees, insofar that language is inherently "analogical" (ibid.) and stands to undercut thought with "conceptless verbalities" (SP, 24). Hence, language fails to answer Levinas' call for "this unthinkable-impossible-unutterable beyond (tradition's) Being and Logos" ("Violence and Metaphysics" 114). However, Derrida stresses "conscious and language are more and more difficult to discern" (SP 15); thus, failure to isolate thought from language might always already mean that if we hope to reveal "truth," we must do it through language because, as Derrida argues, "language guards the difference that guards language" (ibid. 14).

<sup>79</sup> Derrida identifies *différance* as most akin to auto-affective movement, which, as he argues, "cannot mean grasping it in its identity, its purity, or its origin, for it has none. We come closest to it in the movement of *différance*" (SP 82).

affairs, is in actual fact present, intelligible for all, now and always, already being valid in its linguistic expression as geometrical discourse, as geometrical proposition in its geometrical ideal sense.’

(*Origin 76*, Husserl’s emphasis)

That Husserl must admit that “linguistic incarnation” is essential in contributing to formation of ideal object as such does not sway his phenomenological view of the constitutionality of ideal objects. According to Husserl, “ideal formations are rooted only in language in general” (*Origin 66*) and ideality of language is limited to its re-incarnating activity.<sup>80</sup> Yet, the ultimate observation must be that “the Objectivity of this truth [i.e. exact concepts] could *not* be constituted *without pure possibility* of an inquiry into a pure language in general. Without this pure and essential possibility, the geometrical formation would remain ineffable and solitary” (*Origin 77*, Derrida’s emphasis). Husserl’s subject, Derrida suggests, must “fall back” (*ibid.*) into language to constitute the purity and assure the repeatability of his objective idealities; Husserl, therefore, never reconciles his claim of objective purity and its becoming through linguistic exigency, in which case, the question as to pure objective possibilities still remains. Derrida points out decisively that since objectivity depends on the infinite

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<sup>80</sup> For Husserl, ideality of language is restricted to “morphological ideality,” what he identifies as a movement lacking possibilities of pure objective ideality but which is viewed as holding the anticipated, tenable return of morphemic possibilities. Derrida explains: “starting from an *anticipatory* structure of intentionality, we go beyond morphological ideality toward the ideal and invariant pole of an infinite approximation.” Derrida then brings Husserl’s own words from *Ideas*: “‘Geometrical concepts are *ideal concepts*, they express something which one cannot ‘see’; their ‘origin,’ and therefore their content also, is essentially other than that of the *descriptive concepts* . . . which on occasions [as] morphological essences ‘approximate’ more or less [ideal concepts], without ever reaching them . . . .” (*Origin 134 n159*, Husserl’s emphasis). The paradoxical state is of qualified, quasi idealities, ‘morphological idealities,’ advancing the material, empirical reality of expressions of geometrical exactitude and, at the same time, assuring the possibility of its pure ideality *ad infinitum* return.

possibility of repeating signification, “speech *constitutes* the object.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Derrida seems to suggest, if language assures objective ideality, it must structurally operate as ideal in the first place.

Language’s fecundity as the primary movement of idealization, the discourse that constitutes the ideal as infinite possibility, is itself predicated on “the ‘again and again,’ [*immer wieder*] the iterative ‘over and over again,’ or the ‘and so forth’ as fundamental forms of idealization” (*Origin* 135). Derrida is clear about the fundamentally reproductive nature of language:

When I *effectively* use words . . . . I must from the outset operate (within) a structure of repetitions whose basic element can only be representative . . . . A sign which take place but ‘once’ would not be a sign . . . . it can function as a sign, and in general as language, only if a *formal identity* enables it to be issued *again* [my emphasis] and to be recognized. This identity is necessarily ideal. It thus implies representation: as *Vorstellung*, the locus of ideality in general, as *Vergegenwärtigung*, the possibility of reproductive repetition in general, and as *Repräsentation*, in so far that each signifying event is a substitute (for the signified as well as for the ideal form of the signifier). Since this representative structure is signification itself, I cannot enter into an ‘effective’ discourse without being from the start involved in unlimited representation.

(SP 50)

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<sup>81</sup> In referencing language here, Derrida calls our attention to the so called “transcendental language” as that which is restricted to transcendent subjectivity, saying, “we are speaking of transcendental language insofar as, on the one hand, the latter is ‘constituting’ compared with ideal Objectivity, and, on the other hand, insofar as it is not confused in its pure possibility with any de facto empirical language” (*Origin* 77, n76).

Yet, we must ask, what causes such representation to occur, that is, a representation that is nonderivative (*Vergegenwärtigung*), reproductive, repetitive representation in the form of signification? We have established that if language is repetitiously fecund, then language must be ideal. We have also established that language is intrinsic to the differential temporal formation of intersubjective sense, in becoming the ideal juridical tool that assures subjectivity's phenomenological constitution of ideal objective properties.<sup>82</sup> Hence, rather than disregard the ideality of language, seeing it as merely "morphological ideality," Derrida manipulates Husserl's fundamentally transcendental philosophy in showing that if "authentic," "uncontaminated" idealities are repeatable, the investigation must begin within the scheme of inherently systematic differential dynamic of language, which supplements the paradigmatic absence found in the temporal nucleus of intersubjective ideality. More to the point, we are dealing with the *Idea* of language as transcendently consolidating the irreconcilable state of an absence and its repetition as ideality. Crucially, we are dealing with the Derridean trace as the paradoxically primordial, yet, nonderived representation of the inborn, defining intersubjective temporal absence, in assuring its constitutive, transcendental repetition [ideality] through the trace's state as

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<sup>82</sup> We suggest that you reference our n63, n64 both of which deal with the formation of temporal and lingo-spatial intersubjective transcendence. To that effect, Derrida asks: "For, is the recognition in language of what *constitutes* absolute ideal Objectivity, as far as it *states* this Objectivity, not just another way of announcing or repeating that transcendental intersubjectivity is the condition of Objectivity? At bottom, the problem of geometry's origin puts the problem of the constitution of intersubjectivity on par with that of the phenomenological origin of language" (*Origin* 79). This is a profound observation. In fact, when he discusses the trace, Derrida gets close in connecting intersubjectivity and language, putting forward a proposition as to how differentiated Husserlian intersubjectivity is propagated in concert with the idea of signs, though anticipating failure in proving that such a process is viable without elapsing into yet another form of metaphysics.



“protowriting.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, it is through the trace’s quasi-ideal status as the infinitely heterogeneous referential possibilities inherent in the notion of “general text” or “general language,” that we come to understand intersubjective temporality.<sup>84</sup> What is at stake is, of course, the flailing purity of temporal intersubjectivity, shown as such through the persistent engagement of the Derridean trace. We must, therefore, elucidate the condition of the trace as elemental to the non-explicable state of the constitutive properties of “general language,” even as we point to the trace’s inherent iterative, temporal and spatial differential exigencies in “strangely” propelling deconstructing *différance*, all, we must stress, through a textual, “ontic” metaphor. Now, as to the ways the aforementioned explication touches our proposition, we hope to show how textual phenomenon persists

<sup>83</sup> We speak here of “archi-writing,” protowriting, “the movement of *différance*, irreducible *archi-synthesis* [which]. . . cannot, as the condition of all linguistic systems, form a part of the linguistic system itself and be situated as an object in its field” (OG 60). Hence, much like Heideggerian understanding of the engulfing sway of Being, one cannot speak of a directive dynamic and identify it within its constituent field. Therefore, for Derrida, *archi* and *proto* writing designate a conceptually overarching economy of writing, “a new concept of writing,” in which “*synthesis* and *referrals*. . . forbid . . . that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself” (*Positions* 26, Derrida’s emphasis). As protowriting concerns our proposition, the plethora of signs is connected to the lingual reproductive viability inherent in the quasi ideal conception of language, emergent in the phenomenologically textual as a movement performing the workings of the trace. In examining Freud’s impossible dialectic of the subject’s conscious/unconscious as contributing to trace’s conceptual topographical space, within the schema of reproductive textuality, Derrida explains the fundamental impossibility of viewing the text as a vehicle of unconscious truth or presence: “There is not present text in general, and not even a past present text, a text which is past as having been present. The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already “a weave of traces . . . a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are *always already* transcriptions . . . repositories of a meaning that was never present, whose signified presence is always constituted by deferral” (“Freud and the Scene of Writing” 211). Derrida views the trace as a protolanguage movement, which will always forbid “the style of transcendental phenomenology [which] describes the living present as primordial and incessant synthesis . . . led back upon its assembling self, by retentional and protentional openings.” Such temporalization is “simple dialectical complication of presence [unlike] Freud’s alterity of the unconscious” (“Difference” 152).

<sup>84</sup> General language, much like general text is the design, idea, form of language, void of “all ontological status” (*Tain of the Mirror* 283) and is akin to “*arche-writing* [which] is not reducible to the production of durable signs” (ibid. 277). I argue of course that such *idea* of language transforms Saussure’s structural understanding of language to language that is an ontological abstraction. Delimited by its lack of empirical state, language “in general” is the necessary ideality in explicating all else with, nonetheless, a crucial deconstructive caveat that it undercuts all forms of metaphysics of presence when it escapes our ability to perceive it in the impossible totality of its inherently referential heterogeneity and its infinite differential division. Such is the idea of “general writing,” as protowriting, which disturb metaphysical conceptuality of temporality as pure by showing that ideals of purity are contingent upon the effects of writing, that is to say, grammatological, inscriptional spatial effects.



in sustaining its metaphorical and empirical condition as a drama of supplemented idealities, in emphasizing the spatiotemporal movement underlying signification. We hope, as we have stressed on several occasions, to show that such ontological openings mark a deconstructive space that is akin to those spaces that Suzan-Lori Parks's plays reveal. As we are about to discover, nothing defines deconstructive space better than the absent nonpresence of the trace.

To understand the life of the trace and its persistent return, we must follow Derrida in locating it in the ideal *core* of the transcendental subject's intersubjective auto-affective temporality. That is, Derrida de-construct Husserl's intersubjective temporal flux by showing that its fluid auto-affective dynamic is constituted through differences, which "introduce into self-presence from the beginning all the impurity putatively excluded from it. The living presence springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace" (SP, 85).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> In deconstructing the temporal scheme of intersubjective constitution, the "retentional trace" is understood as "an irreducible nonpresence as having a constituting value and with it "a nonlife, a nonpresence or nonself-belonging of the living present, an irreducible non-primordially" (SP 6-7). Hence, the trace is the constitutive element of "the living present" as the absence of its self-presence in differentially defining "the living present" through the totally other within it. In understanding Husserl's monumental blueprint of the transcendental ego's auto-affective temporality, we must elucidate terms such as retention, protention, punctual (instant) now, and living, thick presence. According to Husserl when maintaining an awareness of an object, the conscious and constitutive subject's temporality is marked by a continuous presence, the living present, which assures a durational perception of an object. However, Derrida points to the impossibility of continuous subjective self-presence (consciousness) by arguing that the "instant as a point . . . concept of the now . . . the present as punctuality of the instant . . . discretely but decisively sanctions the whole system of "essential distinctions" (SP 60-1). Hence, Derrida "exploits the tension" in Husserl's account of the instant now and "thick presence" (Rosenthal, Sandra B. "Sign, Time, and the Viability of Trace: Derrida and Peirce." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1996): 19-28) p. 21. In so doing, Derrida hinders Husserl's account of the pure continuity of the "living present" as presence, proving that indivisible, "simple" presence is not available. What is more, Derrida complicates the concept of "the actual now," *im selben Augenblick*, the temporality that "defines . . . philosophical thought . . . , evidence itself . . . , governs every possible concept of truth and sense" (SP 62), in suggesting that its persistent presence is another example of a tradition that carries "Greek metaphysics of presence into the 'modern' metaphysics of presence understood as self-consciousness" (ibid 63); he notes, in fact, that "as soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not now, perception and nonperception . . . in the primordial impression, we admit the other into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*" (ibid. 65). Moreover, the introduction of the other to the living present (as self-consciousness)

In identifying the trace as inhabiting the subject's both retentional and protentional temporal impressions, Derrida shows that its presence is defined through past and future impression while simultaneously rendering the presence of its living present tenably and internally absent. Derrida explains the trace's retentionally and protentionally "dividing" economy of subjective presence:

This trace relates no less to what is called the future than what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what is it not . . . . *In order for it to be, an interval must separate it from what it is not*; but the interval that constitutes it in the present must also divide the present in itself, thus dividing, along with the present, everything that can be conceived on its basis, that is, every being—in particular, for our metaphysical language, the substance or subject . . . . it is constitution of the present as a "primordial" and irreducibly nonsimple,

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causes the living present's displacement, which results in inherent absence; however, if we still perceive it as presence, it is because "the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only inasmuch as it is continuously compounded with nonpresence and nonperception, with primary memory and expectation (retention and protention)" (ibid. 64). Significantly, primary memory for Derrida is a repeating, retentional trace; whereas for Husserl it is "a conceptual phase [in which when] 'a primordial datum, a new phase, emerges the preceding one is not lost but is retained in concept'" (Johanna M. Tito, "Praise of Presence: Rethinking Presence with Derrida and Husserl," *Philosophy Today* 45.2 (2001): 154-67, Tito quotes from Husserl's *Internal Time Consciousness* 63) p. 155. Antithetically, secondary memory for Husserl is characterized by imagination and reproduction. Crucially for Derrida, reproduction identifies the trace's connection to signification whereby "the trace implies that there is a repetition that is prior to any present impression" (*Derrida and Husserl* 193). Hence, retentional and protentional impressions are "essentially and indispensably involved" in constituting the possibility of "the actual now," thus, problematizing the status of the living present as presence (SP 64). Although Husserl views "retention and its consequent endurance [as] a kind of primary memory, a presence which is not the result of productive imagination yielding a separate act of repetition . . . ." considering the introduction of "the instant or punctual now to the living presence," he might have difficulty proving "experience as enduring within an 'endless continuum of duration'" (Patrick Bourgeois, "The Instant and the Living Present: Ricoeur and Derrida Reading Husserl," *Philosophy Today* 37 (1993): 31-7) p. 32. The question is if retentional and protentional elements, as alternate elements of nonpresent /nonidentity to the "actual now," cause the collapse of the subject's durational state as a living present, "the thick now," how does the transcendental subject tenably uphold its presence? For that, Derrida turns to the trace, finding its absent impression in phenomenological retentional and protentional elements, deconstructively redefining these temporalities within the movement of differance ("Differance" 152).

and, therefore, in the strict sense nonprimordial, synthesis of traces, retentions, and protentions that I propose to call protowriting, prototrace, or differance.

(“Differance” 143, my emphasis)

In the phenomenological design, proto-ness as such refers to constitutionality of an ideal and thus to its concealed origin. Yet unlike Husserl, who segregates his transcendental ego and its constitutive idealities from the tools of the idealization, Derrida distinguishes his quasi metaphysical forms by necessarily situating them within a spatial sojourn, appropriated through reproductive, repeating differentiating signs, and identifying them in the “nonprimordial” state of subjective, transcendent temporal deferrals. More to the point, now that we have discussed the Derridean trace’s absent temporal intervention in agitating the conceptual purity of all transcendent temporalities, its interrogation as quasi metaphysical deconstructive movement must explicate on its possibilities as ideal and, therefore, its iterative practices. Crucially, in investigating the trace’s iterability, we must follow its “falling back” into language and hence revealing a reproductive, repeating, and, as it must be, ideal space. Therefore, when Derrida is specific in stating that in its persistent temporal reemergence “the self of the living present is primordially a trace [and that] . . . . Being primordial must be thought of on the basis of the trace, and not the reverse” (SP 85), we must point to the fact that if the living present is a trace first of all, then the living presence’s temporality is nonprimordial.<sup>86</sup> At

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<sup>86</sup> Hence, the trace thwarts the possibility of the primordial [presence, origin], which is “being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system” (*Positions* 26). What inhabits any concept is a trace of its other, forbidding any concept’s claim to origin as such; therefore, deconstructively speaking, “The trace is not only the disappearance of origin . . . . it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted expect reciprocally by nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin” (OG 61).

the same time, we must also point out that if nonoriginary primordially “overtakes” the trace, it is precisely because of its deconstructive position as “protowriting,” that is, its conceptual eminence as reinscription of reproductive representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*).<sup>87</sup> Indeed, although a “nonoriginary\_origin,” a “nonpresence,”<sup>88</sup> a persistent *impure* temporal sediment as a deferring, constitutive absence, the trace gains spatial hypostatization as an “ontic metaphor,” through its status as “archi writing. . . . opening in one and the same possibility, temporalization as well as relationship with the other and language” (OG 60), representing, in effect, an understanding through which deconstruction reinvents language as *structurally ontological*.

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<sup>87</sup> When we speak of repetition fundamental to the anticipation of returning signification, we speak of reproductive representation that is intrinsic to “differences [which] appear among the elements or rather produce them, make them emerge as such and constitute the *texts*, the chains, and the system of traces. These chains and systems cannot be outlined except in the fabric of this trace or imprint” (OG 65). Hence, conceptual *spatial* “imprint” such as that of the trace is the offspring of differences, even as the trace itself ensures their return. Consequently, differences are allocated through retentional and protentional traces, not representing a presence as such but rather a repetition, indicated through language’s promise of reproductivity. According to Derrida, “re-tention and re-presentation” are the “forms” inhabiting “the living now,” traces through which a repeated return of its deferred absence is gained through its openness as presence upon ideality: “Without reducing the abyss, which may indeed separate retention from re-presentation [as *vorstellung*]. . . we should be able to say *a priori* that their common root—the possibility of re-petition in its most general form, that is, the constitution of a trace in the most universal sense—is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of difference it introduces” (SP 67). Constitutes even as it is constituted, the re-tentional trace re-emerges through re-presentational re-productivity in the repeating ideality of “the pure actuality of the now,” in assuring its *ad infinitum* re-turn in alterable state of lack.

<sup>88</sup> Even as we are about to expound on the quasi spatial status of the trace, we must follow Derrida in emphasizing its condition as an “effaced” “nonpresence,” facilitating the impossibility of substantive presence as such: “The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace. Effacement must always be able to overtake the trace; otherwise it would not be a trace but an indestructible and monumental substance” (“Differance” 156). Effaced, yet, present as nonpresence and, hence, not surprisingly, Derrida identifies it as a “cinder” contending, “I would prefer *ashes*, as a better paradigm for what I call the trace—something that erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself” (“On Reading Heidegger: An Outline of Remarks to the Essex Colloquium,” *Research in Phenomenology* 17 (1987)) p. 177. In *Cinders* Derrida repeats the phrase, “cinders there are” (*il y a la cendre*) in suggesting the unavoidable condition of “that which preserves in order no longer to preserve, dooming the remnant to dissolution . . . [yet, remaining by] knowing how to keep itself from showing” (Trans. Ned Lukacher, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) pp. 21, 35. Interestingly and on the mark, translator Ned Lukacher *textualizes* the heading of his introduction by inserting Mark Antony’s introspective remark from Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, “I shall show the cinders of my spirits/through the ashes of my chances.”

Deconstructively speaking, then, discussing language's ontological, spatiotemporal, elements means discussing the absent habitation of the trace in the deferred and differed conceptual sign. If we once again persist with our examination of both Husserl and Derrida's "primordial" absences, we find that the trace's absence carries a constitutive pathology similar to that of the Idea in the Kantian sense; similar too is their self-engendered, auto-affective economy— mathematical objects and intersubjective constituting idealities for Husserl, differences as a constitutive impulses for Derrida.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, unlike Husserl, who envisions his subjective monadic ideal as homogeneously, expressively [purely univocal] a-lingual,<sup>90</sup> Derrida quasi hypostatizes his temporally deferring "nonpresence" by ascribing it a *spatial* dimension through the ultra form of signification, "protowriting," which iteratively propels as it inhabits an interval within the auto-affective temporality of transcendental subjective "sense."<sup>91</sup> Henceforth,

<sup>89</sup> Caputo, in fact, claims that "by subverting the very idea of 'origin' in treating 'The Origin of Geometry,'" Derrida insisted that the principle of deferral, disguised metaphysically by Husserl as the 'Idea in the Kantian sense,' ought to be confessed outright and built into the very structure of consciousness as a principle of *différance*" (*Radical Hermeneutics* 131). As we have mentioned before, *Origin* is Derrida's pre-deconstructive work, in which one can readily discern the onslaught of deconstructive thinking, lacking at the time its full nominal punch. The so called "principle of *différance*" was first introduced in *Speech and Phenomenon* as *La Voix et le Phénomène* by Presses Universitaires de France in 1967, whereas *Origin* as *Edmund Husserl's L'origine de la géométrie* was first published by Presses Universitaires de France in 1962, within which *différance* as such is never mentioned. Derrida's essay "Différance," dedicated completely to the non/concept, was first given as an address before the Société française philosophie and published in its bulletin in 1968.

<sup>90</sup> Pointing to Husserl's crucial understanding of the elucidation of the ego through its totally other and the retentive other as "past present" whereby, "now differences within auto-affection" of the subject's "*alter ego*, constituted within the ego . . . [as well as] the other present, the past present, as constituted in . . . the living present," Derrida questions Husserl's choice in rejecting "the *divergence* in indicative communication and even in signification in general . . . , for Husserl not only intends to exclude indication from 'solitary mental life'; he will consider language in general, the element of logos, in its expressive form itself, as a secondary event, superadded to a primordial and pre-expressive stratum of sense" (SP 68-9).

<sup>91</sup> As we attempt to expound the spatial dimension of the trace, discussing its onto-lingual properties, we must make mention of its ethical *interval* as propounded by Emmanuel Levinas. In "Violence and Metaphysics," from the Levinas first ethics of the "face-to-face," the event of infinite opening of any exteriority (the other) within the interiority of the ego, Derrida borrows the idea of the trace as the other within a self-presence; yet, unlike Levinas, Derrida absolves the exacting differential binaries inherent in "the emergence of absolute alterity, the emergence of an exteriority which can be neither derived, nor engendered, not constitute on the basis of anything other than itself" (WD 106), in distributing differences through multiplicity of traces, necessarily avoiding defined presences of both the self and the other. Then

we follow Derrida, who de-onto-theologizes Husserl's conception of intersubjective temporal purity, presence par excellence, by convincingly showing that although sense is indeed auto-affectively temporal, its primordial deferral, (that is, the absence of its always already collapsed presence, dissimulated, through its retentive and protentive traces), is narrated, as it must be, through the "*scène, a theater stage*" (SP 86), conceptual space of signification: "sense, being temporal in nature, as Husserl recognized, is never simply present; it is always already engaged in the 'movement' of the trace, that is, in the order of 'signification'" (SP 85). Now, in admitting that the practices of the Derridean trace involve ontological structures of time and space both, we must respect and, hence, respond to Derrida's premises that the fissured temporality of intersubjective sense occurs: first, in locating the trace within the "order of 'signification,'" and, second, in allowing the ubiquity of the phrase *always already* announce the reproductive, regenerative perpetuity marking inscription and the repeating behavior of the trace, whence "This protowriting . . . is *always already at work* at the origin of sense" (ibid., my emphasis). In other words, the onto-lingual turn, significant to deconstruction and to our proposition, might be understood through the double-life of the trace on the intersubjective spatiotemporal cusp and its persistent return; for indeed, if

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again Derrida declares, "Thus I relate this concept of trace to what is at the center of the latest work of Emmanuel Levinas and his critique of ontology: relationship to illeity as to the alterity of the past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence . . . this notion signifies. . . the undermining of being as presence and the meaning of language as the full continuity of speech" (OG 70). In fact, Derrida partly attributes Levinas' qualification of the trace in aiding to forge difference: "A past that has never been present: this formula is the one that Emmanuel Levinas uses . . . to qualify the trace and enigma of absolute alterity: the Other . . . the thought of *différance* implies the entire critique of classical ontology undertaken by Levinas" ("Difference" 152). In the deconstructive trajectory "classical ontology," onto-theology, understood as a totality of a substantive presence, is overturned by differences, simultaneously propagated through primordial deferral and regenerative productivity of nonprimordial signification. Hence, the trace is "neither a ground, nor a foundation, nor an origin [and] in no way can it provide for a manifest or disguised ontotheology" (*Positions* 52).

through its iteration the trace sustains an opening for idealities and their return, then the trace sustains presences, with, however, one deconstructive qualifying caveat—an admittance of its pending inability to re-present complete, substantive presences.

Arguing our first point, the engagement of subjective temporality through the trace as protowriting, proto-*Idea* of-writing, we follow Derrida, who argues that we have no other agency in engaging retentional and protentional, past and future, subjective temporalities, other than within the incommensurable sedimentations of its traces as infinitely heterogeneous possibilities of signification.<sup>92</sup> It is through “the order of signification” that the trace engages the temporality of the transcendental subject,<sup>93</sup> dispossessing, in the process, western metaphysics from its conception of pure presence by shuttering its inner/outer paradigm in agitating all settled dichotomies, guided by

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<sup>92</sup> Discussing “constitutive language” in the *Origin*, Derrida charts our necessary path within a lingual and temporal dimension as a way of sustaining “an ideal object” within our “gaze,” our perception in assuring its “permanent disposition.” He argues, “before being the constituted and exceeded auxiliary of an act which proceeds toward the truth of sense, linguistic ideality is the milieu in which the ideal object settles as what is sedimented or deposited . . . . *depositing* [however] is not the recording of a private thing, but the production of a *common* object, i.e., of an *object* whose original owner is thus dispossessed. Thus language preserves truth, so that truth can be regarded in the henceforth nonephemeral illumination of its sojourn; but also so it can lengthen that stay . . . . [the word] hoarding [*thésaurisation*] . . . . *deposits* and keeps hold of the truth [and] without which a *project* of truth and the idea of an infinite task would be unimaginable. That is why language is the element of the only tradition in which (beyond individual finitude) sense-retention and sense prospecting are possible” (78, Derrida’s emphasis). Hence, retentive and protentive traces, “sense retention and sense prospecting,” are viable only through language. In the same vein, though dealing with Freud’s memory substratum as the other to conscious stimuli, “the foundations of memory [which] come about in other, supplementary system . . . . form permanent traces” as writing; “Writing [therefore] supplements perception before perception appears itself. The ‘perceived’ may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it” (“Freud and the Scene of Writing” 224).

<sup>93</sup> In expounding difference, Derrida discusses the trace in stressing the differential lingual-temporal movement being conditioned, even as it conditions by, the practices of the trace, which “is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present,’ appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not” (“Différance” 142). There is no constitution of presence, the constituted present is a “nonpresence” as trace, which as “protowriting” opens temporality within itself as spacing.



conceptuality of temporal inner purity as antithetical to spatial outer marginality.<sup>94</sup> Now, following Derrida once again in arguing our second point, we intend to show that the temporal impulse, marking the trace of the other as the intersubjective nonpresence, is defined by spatial intervention, which, as we have stressed before, fissures substantive presence; that is, presence as “determining Being as presence (presence in the form of the object, or self-presence under the rubric of consciousness)” (MP 71), which underlies for Derrida “the metaphysics of presence.” In fact, we are dislocating the metaphysics of presence<sup>95</sup> (intersubjective, pure, and conscious to itself, legitimized through univocality of phenomenological expression) by showing that spatiality as such is revealed through the trace (outside the intersubjective scheme as indicative, inscriptive, impure, and writing as protowriting), which is *always already at work* in the always already reproductive regenerative, and hence, iterative movement of signification.<sup>96</sup> We thus

<sup>94</sup> We suggest that you refer to our n60 and our explication on the phenomenological “theme of a pure inwardness, or the hearing one’s self speak” (SP 86) as irreducibly compacted temporality. This view is disproved by Derrida, who argues that since the spoken had been long gone, the breadth between speaking and hearing is filled with repeating signification, intervening and in so doing creating an interval, space, through its reproductive representation as *Vergegenwärtigung*. Temporality and spatiality are thus combine to a seemingly irreducible whole, which is, in effect, fissured by the movement that makes it possible, by the movement of the trace, which “is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not ‘one’s own,’ etc., *the temporalization of sense is, from the outset, a ‘spacing.’* As soon as we admit spacing both as ‘interval’ or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the ‘outside’ has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the nonspatial, which is called ‘time’ appears . . . ‘the going forth into the world’ [is always already] implied in the movement of temporalization” (ibid.), situating the trace on the cusp of the primordial, differential opening of the inside upon itself, which is to say that the ultra metaphysical binary of inside/outside is effaced; whereby its outside is a from of its inside, in which case, “hearing myself speak,” is already a repetition, which forces temporality to a “pure exit of time out of itself” (SP 86).

<sup>95</sup> In disqualifying intersubjective temporality as tenably pure, that it, in “shaking” metaphysics of presence, Derrida suggests “venturing beyond our own logos . . . whenever metaphysics serves as the norm of Western speech . . . allow[ing] the trace of whatever goes beyond the truth of Being to appear/disappear. It is a trace of something that can never present itself; it is itself a trace that can never be presented . . . it lies beyond what profoundly ties fundamental ontology to phenomenology” (“Differance” 154). Though a-empirical, whereby “in presenting itself it becomes effaced” (ibid.), importantly, Derrida designate a stage, a spatial interval crucial for the trace in temporally propelling signification into performing its inscriptional textuality, showing, lastly, an opening to potential detachment from “logos,” signified, meaning as such.

<sup>96</sup> “Once again,” we iterate as we stress: “*The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the*



pursue an incomplete, quasi spatial structure of the iterative trace as it engages an opening of an ideal, a repeating phenomenal event and/or self-presence, through reproductive representation (signification), which is invested in and promulgated by the trace. For indeed, when one hear one's self speak, the absent of what was spoken/uttered can infinitely continue by being written down, that is, through the movement of protowriting. More to the point, hearing is itself a trace of the spoken and, hence, a repetitious act, which, finds its lifeline through the iterative regeneration of representation, of archi- proto-writing. Says Derrida, "When I *effectively* use words . . . . I must from the outset operate (within) a structure of repetitions" (SP 50); significantly, however, this exponential "structure of repetitions" gains its iterative impetus through the "bending back of a return" (SP 68), "*regressus ad infinitum* . . . . regression to the beginning" (*Origin* 125) in an attempt to recover "the presence of the present."<sup>97</sup> Derrida

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*difference* which opens appearance [*l'apparaître*] and signification . . . . origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and *no concept of metaphysics can describe it*" (OG 65). There is no defining the trace within its "interval" of difference wherein "constituting itself, dynamically dividing itself, this interval is what could be called *spacing*; time's becoming-spatial or space's becoming-temporal (*temporalizing*)" ("Difference"143). We also must stress the trace's condition of iterative nonorigin origin as protowriting, breaching, through its conceptual state as inscriptive signification, "all metaphysical drives to purity." Explicating the spatial interval of the trace, Derrida discusses the *khora* as that preexisting condition to all metaphysical drives to purity, "which [are] never free of traces . . . . What drives them is spacing, a *khora* that prevents them from reaching their purity. This obstacle, this limit to the pure and full plenitude and fulfillment of this drive, is not a negative failure nor is it a threat. It is also a chance, an opening of the desire of the drive. This obstacle is the condition of possibility of the drive itself" (*Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars*, ed. Paul Patton and Terry Smith, Sydney: Power Publications, 2001) p. 23. Writing as "spacing" is the possibility of all drives of idealization, even as the trace as writing undermines the viability of their temporal purity.

<sup>97</sup> It seems as if Don DeLillo's Sister Edgar understands the conceptual impossibility of infinite regression to origin, "leaning over the washbasin in her room cleaned a steel wool pad with disinfectant, then [using] the pad to scour a scrub brush, cleaning every bristle. But she hadn't cleaned the original disinfectant in something stronger than disinfectant. She hadn't done this because the regression was infinite. And the regression was infinite because it is called infinite regression. You see how fear spreads beyond the pushy extrusions of matter and into the elevated spaces where words play upon themselves" (*Underworld*, New York: Scribner, 1997) p. 251. Dreading it, Sister Edgar understands that regression, reducibility, to origin as what it is, will have to end up with a play of words "upon themselves." Yet, there is no end to repetitious regression or else what Samuel Beckett's Clove can possibility mean when he says, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (*Endgame*, in *The Norton Anthology: World Masterpieces*, Sixth Edition vol. 2, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992) p. 1930.

overturns the phenomenological overarching project of revealing sustainable, expressive, univocal, pure presences by asking:

Does not the fact that this bending back is irreducible in presence or in self-presence, that this trace or differance is always older than presence and procures of it its openness, prevents us from speaking about a simple self-identity ‘*im selben augenblick?*’ Does this not compromise the usage Husserl wants to make of the concept of ‘solitary mental life,’ and consequently of the rigorous separation of indication from expression?

(SP 68)

The answer seems to be “self-evident” [here the scare quotes denote the peculiarity of the term for deconstruction] whereby “the presence of the present is thought of as arising from the bending back, from the movement of repetition and not the reverse” (ibid.). Hence, phenomenological eidetic reduction of subjective and objective idealities is, in effect, be-labored by signifying iteration, which preexists any possible conceptualization.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> That is to say, all subjective and objective idealities gain their status as ideal through their possible return; that is, through their viable iterate return. Derrida explains, “The concept of iterability is this singular concept that renders possible the silhouette of ideality, and hence of a concept . . . . But it is also the concept that . . . . marks the limit of idealization . . . . of a concept in its relation to the nonconcept” (“Afterward” in LI 119). Both limits and accommodates, the “unique character of this structure of iterability, or rather this chain, since iterability can be supplemented by a variety of terms (such as *différance*, grapheme, trace, etc.), lies in the fact that comprising identity *and* difference, repetition and alteration, etc., it renders the project of idealization possible without lending “*itself*” to any pure, simple, and idealizable conceptualization. No process [*procès*] or project is possible without iterability, and yet iterability itself cannot be idealized. For it comports an internal and impure limit that prevent it from being identified, synthesized, or re-appropriated, just as it excludes the reappropriation of that whose iteration it nonetheless broaches and breaches [*entame*]” (LI 71). Hence “internal impurity” as that of the originary impulse of the trace, as the differential trace of the other within the absent presence of self presence, propels iterating idealization as nonpresence in its relation to an absent presence, which is necessary for “infinity [to] be instituted only in the form of presence upon ideality, as the possibility of a re-turn *ad infinitum*” (SP 67). Return is prescribed through the possibilities of inscriptive iterability, assuring as it is limiting tenable movement of ideality.

As we explicate phenomenological structures of origin through the Idea in the Kantian sense, we find that idealization, the language propagating/constituting the content of the Idea, that is, its possibility as an ideal, is metaphysical. We have also revealed that what characterizes idealization as metaphysics is its supplemental structures of putative purities that are differentially defined by traces of what they are not, in compulsory relation to the same self assume purities' absent presences (we speak here of the ideal states of the presence of the self-present and a tenable objective presence). Re-stressing the tenets of our proposition again, we are set to show how inherent spatiotemporal, auto-affective regeneration underlies metaphysical discourse in attesting to pre-subsisting traces (conceptual "general language" as protowriting and as "spacing") that promise a concept's opening within the closure of its temporal purity, demarcating a concept's nonpresences within its proclaimed substantive presences, while assuring its return as an ideal. Hence, we set out to show how processes of deconstructive poetics underlie dramaturgical views of conceptual and empirical textual dramatics, wherein inscribed *engramme*-atic signifiers perform the spatiotemporal problematic inherent to structures of idealization. Deconstructively, we speak here of metaphysical discourse, which through processes of self-characterization,<sup>99</sup> emphasizes the difficulty of its impossible dual state as both unsubstantiated dogmatic and its tenacious return as ideal. We claim that such strife is invested in the nonprimordial primordiality differential of a deconstructive textual particular, differance, marked, as Derrida stresses, by "obtrusive

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<sup>99</sup> In misspelling the word difference to create his landmark neologism differance, Derrida explains that such aberration is "necessary in the course of writing about writing, and of writing within writing" ("Differance" 131), pronouncing/inscribing, henceforth, a dynamic of self-reflexivity through the textual difference of differance.

character” (“Differance” 131) and, as it were, marking all textual possibilities insofar as they are understood deconstructively.

If Derrida’s philosophy of language is a meditation upon the heterogeneity intrinsic to referential, differential chains of signifiers in an incessant conceptual “play,” it is because he reveals it in the “epochal” thinking of our time.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, through the empirically textual, morphemic irregularity of differance, the gram, the inscribed *a*, which is in fact silent, Derrida’s call aims to “refer to an order that resists philosophy’s founding opposition between the sensible and the intelligible,” between writing and speech in pronouncing differance’s spatiotemporal intervention as the ultimate condition of all metaphysical thinking. Therefore, in auto-affectively “constituting itself, dynamically dividing itself” in creating an “interval [which] is what could be called *spacing*; time’s becoming-spatial or space’s becoming-temporal (*temporalizing*)” (“Differance” 143), differance infuses conceptual metaphysics with fundamental ontological primordial division.<sup>101</sup> And so, though differance “‘produces’ differences,” which

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<sup>100</sup> Derrida points to “the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure’s principle of semiological differences, differing as the possibility of . . . impression and delayed effect in Freud, difference as the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas, and the ontic-ontological difference in Heidegger” (“Differance” 130). At the outset, Derrida states that he employs his differences in following Heidegger, whose differences “indicate the closure of presence” (ibid. 131). Heidegger’s cosmic “dif-ference” thus textualized, is a “dimension [which] apportion[s] world and thing [and] opens up the separateness and towardness of world and thing . . . . The dif-ference for world and thing *disclosingly appropriates* things into bearing a world’ it *disclosingly appropriates* world into the granting of things . . . . the dif-ference, as the middle for world and things, metes out the measure of their presence. In the bidding that calls things and world, what is really called is: the dif-ference.” Persuasively, Heidegger discusses the “stilling” nature of “dif-ference” into which things repose, even as they gain their definition. Lastly, dif-ference “gathers the two [world and things] out of itself as it calls them into the rift that is dif-ference itself.” Heidegger then identifies language as “the pill of stilling [which] is, inasmuch that the dif-ference takes place” (“Language” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, New York: Norton & Company, 2001) pp. 1130, 1132. Derrida’s understanding of differences echoes, yet, again when Heidegger examines differences of language and thinking, “poetry and thinking [which] are held apart by luminous difference . . . . not separated if separation is to mean cut off into a relational void. The parallels intersect in the infinite” (*On the Way to Language*, Trans. Peter Hertz, New York: Harper & Row, 1971) p. 90.

<sup>101</sup> Division is the first order of differance, beginning within the auto-affective temporality of “hearing one’s self speak,” in sustaining one’s sense by hearing one’s words within one’s living present, in effect, making subjective presence inescapable; at the same time, however, the tenability of the words one hears

are “themselves *effects* [which] have not fallen from the sky ready made,” difference itself is “nonfull, nonsimple ‘origin’; it is the structured and differing origin of differences” (“Differance” 140-1).<sup>102</sup> Primary to differences “in a chain or a system” within which “every concept is inscribed . . . referring to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences . . . , difference is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general” (ibid.). There is no stepping outside of differences, which really means that there is no avoiding infinite state of deferrals; for indeed, “without difference as temporalization, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of presence” (OG 71), any kind of conceptualization will be out of our reach. Hence, nothing can be understood in isolation, things are what they are because they differ, which is to say that they infinitely defer their primordial definition. Thus, deferral, delayed response, a temporal opening, the “*sollicitare* [which] means in old Latin, to shake all over, to make the whole tremble

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within one’s living present dissolves, always already making subjective living presence a thing of the past. This is difference’s divisionary point within and through which subjective presence always escapes the subject, who is always delayed to its own complete subjective temporality. Nonetheless, to overcome the loss of presence, to supplement sense, one participates in the “again and again” (*Origin* 134) iterative movement of the trace, in bringing back memory to sense. Hence, iteration is the movement that difference makes possible in supplementing the absence of subjective presence: “. . . what is supplementary in reality is *différance*, the operation of differing which at one and the same time fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial division and delay” (SP 88). However, if the subject’s “simultaneously” divided and delayed [already gone] presence is to be perpetually recovered, then its immediate, yet, finite temporality [the voice, speech] must be infinitely returned through the continual supplementarity of difference, which materializes through “. . . writing of difference, this fabric of the trace [which] permits the difference between space and time to be articulated . . .” (OG 65-6). If, therefore, subjective sense is to survive, graphic, grammatical [as gram, an inscriptive unit] possibilities must assure its return; moreover, if graphemic possibilities are to survive, difference must “articulate” idealization in the form of anticipation of a return and, in effect, of a return of the trace in the form of full, substantive presence; yet, aporetically, we must also remember that “effacement must always be able to overtake the trace” (“Differance” 156), which is “nothing, it is not an entity, it exceeds the question ‘What is?’ and contingently makes it possible” (OG 75).

<sup>102</sup> Hence, as “differing origin” difference itself becomes the primordial dividing and divided temporality. It comes to no surprise, therefore, when Derrida declares: “There is no essence of *différance*: not only can it not allow itself to be taken up into the *as such* of its name or its appearing, but it threatens the authority of the *as such* in general, the thing’s presence in its essence. That there is no essence of *différance* at this point also implies that there is neither Being nor truth to the play of writing, *insofar* as it involves *différance*” (“Difference” 158, Derrida’s emphasis).

[as the outcome of] What is questioned by the thought of differance [which is] . . . . the determination of being as presence . . . .” (“Differance” 153).<sup>103</sup> Concluding his essay “Differance,” unnam[ing] the name of Being through differance, in mentioning Nietzschean “affirmation” of play “conceived without *nostalgia* . . . . with certain laughter and with certain dance,” Derrida refers to “Heideggerian *hope*” as the disturbance of the dialectic underlying being (“Differance” 159-160). Quoting from Heidegger’s “The Anaximander Fragment,” Derrida discusses “the question,” that is, the state of differance within which opening one participate in dynamics of indecision. Here, deconstructive “undecidability,” as a function of differance, agitates the historically *decided* binary opposition in showing that its elements, rather than be calcified and detached, are “held in a relation of non-absolute, incomplete, non-oppositional differences” (*A Derrida Dictionary* 150). If, and we follow Derrida in quoting Heidegger here, “Being / speaks / through / every / language; / everywhere and always /,” then the Being of beings is always already differentially and deferentially referential.

Through this noticeably textually dually fractured text, we aim to show the mitigating spaces of differance as inscriptive textuality, that is, as the ultimate performing testament of the deconstructive contestation Suzan-Lori Parks stages on her pages.

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<sup>103</sup> The “trembling” of the occidental conceptual temporal stronghold is gained, henceforth, through the inscriptive “gram as *différance*, structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence . . . . a systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements relate to each other . . . . the becoming-space of the spoken chain—which has been called temporal or linear; a becoming-space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing, every passage from one to other” (*Positions* 27).

## Part II

### *Suzan-Lori Parks and the Conceptual Turn*

As the imprint of king Hamlet's ghostly specter disappears, Horatio exclaims, "Stay, illusion!" (*Hamlet* 1.1.131), expressing William Shakespeare's profound understanding of the differentially dichotomous state of experience and concept thereof and, for that matter, the locum of the theatrical impulse gained through the incommensurable gap between reality and representation.<sup>104</sup> As some academicians in literary studies question the merits of scholarly criticism on the one hand, while, on the other, fail to comprehensively account for the philosophical structures they use, I aim to demonstrate that contemporary American playwrights like Suzan-Lori Parks adhere to a heritage of philosophical, self-reflexive, conceptual trajectory that is germane to all

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<sup>104</sup> Illusion making is the business of theater and in the act of "hold[ing] as't were the mirror up to nature" (*Hamlet* 3.2.22), theater comments on its inability to represent reality. Nonetheless, by producing illusions, self-reflexively and repetitiously enacting its failure, theater becomes a persistent viaduct to the absent shadow of the real. Says Herbert Blau: "there is something in the nature of theater which from the very beginning of theater has always resisted being theater" (*The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) p. 185. Still, Artaud's vision of pure representation is as Blau remarks, impossibility: "There is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated. It is a very powerful illusion in the theater, but it is theater, and it is theater, the truth of illusion, which hunts all performances, whether or not it occurs in the theater" (quoted in Marvin Carson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Rutledge, 1996) p. 513. Self-reflexive dialogue and action in a theatrical performance, which underlie metatheatrical structures, within which dramatists concentrate on theater's inability to represent the real, peak with Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*. Brecht's alienation effect is metatheatrical because it fissures the space between the proscenium arch and audience so as to agitate audience's comfort with naturalistic/illusionist view of theatrical performance. John Willett describes Brecht's A-effect as an effort "to shatter illusion and stop the reader or the spectator from getting swept away by the story, the characters, the actors who represented them on stage, and/or the naturalistic devices with which that stage set out to make their representation truly life-like" (*Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches*, New York, Methuen, 1984) p. 219. Historically speaking, we can find metatheatric, or, if you will, metadramatic structures in works by Marlowe (Sara Munson Deats and Lisa S. Stark, "So neatly plotted, and so well perform'd: Villain as Playwright in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," *Theater Journal* 44(1992): 375-89), Shakespeare (James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), and most noticeably Luigi Pirandello's trilogy of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) *Each in his Own Way* (1924), and *Tonight We Improvise* (1930). Of course and again, there is no discounting Samuel Beckett, whose *Hamm* is both playwright and director. As we shall see, Suzan-Lori Parks's play is a careful referential subversion of illusionist, traditional drama with distinct Brechtian and Beckettian underpinnings.



possible production of dramatic discourse.<sup>105</sup> As I am about to discuss Parks's consciousness of spatiotemporal perpetuated textuality, a movement which, as I have shown, procures its conceptual, formal design from both phenomenological and deconstructive investigations, I am simultaneously suggesting that in *The America Play*, Parks's dramaturgical scope is underscored by critical sensibilities that subversively, that is, reflexively, locates her work within Western philosophical tradition. For indeed, her ontological reflection begins with a somewhat universal quest for the "exploration of The-Drama-of-the-Black-Person-as-an-Integral-Facet-of-the-Universe."<sup>106</sup> In an online

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<sup>105</sup>At the 2006 *MLA* annual convention in Philadelphia, I felt dumbfounded when I heard David Kastan out of Colombia purport that we are "after theory," fantastically, in a position to enclose our examination of a play in the present, in what he identified as "presentism," as if the so called "presentism" itself can be isolated from processes of theorization and as if anything in the presence, including a literary work, can be examined in its pure, temporally unadulterated form. What is more, Early Modern scholars were not the only ones moving away from a conceptually critical design. In speaking about "Theorizing the Performance Archives," performance theorist Elin Diamond out of Rutgers contends that she aspires to reveal "things as they are," forgetting that all conceptualization occurs relationally through language, a process that will, as it must, always keep investigation one step removed from the archives she attempts to reveal. As discussions progressed, it became abundantly clear that some scholars adopted none-reflexive, uncritical, usage of their concepts, moving on parallel lines of rejecting any kind of theoretical bearing and negligent usage of philosophical terms that verge on flagrant reproduction of metaphysics. Hence, when in discussing "Missing Persons," someone out of Boston University, constructs a subjective "monad," which generates its definition from "within" and is analyzed through presence, which is "unlike Derrida's," and when someone from the university of Southern California examines the subject through Leibniz's understanding of the solipsistic ego, avoiding almost 70 years of investigation and problematization of Heidegger's *Dasein-ic*, contingent subject, one must wonder about the state of our discipline and its critical, self-reflexive practices. I intend to show that it is on the cusp of conceptuality and experience, the Heideggerian ontological/ontic differential, fundamental to Derrida's understanding of *différance*, Suzan-Lori Parks's works function, persistently commenting on their inability to depart from a conceptual heritage, while problematizing their success in gaining tangible materiality. Certainly, here I must make mention of my former mentor's view of the bankrupt state of literary theory. Anthony Kubiak goes as far as to link poststructural, performance theory, specifically Judith Butler's "canonization of multiplicity . . . assumption that multiplicity and instability are inherently liberatory" to problems ranging from "MPD" (multiple personality disorder) to "other phenomena in the world *realpolitik*" (*Agitated States*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002) p. 160. Although Kubiak makes a complex and compelling argument in linking American cultural ailments to prevailing historically anti-theatrical sentiments, nonetheless, when arguing against poststructural, performance theory's adoption of "multiplicity and instability," he avoids acknowledging that the condition of conceptuality is inherently heterogeneous. Henceforth, when Husserl tells us that, "philosophy is the systematic description of pure possibilities that subtend any possible real world," we may safely agree that "possibilities" are conceptual and as such infinitely multiple. Thus, in philosophizing, we must, at every turn, contemplate heterogeneity of possibilities so as to consciously reject monolithically calcified, rigid and ultimately dogmatic thinking.

<sup>106</sup> (Suzan-Lori Parks, "An Equation of Black People Onstage" in *The America Play and Other Works*) p. 21. In discussing contemporary American playwrights' indebtedness to Samuel Beckett, which really

excerpt Parks emphasizes, “. . . while also being interested in human emotions and the human condition . . . . I am most interested in Time and how people pass through it,”<sup>107</sup> adding on another occasion, “It’s not only trying to tell the story of your people, or put the blame on somebody. . . . learn that the important thing is to solve the riddle of the universe . . . . quantum theory . . . . atomic theory. . . . ‘The Big Bang Theory’ . . . . resonate in our daily lives . . . . so it’s bigger thing that makes for more interesting relationships between things.”<sup>108</sup>

Western metaphysics unavoidably carry pathologically traumatizing echoes of enslavement and racial discrimination.<sup>109</sup> Certainly, Parks’s works are about blacks; yet,

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means indebtedness to Western dramatic and philosophical heritage, Tony Kushner says, “Suzan-Lori Parks is an interesting case, because she’s on one level a very opulent and lyrical writer but also one who explores terseness and abbreviation and silence and aporia of various kinds. She has a very clear debt to the Beckettian tradition” (Jonathan Kalb, “American Playwrights on Beckett,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 29.1 (2007): 1-20) p. 8. Silences—as absences, as ideas, as a formal design—propel Parks’s ontological vision of her dramaturgy. Discussing *The America Play*, Parks states that she attempts to “encourage people to think about the idea of America in addition to the actual day-to-day reality of America” (Michelle Pearce, “Alien Nation: An Interview with the Playwright,” *American Theater* 13.2 (1994): 26). An Idea, design or a map is what “a playwright provides . . . there are 10 roads, 20, 50 roads—take one. No one way of doing a play, provide a design and let the director, audience make a choice. . . a bad play only has a one-way road” (Shelby Jiggetts, “Interview with Suzan-Lori Parks,” *Callaloo* 19.2 (1996): 309-17) p. 312. Asked by interviewer Jeffery Brown about her latest publication *365 Days 365 Plays*, in what sense these, at times less than page long plays, are plays, Parks describes a play as having an opening, “a doorway from its conception” (Interview with Jeffery Brown, *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, PBS, 22 December 2006). An opening, an unenclosed space, however, does not mean that Parks is not adamant about a playwright’s necessary skill to aim at her audiences’ intuition: “what I think theater or a play should do is provide the opportunity to feel it in your gut,” even as she declares that “The most exciting thing about theater is that it’s about theater” and in so doing underlies the conceptual rigor of metatheatrical dynamic. (“Interview with Suzan-Lori Parks” 313).

<sup>107</sup> (“Suzan-Lori Parks playwright & screenwriter” *Theater ’96* 8 June 2004

<http://www.alpertawards.org/archive/winner96/parks.html>). As we are about to discover, conceptuality of time and space are crucial to Parks’s textual scope. On the same occasion, Parks specifies, however, that, “A by-product of Time is History - what is remembered, recorded and transported into the next age. History - the destruction and creation of it through theatre pieces and how Black people fit into all of this.” Hence, Robert Burstein’s assertion that “Parks’s writing has always been as much a product of Western postmodernism as of African-American consciousness and the black experience, an unusual amalgam of the two,” comes to no surprise. (in Jonathan Kalb, “Remarks on Parks: A Symposium on the Work of Suzan-Lori Parks.” *Hunter online Theater Review* 30 April 2004. 24 September 2006 <http://www.hotreview.org/articles/remarksparks2.htm>)

<sup>108</sup> (“Interview with Suzan-Lori Parks” 314).

<sup>109</sup> These echoes are explicit in what some scholars identify as Parks’s “history plays.” Although *The America Play* is one of them, looking through the dramatis personae of plays such as *The Last Dead Man in the Whole Entire World* (1992) and *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdome* (1989), one is

she never fails to express her resentment for attempts to restrict black dramaturgy to the so called “black experience.” Shawn-Marie Garrett explains,

Hers is not drama of polemics . . . . In 1990, she asked in a post-show discussion: ‘Why does everyone think that white artists make art and black artists make statements?’ [telling] an interviewer ‘I don’t write headlines . . . . People say the black experience is X, and usually the X is the sorrows and the frustrations . . . . That’s all we get to write about. That’s the black experience. Well, it’s very important, but it’s not my thing.’ In 1994: ‘I just don’t respect politically correct writing.’ In 1995: ‘In theatre we have more simplistic forms of representation that are still

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immediately hit with sometimes profound, sometimes ludicrous sense of black historicity. *The Last Dead Black Man in the Whole Entire World*’s list of “figures,” for example, reads: “Black Man with Watermelon, Black Woman with Fried Drumstick, Lots of Grease and Lots of Pork, Yes and Greens Black-Eyed Peas Cornbread, Queen-then-Phearaoh-Hatshepsut, Before Columbus, Old Man River Jordan, Ham, And Bigger and Bigger and Bigger, Prunes and Prisms [Prunes and Prisms repeats the phrase in attempts to reduce the size of her lips], Voice on thuh Tee V” (100). In *Imperceptible Mutabilities of the Third Kingdom*, the “Players,” who navigate a metaphorical “Middle Passage,” echo in names and content African-Americans’ haunting experiences. Parks’s poetic and textual acumen is unmistakable:

Shark-Seer: How many kin kin I hold. Whole hull full.

Soul-Seer: Thuh hullholesfull of bleachin bones.

Us-Seer: Bleached Bones Man may come and take you far uhcross thuh sea from me.

Over-Seer: Who’re you again?

Kin-Seer: I’m. Lucky.

Over-Seer: Who’re you again?

Soul-Seer: Duhduhnt-he-know-my-name?

Kin-Seer: Should I jump? Shouldijumporwhut?

Shark-Seer: But we are not in uh boat!

Us-Seer: But we iz. Iz iz iz uh huhn. Iz uh huhn. Uh huhn iz.

Shark-Seer: I wonder: Are we happy? Thuh looks we look look so.

Us-Seer: They like smiles and we will like what they will like.

Soul-Seer: UUH!

Kin-Seer: Me wavin at me me wavin at my I me wavin at my soul.

Shark-Seer: Chomp chomp chomp chomp.

Kin-Seer: Ffffffffff--

Us-Seer: Thup.

Shark-Seer: Baby, what will I do for love?

Soul-Seer: Wave me uh wave and I’ll wave one back blow me uh kiss n I’ll blow you one back.

Over-Seer: Quiet, you, or you’ll be jettisoned!

Shark-Seer: Chomp chomp chomp chomp.

Kin-Seer: Wa-vin wavin.

Shark-Seer: Chomp chomp chomp chomp.

Kin-Seer: Howwe gonna find my Me? (39-40)

held up as examples of the best kind of theatre that black people can involve themselves in. It's just a long road, a long, dumb road.'<sup>110</sup>

Debate as to what exactly makes for black theater is still raging, creating substantive polemics amongst black artists and scholars, polemics, in effect, which are not limited to the theater and which are well reflected in African-American political and social discourse.

Contributing to heated discourse in locating black theater teleology, Harry Elam follows many in using W. E. B. DuBois' 1926 famous words in claiming "that 'a real Negro theatre' must be 'About us, By us, For us, and Near us.' His intention was to liberate black theatre from white representational control. But for the 'us' implied by DuBois, there was no public consensus about what it meant to write for 'us.'" Elam relates George C. Wolfe's, a renowned black director, exasperation, "People kept asking for a 'black' play. I kept asking, 'What's a 'black' play? Four walls, a couch and a mama?' I can't live within those old definitions."<sup>111</sup> Nonetheless, a concise definition as to the meaning of "black theater" followed, outraging black and white playwrights and critics alike. In his 1996 address, "The Ground on Which I Stand" to The Theater Communication Group, celebrated playwright August Wilson declared that "American theater . . . was an instrument of white cultural hegemony and the recent campaign to integrate and diversify it had made things worse."<sup>112</sup> Wilson, who identifies himself as a "race-man," finds his inspiration by allying himself with the Black Power Movement of the 60's and its ideologies of black separatism, suggesting that black theater productions

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<sup>110</sup> ("The Possession of Suzan-Lori Parks," *American Theater* 17.8 (2002): 22-26, 132-34) passim.

<sup>111</sup> ("Making History" *Theater Survey* 45.2 (2004): 219-25) p. 222

<sup>112</sup>(Quoted in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Chitlin Circuit" in *African American Performance and Theater History*, Eds. Harry J. Elam, Jr. and David Krasner, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 132.

must uniformly entertain black audiences and singularly employ black directors and actors.<sup>113</sup> In a direct and burning refute, Robert Brustein, the founder of the Yale Repertory Theater and the drama critic for the *New Republic*, asks, “What next? Separate schools? Separate washrooms? Separate drinking fountains?”<sup>114</sup> Realizing that Wilson’s rise to fame was predominantly affected by “white power,” Wilson’s call to arms is no less than hypocritical; as Suzan-Lori Parks, who Wilson shamelessly identifies as a “crossover artist” and who expressed her admiration for Wilson’s work on several occasions, tells Gates, “August can start by having his own acclaimed plays premiere in black theaters, instead of where they premiere now. I’m sorry, but he should examine his own house.”<sup>115</sup> That eminent scholar such as Henry Louise Gates Jr. seeks Parks’s opinion, is not surprising. Parks is known, through her own publications and many interviews, for her avid participation in the theoretical discourse about black theater and her work.

Parks’s theoretical thought on black theater attests to a far reaching understanding of how black humanity necessarily partakes in a combined heritage of philosophical and black conceptuality, in, finally, manipulating black theater polemics against itself. Parks’s theoretical design is about diffusing black/white binaries that have been defining black drama in an attempt to disengage black consciousness from sensibilities limited to race. Her intent is to reveal a black space in the ontological parlance, suggesting that

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<sup>113</sup> Sandra Shannon discusses Wilson’s position, asserting that, “Though he conceded that there are a number of highly capable white directors up to the task, he rejected the white applicant, arguing, ‘But he is not black. He is not a product of black American Culture—a culture that was honed out of black experience and fired in the kiln of slavery and survival—and he does not share the sensibilities of black Americans’” (“What is a black play? Tales from my theoretical corner,” *Theatre Journal* 57.4 (2005): 603-5) p. 604.

<sup>114</sup> Brustein identifies Wilson’s sentiments with “the rabid identity politics and poisonous racial consciousness” and “an appeal for socially approved and foundation-founded separatism” (“Subsidized Separatism” in *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, Ed. W. B. Worthen, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2004.) p. 1330.

<sup>115</sup> (“The Chitlin Circuit,” 134).

such discourse is not singular to the occident. Narrativization, indeed, story telling of history occurs in space and time, even when we take into account that those elements partake in defining history and its retelling in language, through spatiotemporal structures. She explains: “The use of the White in the dramatic equation is, I think too often seen as the only way of exploring our Blackness; this equation reduces Blackness to merely a state of non-Whiteness . . . . We have for so long been an ‘oppressed people’ there are many ways of defining Blackness and there are many ways of presenting Blackness on stage [so that] Black presence onstage is more than a sign or messenger of some political point.”<sup>116</sup> This is not to say that Parks is not intensively conscious about being a black writer, whose love and sense of indebtedness to her heritage is readily apparent, saying “I write plays because I love Black people.”<sup>117</sup> Yet, as a playwright, who, as I argue, demonstrates specific sensibilities to ontological and deconstructive elements, Parks can be identified as contributing to the onslaught of postmodern suspicion. Hence, Parks rejects conventional, limiting discursive descriptors such as “Black Experience” “Black Aesthetic,” arguing that “there is no one way to write or think or feel or dream or interpret or be interpreted.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> (“An Equation for Black People Onstage,” in *The America Play and Other Works*, New York: Theater Communication Group, 1995) p. 19-21. Certainly, Parks is not the only black dramatist to interrogate the black historical dramatic space, redefining expectancies of theater critics and goers. In fact, Shannon notes that “surprising number of playwrights who happen to be African Americans have taken to defamiliarizing, deconstructing, and even outright rejecting traditional notions of blackness in their work” (“What is a Black Play?,” 603). Analyzing Parks’s play *In the Blood*, Elam observes that Parks, “pushes beyond simple racial definition as it provokes and represents questions of cultural identity. Parks . . . adamantly seeks to move beyond the identify politics of the past black cultural nationalism and has argued for the exploration of new dramatic territory in black writing” (“The Postmulticultural: A Tale of Mothers and Sons,” in *Crucible of Cultures: Anglophone Drama at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. Marc Maufort , Franca Bellarsi, Ed. Brussels, Belgium: Peter Lang, 2002) p. 117.

<sup>117</sup> (“An Equation” 21).

<sup>118</sup> Characteristically blatant, Parks adds: “As African-Americans we should recognize this insidious essentialism for what it is: a fucked-up trap to reduce us to only one way of being” (ibid.).

Agitating inscribed binaries within which blacks are depicted as oppressed and marginalized against whites as oppressors and privileged, is but one aspect of Parks's battle against black theatrical convention. Unlike Wilson, Parks supports "color-blind" casting, relating an idea of an acquaintance "that a fabulous production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* would feature Black principles with Whites as the servants . . . [stressing that] This is the thinnest sort of dramaturgy."<sup>119</sup> Revisiting her essay, "An Equation for Black People Onstage" after 10 years, Parks still seems to view "Blackness" within a universal scheme.<sup>120</sup> Follows, is an excerpt from her verse "The New Black Math," explaining what is a "black play," explanation which, as I argue, underlies the complexity of her work as interrogatory and, at the same time, as adhering to certain metaphysical configuration:

A black play knows the real deal.

A black play is told that it is about race and a black play knows it's really about other shit.

A black play knows that racerelations sell.

A black play knows that racerelations are a holding cell.

A black play is blacker than my new black cat, Houndog, named after Houndog Taylor, the blues guitarist, who is also a polydactyl brother.

A black play is blacker than black.

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<sup>119</sup> ("An Equation" 20). It might be worth mentioning here Harry Elam's distinction between color-blind casting and nontraditional casting, supported by Wilson. Nontraditional casting "inverts, subverts or potentially or potentially illuminates those meanings by casting across gender, cross-racially against the traditional norms as implied within the written text [while color-blind casting] implies that race does not matter, that the casting is blind to color" (*The Past as Present in the Drama of August Wilson*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004) p.223.

<sup>120</sup> In "Remarks on Parks: A Symposium on the Work of Suzan-Lori Parks" held in Hunter College on April 30, 2004, Liz Diamond, who directed all of Parks's early plays and who participated in the directors' panel, tells of a concern voiced on the first day of rehearsal of *The Last Dead Black Man in the Whole Entire World* about Diamond not being black. According to Diamond, "Suzan-Lori turned around and said, 'You're not?'"



A black play is written by a black person.

A black play has black actors.

A black play is written by a white person and has white actors.

A black play doesn't [sic] have anything to do with black people. I'm [sic] saying *The Glass Menagerie* is a black play.

SAY WHAT?

EXCUSE ME?!?!

Cause the presence of the white suggests the presence of the black. Every play that is born of the United States of America is a black play because we all exist in the shadow of slavery. All of us. *The Iceman Cometh* is a black play. *Angels in America* is a black play and Kushner knows he's a brother. It's all black.<sup>121</sup>

The conceptual play of ontologically defined concerns and specificities of black heritage, representing Parks's artistic worldview and her African-American dramatic

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<sup>121</sup> ("New Black Math," *Theatre Journal* 57.4 (2005): 576-83) p. 580. For a complete reading of Parks's "New Black Math," refer to our Appendix. In relating black dramatic sensibilities and their dialectics of race specific and universally encompassing sentiments, it might be worth mentioning that consciousness to race-politics pervades American discourse from politics to sports. For example, in an interview, Barack Obama listening to Bobby Rush's words, "I'm a race politician and he's not. I don't compromise. I don't step back. I don't try to deny. I'm proud to be an African American," replied, "There's no doubt that in the history of African American politics in this country there has always been some tension between speaking in universal terms and speaking in very race-specific terms about the plight of the African American community. By virtue of my background, I am more likely to speak in universal terms" (Interview with Steve Inskeep, *Morning Edition, NPR*, WUSF:FM, Tampa 28 February 2007). On another occasion, columnist Joseph H. Brown discusses *NPR's* senior correspondent Juan Williams's newest publication, *Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America – and What Can We Do About It*, in expressing African-American exasperation with race identity politicians ("What Kind of History Are We Making," *Tampa Tribune*, 18 February 2007, final ed.: B1). Discussing, in part, the make-up of a community, Angela Davis, scholar, author, and former radical, stresses that "race has become, uh, an increasingly obsolete way of constructing a community because it is based on unchangeable immutable biological facts in a very pseudo-scientific way, alright?" signifying a more conceptually universal gesture for African Americans (Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities*. New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1997) p. Sports are not exempted from the debate. On receiving the Heisman Trophy, Troy Smith, Ohio State Buckeyes quarterback, rejected talk about the importance attributed to the fact that he is the first black quarterback ever to get the trophy, saying that he "is just another guy" who doesn't buy into "the African American thing" (Weekend Edition *NPR*, WUSF: FM, Tampa 10 December 2006). Contrary to Smith, accepting the Super Bowl trophy on January 8, 2007, Tony Dungy declared that he is fully aware of his historic position as "the first black coach" to lead a team to championship.

consciousness become manifest in rich, poetic, and innovative oeuvre. Expressing what I view as her deconstructive penchant Parks says, “I write plays that are theatrical, performative, language based and formally challenging,”<sup>122</sup> explaining, “As a playwright I try to do many things: explore the form, ask questions, make a good show, tell a good story, ask more questions, take nothing for granted” in defending “dramatic theater against becoming ‘Theater of the Schmalz.’”<sup>123</sup> Yet, again and as I have been proposing, Parks’s obvious interrogatory proclivity is located within unsettled dialectic of unraveling of traditional understanding of drama and its conceptual heritage on the one hand, and an excavation of a certain specie of black metaphysic<sup>124</sup> on the other, which, as it is *dug* in *The America Play*, it is subverted as concoction of supplemented, textually performing dialogue that comments on its propagation through spatiotemporal structures that attest to defining underlying absences.

*The America Play* is about repetitious “digging” of what a gravedigger, the Lesser Known *as* the Foundling Father *as* Abraham Lincoln sets out to replicate—“The Great Hole of History.” For indeed, if the working impulse in *The America Play* is digging, excavating in *regressively* and repetitiously attempting to replicate concept and phenomena, and Parks is interested in “History – the destruction and creation of it through theatre pieces and how Black people fit into all of this,”<sup>125</sup> then we might surmise

<sup>122</sup> (“Suzan-Lori Parks playwright & screenwriter” *Theater* ’96, 8 June 2004 <http://www.alpertawards.org/archive/winner96/parks.html>)

<sup>123</sup> (“Elements of Style” 6).

<sup>124</sup> Says Parks, “. . . because so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as a playwright is . . . to locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down” (“Possession” 4). On another occasion, Parks asks: “Where is history? Because I don’t see it. I don’t see any history out there, so I’ve made some up” (*Alien Nation*,” 26). Certainly, in analyzing her texts, I intend to present Parks’s views limitedly. For now nonetheless, I am attempting to introduce the kind of philosophical trajectory with which Parks, by her own account, identifies.

<sup>125</sup> (“Suzan-Lori Parks playwright & screenwriter”).

that Parks's work does oscillate between adherence to certain Black ideality and postmodern suspicion of a history as stasis. As we shall see, processes of historicity in the play carry a certain promise of pliability, invested in what I see as the re-narrativization, as in the supplementation, of American history. As I am about to show, Parks's supplementary dynamic in *The America Play* is propagated through distinct deconstructive structures, which find their allusive core in the absence of presences that define their iterative state through Derrida's concept of the trace—the signified that is *always already* a signifier; its temporally deferred semantic that is *always already* simultaneously spatially differed; the component that is *always already* accountable for the impossibility of idealization and the possible perpetuation of its return. Certainly, in discussing processes of deconstructive iteration, we will emphasize Parks's own repetitious, supplemental poetics in inscribing the dramatics of their own irreconcilable state as material effect and illimitable impetus of conceptuality. Hence, Parks's deconstructive consciousness is most noticeable in her textually performing pages, textual theatrics that comment on their content's deconstructive undecidability, burgeoning from a concept's absence and its spatiotemporal genesis in the world.

I plan to show that Suzan-Lori Parks's deconstructive dramaturgical design in *The America Play* prepares readers for a textually performative stage of differential, repeating, supplemental avant-garde impulse, which implodes conventions of philosophical and dramatic occidental structures.<sup>126</sup> For indeed,

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<sup>126</sup> It might be worth noting here that staging her 2001 Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Topdog Underdog*, prompted some critics to laud her so called naturalistic turn (i.e. Don Shewey's "Suzan-Lori Parks Turns Toward Naturalism," *New York Times*, July 22, 2001) in moving away from her early works as one of contemporary drama's most experimental playwrights. I join critic Alisa Solomon and director Liz Diamond in admittedly being enthralled by her early works. Solomon, one of the critic panelists on Hunter College "Parks Symposium," voices her frustration about a "narrative [that] describes her starting out with promising but largely obscure early plays championed by a few white intellectuals until she was

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text [s]he writes, the work [s]he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.<sup>127</sup>

Indeterminacy, seen by most commentators as decisively contributing to examination of the postmodern ethos, defines *The America Play* paradoxically. The paradox of the indeterminate unveils itself when the play's unique language and structure, propelled through absence, become a philosophical yet juridical gesture, which indicates, while converges, their form and content. As we shall see, Parks's sensibilities to a-linear, a-naturalistic, a-representational drama is most noticeable in her method of Rep & Rev. Parks stresses that "a text based on a concept of repetition and revision is one which

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triumphantly rescued by those who knew better, George C. Wolfe and The Disney Corporation, who guided her toward the writing of characters you can sympathize with and plots you can follow and sometimes even predict" (in Jonathan Kalb, "Remarks on Parks: A Symposium on the Work of Suzan-Lori Parks." *Hunter online Theater Review* 30 April 2004. 24 September 2006). Robert Brustein voices the same sentiment in his review of Parks's *Topdog Underdog*, admitting to be "an admirer of her previous work," saying that he was on the committee that gave the Pulitzer Prize for drama to Suzan-Lori Parks for *Topdog/Underdog* and that "Prizes often go to the lesser achievements of good playwrights whose better stuff had been previously ignored" ("On Theater – A Homeboy Godot," *The New Republic*, May 13, 2002) p. 25. I hope to show that Parks's genius is apparent in her unique mastery of language, which is noticeably discernable in her early works; this kind of mastery is revealed through the drama's connection to conceptual possibilities, which are hypostasized, staged through the materiality of her drama's textual configuration.

<sup>127</sup> (Jean-François Lyotard, "What is Postmodernism?" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) p. 80. Challenges to norms of dramatic textual form are not novel for contemporary drama: Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*'s brick-like textuality comments on a modern Hamlet's state of philosophical bankruptcy; Richard's Forman's *Rhoda in Potatoland*'s sectioned text calls attention to its deconstructive content; Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: The Millennium is Coming* and *Perestroika*'s split intervening scenes textually comment on their potential manipulation in the theatrical space; Anna Deveare Smith's *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* represents a series of interviews as theatricalized performance art pieces; Mac Wellman's *The Hyacinth Macaw* has signs, icons, for scenes; David Greenspan's *Jack* scattered, repetitious dialogue is testimony to the characters' suspended emotions; however, none surpass Samuel Beckett's pioneering textual spaces, corresponding to his characters' state of collapse and potential regeneration. Joining many, Kushner is apropos in identifying Beckettian echoes in Parks's work specifically *The America Play*'s Great Hole of History discussion of which is forthcoming.

breaks from the text which we are told to write—the text which cleanly ARCS.”<sup>128</sup>

Parks’s unusual structures accommodated unusual content and *vice versa*. For Parks, therefore, structure is an inherent part of the narrative; she in fact asks, “Why linear narrative at all? Why choose that shape? If a playwright chooses to tell a dramatic story, and realizes that there are essential elements of that story which lead the writing outside the realm of ‘linear narrative,’ then the play naturally assumes a new shape.”<sup>129</sup>

Disturbing categories of conventional form induce Parks’s semantics to challenge their own meaning. Analyzing *The America Play*, Haike Frank is right in noting that, “The play uniquely resists linear logic. Not only do the spectators try to track down the meaning of the work, but the play also chases its own meaning.”<sup>130</sup> My proposition aims to reveal the deconstructive absent locum through which Parks’s interrogation of meaning indicates itself. In my view, questions of origin are the basis for Parks’s suspicion of history and its renarrativization; moreover, suspicion of concepts such as identity can be traced in *The America Play* to a fractured and three dimensional protagonist. To be sure, and as many commentators of Park argue, Parks’s avant-garde view of a drama and the texts she creates locate her within the postmodern epoch. Hence, we might be well served in quoting Mikhail Bakhtin here in stating that “Art derives its character directly from the unity to its ideological horizon . . . . it is art only if it is ‘oriented toward the common value centre of the ideological horizon of each epoch.”<sup>131</sup>

Postmodern “horizons” notwithstanding, Parks’s indebtedness to dramatic and

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<sup>128</sup> (“Elements” 9).

<sup>129</sup> (ibid. 8)

<sup>130</sup> (“The Instability of Meaning in Suzan-Lori Parks’s *The America Play*,” *American Drama* 11.2 (2002): 4-20) p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> (quoted in Juliet Fowler MacCannell’s “The Temporality of Textuality: Bakhtin and Derrida,” *MLN* 100 (1985): 968-88) p. 970

philosophical “heritage” can be hardly questioned. Hers is a drama that succeeds in manipulating traditional ontological and lingual values in representing structures of white idealization through “black” self-reflexivity, which, as we shall soon discover, finds its genesis in Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*—all occurring within Parks’s innovative, repetitious structures. Again, I here quote Lyotard, who discusses processes through which postmodern art gains its status as avant-garde:

The secret of an artistic success, like that of commercial successes, resides in the balance between what is surprising and what is ‘well known,’ between information and code. This is how innovation in art operates: one re-uses formulae confirmed by previous success, one throws them off-balance by combining them with other, in principle incompatible, formulae, by amalgamations, quotations, ornamentation, pastiche.<sup>132</sup>

In *The America Play* as we are about to see, Parks’s “amalgamations” and “quotations” participate in a performance of ground-breaking textuality, which as it repeats helps create American Lincolnesque pastiche, through which conceptualities of histories and identities are all but certain.

*The Textual Performance of the Deconstructive Supplement:  
Parks’s Ontological/Ontic Strife*

In considering the conceptual turn, the metaphysical turn, I see Parks’s deconstructive bend in *The America Play*, introduced through her rigorously regenerative, repetitious, textually performing written discourse, as a persistent self-reflexive commentary elemental to its supplemental state. Hence, the differential of ontologically

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<sup>132</sup> (“The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” *The Lyotard Reader*, Ed. Andrew Benjamin, Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p. 202-3.

defining spatiotemporal, formal trace structures, as both propagating an opening for and obviating the return of idealization, hypostatize—through the empirically ontic phenomenon of signification in noticeably dramatic textual strife—on the page. Arguably, deconstructively speaking, language—its lexicological dissemination in metaphysically making the merely evident self-evident and its phenomenal reemergence in repetitious and supplemental reproductivity—emanates from a nonpresence. That is, a nonpresence which is defined auto-affectively through the trace as “general language,” “protowriting,” according to Derrida “spacing,” in promising a concept’s opening within its temporal purity,<sup>133</sup> and, hence, questioning its viable ideality while reassuring its return as an ideal. The upshot is that strife, difference is both attenuated and, at the same time, identified within the binary of a concept, rising from the aporia of its supplemented absence [of origin, of presence] and its possible materialization through performing signification in innovative textual expression. For indeed, since I argue that in *The America Play Parks*’s deconstructive poetics is apparent through its textual theatrics *on the page*, I must also make mention of the supplemented concepts for which these repetitious, textually specific, deconstructive semiotics are perpetuated. Forthwith, I intend to showcase Parks’ repetitious supplemental virtuosity, which, as I have already argued, is a testament to the fluid, indeterminate condition of her concepts. For now, however, understanding the so called “textual” as an ontic representation of onto-spatiotempo-lingual life of a concept is significant because this is the point through which we might begin to understand Parksian, deconstructive attachment to and detachment from metaphysics.

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<sup>133</sup> As mentioned already, discussing the auto-affective moment of a concept, says Derrida, “Constituting itself, dynamically dividing itself, this interval is what could be called *spacing*; time’s becoming-spatial or space’s becoming-temporal (*temporalizing*)” (“Differance” 143).



Although I agree with critics who comment specifically on Parks's consciousness of textuality in linking its impulse to values of theatrical performance, I differ by identifying her textual performance as *deconstructively phenomenological* nonconceptual byproduct. That is, my investigation of textual performativity in *The America Play* concentrates on its inviolable relation to an absence that adjudicates, much like Husserl's Idea in the Kantian sense, its state as supplemental, reproductive, repetitious, and regenerative operation in form of signification as an ontic metaphor.<sup>134</sup> W. B. Worthen, who, in addition to Parks's other early plays examines *The America Play*'s textuality, views breaching, conventional dialectic of text and performance as being mitigated by "citational" structures apparent in Parks's texts:

Parks's theater self-consciously underscores the *performative* (Worthen's emphasis), citational dimensions of the repetitive, ritualized events taking place on stage . . . . [while] the many footnotes, extracts, and lectures performed in her plays emphasize the textual character of "history," and the mediating role of print in our understanding of history in and out of the theater.<sup>135</sup>

Unlike my reading of Parks's perpetuation of textual repetition as deconstructive performativity, Worthen, in his later works, transposes print from its conventional position as rigid and archival to the fluidity of performance. Although stating that "Texts cannot determine performance," Worthen still contends that "the material properties of a given dramatic text – typography, layout, page and cover design – matter to the ways

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<sup>134</sup> Derrida, of course, identifies the reproductive life of the sign as preexisting ideality before the implementation of a desire for conceptual presence. I intend to argue that Parks's *The America Play* operates on both levels: primordial reproductivity and supplemental ideality.

<sup>135</sup> ("Citing History: Textuality and Performativity in the Plays of Suzan-Lori Parks," *Essays in Theatre/Etudes Théâtrales*, 18.1 (1999): 3-22) p. 4-5. Here we deal with the performing values of inscribed texts revealed through the phenomenon of its textuality.

specific groups of readers . . . . understand its potentialities of performance, insert them into the conventional behaviors . . . . of theater practice.”<sup>136</sup> Examining Parks’s textual machinations in *Venus*, Elizabeth Dyrud Layman observes, “Parks combines multiple strategies of variable fonts, white space, speech attributions, spelling, page layout, and even punctuation . . . . to create devastating dramatic effect.”<sup>137</sup> Jennifer Johung, who discusses one scene from Parks’s *Venus*, identifying among other notational marks the index as asserting a relational impulse to spatial and “bodily performance,” views both Layman and Worthen’s work as “significantly advance the field of inquiry into the activities of writing and performing toward a much needed convergence of the materials and methods of print notation and performance.”<sup>138</sup> Kimberly D. Dixon, examining Parks’s early plays, diverts tensions from written text and its propositioned effect on performance to values of audibility and textuality as effectively contributing to performative structures.<sup>139</sup> Liz Diamond, director of Parks’s first three plays, also discusses Parks’s language and the performative value that her words contain: “Her words are actors, performing virtuoso feats of transformation, reconfiguring new meanings . . . .”<sup>140</sup> Alisa Solomon, though somewhat less metaphysical, argues that “Parks uncovers the power of language to be performative . . . . [whereby] the very

<sup>136</sup>(“The Imprint of Performance” *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History*, vol. 1. Worthen and Holland, Peter Eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p. 123-4.

<sup>137</sup>(“The Page Refigured: The Verbal and Visual Language of Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Venus*,” *Performance Research* 7:1 (2002): 90-100) p. 97.

<sup>138</sup>(“Figuring the ‘Spells’/Spelling the Figures: Suzan-Lori Parks’ ‘Scene of Love (?)’” *Theater Journal* 58.1 (2006): 39-52) p. 43.

<sup>139</sup>Dixon quotes Tejumola Olaniyan in explaining, “that the performative ‘conceives identity as open, interculturally negotiable, and always in the making—a process,’ and that ‘it stresses the historicity of culture, that is, its ‘madness’ in space and time. (“An I am Sheba me am (She be doo wah waaaah doo wah) O(au)rality, Textuality and Performativity: African American Literature’s Vernacular Theory and the Work of Suzan-Lori Parks” *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 11.1 (1999) 49-66) p. 51.

<sup>140</sup>(“Perceptible Mutability in the World Kingdom,” *Theater* 24.2 (1993): 86-87) p. 86.

typography of Parks's script . . . . [can be understood] in theatrical terms."<sup>141</sup> Solomon brings Parks's own words, stressing the self-reflexivity underscoring her dramatic language:

So how do I adequately represent not merely the speech patterns of a people oppressed by language (which is the simple question) but a pattern of a people whose language use is so complex and varied and ephemeral that its daily use not only Signifies on the non-vernacular language forms, but on the construct of writing as well. If language is a construct and writing is a construct and Signifying on the double construct is the daily use, then I have chosen to Signify on the Signifyin(g).<sup>142</sup>

To understand Parks's fundamentally philosophical impulse, Derrida had only to remind us that empirical value of textual aberration is "necessary in the course of writing about writing, and of writing within writing."<sup>143</sup> Moreover, reflecting on Parks's textually performing pages, her choice "to Signify on the Signifyin," I argue, can be interpreted deconstructively whereby the performing supplementation of signs *on the page* is a

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<sup>141</sup> ("Signifying on the Signifyin: The Plays of Suzan Lori Parks," *Theater* 21.3 (1990): 73-80) p. 76.

<sup>142</sup>(ibid. 75-6). Linda Ben-Zvi, therefore, is apropos in saying that "Parks stages the process of linguistic deformation itself, the imposition of language and culture and these strategies of survival encoded in the Black vernacular" ("Aroun the Worl: The signifyin (g) Theater of Suzan-Lori Parks," *The Theatrical Gamut: Notes for a Post-Beckettian Stage*. Ed. Enoch Brater. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) p. 191. Though not specifically extrapolating on the process underlining it, Jeanette R. Malkin discusses Parks's language as deconstructive: "Parks's language, as Robert Brustein has pointed out, is also a form of verbal deconstruction. 'Like other verbal adventures,' Brustein writes 'especially Joyce and Stein, Parks is preoccupied with deconstructing language'; this is partly an effort to exalt black English into a kind of poetic code. It is also an effort to adapt English words to the black experience" (*Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) p. 160. In a book review, presenting authors' interviews, one of whom is Parks, Liz Diamond observes that these authors "seem united by a preoccupation with deconstruction as a liberating act. A project of destabilization is under way—of conceptions of gender, race, authorship—of the very project of discovering or revealing truth" ("Affinity and Contradiction," *Theater* 32.3 (2002): 144-145) p. 144. Hence, the mention of deconstruction seems to become synonymous with Parksian language. Nevertheless, though quite few critics mention space and time in referencing Parks's works, they fail to make a discrete connection to the ways spatiotemporal elements perpetuate her deconstructive traces.

<sup>143</sup> ("Difference" 131).

testament to the machinations of the trace: hypostatization of a conceptual absent, which is, as Derrida suggests, the textual evidence of processes of idealization, which are marked by “the double construct” of a double absence—of signification and of concept.

Hence, as critics point out, Parks’s textual drama *on the page* is indeed a commentary on the performative value of her signs. Yet, as I argue, rather than performatively attempting to deliver conceptual totalities, Parks’s semiotic craft in *The America Play* culminates in her convincing staging of textual performances that are specific to deconstructive investigation; whereby reformulated phonemic and morphemic inscriptions, immerse through Parks’s supplemental spectacle in commenting on their impossible task. Deconstructively speaking, what is a written sign’s impossible task? The answer might be knowing that inscription, writing — an “ontic metaphor” to its conceptually absent “protowriting” or “general language,” which formulates (through spatiotemporal reemergence of the Derridian trace as a sign) metaphysical concepts — aids us in elucidating the ‘impossible task’ and allows us to view Parks’s supplemental, hyper-textual phenomena as performing writing’s inability to represent its own putative lexicological values. If I am to succeed in making a case for Parks’s fundamental deconstructive alliances in *The America Play*, I must show that the play’s cache of concepts is represented through repetitious idealization, gaining its repetitious reemergence through the impossible spatiality of the trace, while I sustain specific consciousness to these concepts’ absent, deferred temporality as nonpresence and, hence, their interrogationable metaphysical state. Once again, traces of conceptual nonpresence represented as presence underlie the condition of all tenable deconstructive interrogation; I see Parks’s dramaturgy perform the nonpresence of a conceptual presence, ideality as it

must be, through textual, signified [v.] supplementarity, perpetuated by the ontic semblance of the trace within the nonconceptual ontology of differance.<sup>144</sup> As Parks textually iterates, she performs the problematic genesis of a metaphysical concept and the promise of its idealization through its absent, yet enigmatically potent, irreducible trace. Iterating signs supplement the difficult dialectic of absence and presence in interrogating the deferred temporal opening, which is *re-substantiated* through the spatial movement of the trace as protowriting, in effect, a nonconcept—differance itself. Henceforth, we can readily identify the so called deconstructive “undecidable” as irreconcilably intrinsic to Parks’s materialization of the tension between a concept’s unsubstantiated idealization and its qualified return through textual performance. And so, we set out to show how processes of deconstructive poetics underlie Parks’s conceptual aporetics and their dramatization within *The America Play*’s textual scheme; wherein inscribed, engrammatic signifiers perform the irreconcilability of the onto-spatiotemporal-lingual difficulties inherent in structures of idealization and their repeating reemergence through the ontic, signifying, supplementing movement of the Derridian trace.<sup>145</sup>

*The Foundling Father: Differance as Supplement within the Pathologies of Rep & Rev*

Presenting Tony Morrison’s idea about African-American’s need to use “fabricated presence,” Steve Drukman asks Parks if when “making a character or a stage-figure” she is compelled to follow such construction, Suzan-Lori Parks responds that she

<sup>144</sup>An excerpt from Derrida’s “Signature Event Context” in our Appendix offers an explanation on connections Derrida draws within the deconstructive scheme in explicating on the “labor . . . performed on a conceptual system . . . in displacing a conceptual order as well as the nonconceptual order with which it is articulated” (LI 21).

<sup>145</sup>As I propose, Parks’s textual work is deconstructive in following what Shain identifies to be “Derrida’s philosophical view [which] can be designated as ‘textualism,’ because ‘text’ is for Derrida both ontologically and methodologically primary” (“Situating Derrida between Hegel and Kirkegaard” 399).

creates her stage-figures, “From the fabricated absence, actually. It’s fabricated absence. That’s where I start from. And that’s where the Foundling Father came from. It’s the hole idea.”<sup>146</sup> The whole idea does emerge from a hole, “*A great hole. In the middle of nowhere. The hole is an exact replica of the Great Hole of History.*”<sup>147</sup> With these words, **ACT ONE: THE LINCOLN ACT**<sup>148</sup> and Parks’s perpetual “replication” of absent event-turn-conceptual ideality begins. For Parks, as I argue, the replication of an absent event is invested in reproductive signs, dramatizing in a supplementary impulse within the play’s spatiotemporal scheme, the repetitious collapse and return of the Derridian trace. What is more, Parks’s excruciatingly formal manipulation of structure and content is but a façade for her paradoxically substantively absent concepts of which origin, presence, is *ad-infinitum* deferred through the dynamic movement of difference.

I will demonstrate the ways in which *The America Play* is a deconstructive drama; that is, the ways in which repetitious regeneration of concepts such as history and identity are potentially introduced as elements belonging to the trace, supplemented through textually specific structure and language. Moreover, since, as I argue, deconstruction is marked by ontological pathologies invested in Saussure’s structural differential, I plan to show how Parks’s manipulation of space *on the page* in concert with content-related expressions of time, attest to underpinnings of spatiotemporal intervention in processes of discursive idealities, marking the language of metaphysics. More to the point, if

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<sup>146</sup> (“Suzan-Lori Parks and Liz Diamond Doo-a-diddly-dit-dit,” *TDR* 39.3 (1995): 56-75) p. 67.

<sup>147</sup> (Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works*. New York: Theater Community Group Inc, 1995, [*The America Play* will be referenced as TAP hereafter]) p. 159.

<sup>148</sup> In quoting, I follow Parks’s typographical style in *The America Play*, emphasizing the work’s accentuation on a textual gesture.

repetitious “*regressus ad infinitum* . . . . regression to the beginning”<sup>149</sup> marks the ontological and ontic differential primacy of differance, whereby deconstruction, breaking from Husserlian phenomenology, is a movement of a self-proclaimed, self-declared anticipation of a none-reductive labor, then *The America Play* is a model of deconstructive self-reflexivity, performing its concepts’ irreducibility to their origin. Also, since topographical recovery of originary structures of a concept is in question, I intend to discuss, the space, the locale, “*the great hole of history*,” within which absent, supplemented and ultimately historicized idealities are staged with reproductive ferocity. Parks’s protagonist in the play, the Foundling Father, unlike the constitutive phenomenological subject, becomes the differential catalyst, who, by personifying the regenerative, nonconceptual plane of differance and protowriting, reveals deconstructive subjectivity as an absence, gaining its subjective definition through differentiation and supplementation. As a product of supplementing differential, the Foundling Father reproduces his vicarious current reality *as* a Lincoln impersonator (which might be understood as “the pure actuality of the now”)<sup>150</sup> by differentiating, even as he regenerates, temporalities of his past *as* the Lesser Known, a black gravedigger (understood through retentive traces), with the temporality of a projected, idealized future *as* Abraham Lincoln (understood through protentive traces) all within the deconstructive movement of differance, “which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence, submitting simultaneously to primordial division and delay.”<sup>151</sup> I intend to demonstrate how *The America Play* is a model of deconstructive understanding; that is, how underlying structures of deferred temporalities define the reproductive nature of

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<sup>149</sup> (*Origin* 125)

<sup>150</sup> (*Speech and Phenomena* 67)

<sup>151</sup> (*ibid*, 88)



metaphysics, in tenably representing idealized presences of concepts such as identity and history through supplementary differentiated retentive and protentive traces, which complicate any claim of recoverable origin.

Henceforth, in introducing Parks's spatiotemporal, differential scheme in *The America Play*, we shall start by anthropomorphizing Derrida's nonconceptual, passive, yet, paradoxically indicatory plane of differance. We must, furthermore, show how Parks's method of Rep & Rev, repetition and revision, functions in concert with deconstructive pathologies marking the trace's repeating reproduction within a deferred temporal scheme, which simultaneously performs absences of conceptual presences and the absence inherent in Derrida's notion of the *always already*- at-work trace as "protowriting." Our attentiveness to the language of metaphysics, idealization as such and its ontological differential, follows Parks's textual retort to metaphysical discourse's supplemental rigor of its conceptual absence, its "locum."<sup>152</sup> Hence, I identify an anthropomorphically mutating differance in *The America Play*'s protagonist, the Foundling Father. The "perceptibly" mutating dynamic rises through Parks's unconventional plotline. In "**Act One: Lincoln Act**," The Foundling Father, formerly a gravedigger called the Lesser Known, whose resemblance to Abraham Lincoln prompts him to leave his wife and child, become a Lincoln impersonator and stage a show "out West" in which he *reenacts* the Lincoln assassination. In "**Act Two:**

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<sup>152</sup> Here I suggest that Parks's concept of a center-emanated-structure in the play follows Derrida's view of a center of a structure, which "had no natural site, that it was not a-fixed locus but a function a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitution came into play ("SSPDHS" 280). Discussing "fixed" and "mutational" structures, the "usage of larger-than-life slides in *Imperceptible Mutabilities* Parks says: 'you have these fixed pictures projected up there and down below there's a little person mutating like hell on the stage. I'm obsessed with the gap between these two things'" ("Signifying on the Signifyin'" 75). "The gap" is the absence directing Parks's work. I aim to show that *The America Play*'s repeating structures, consisting of words, phrases, and paragraphs, are tools for Parks's formal side, even as these tools are being undermined by the absent status of the concepts they attempt to represent.

**The Hall of Wonders,**” wife and son, Lucy and Brazil, come to bury him. No naturalistic, linearly progressing plot here. As we shall see, the Foundling Father’s changing temporalities define a plot of which climax can be marked through the playwright’s formal manipulation of repetition and revision. To be sure, Parks’s Rep & Rev is part of a greater design. I suggest, in fact, that Parks is performing on her pages a certain consciousness to a theater that comments on its inability to represent the purported realities of its drama. Paradoxically, superposing deconstructive self-reflexivity, of which metatheatrical sensibilities are indeed part, is *The America Play*’s supplementing and supplemented protagonist, who signifies the diminishing potentiality of a viable identity by differentiating retentive and protentive realities of his former self, the Lesser Known, and his ideal, the Great Man (Abraham Lincoln), in the shifting, temporally fractured actuality of his reproductive and hence impossible identity.

In keeping with Parks’s textual and, hence, onto-lingual sensibilities, following is a textual design, representing the deconstructive trajectory of the play; the following inscriptive scheme, I contend, stages the Foundling Father’s differing and deferring temporalities, emulating the performing spaces with which Parks fissures her pages. In fact, Parks’s spaces are deconstructive because they are akin to Derrida’s inaudible differential apparatuses necessary for definition of phonemes and their inscriptive representation in writing. My diagram trajectory<sup>153</sup> locates the Foundling Father on the spatiotemporal plane of Derrida’s differance, through which repeating, supplementing traces the Foundling Father, as an absence of his own presence, the intersubjective, spatiotemporal nonpresence, self-reflexively regenerates the identity of his former self,

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<sup>153</sup> Our textual trajectory may be found in our Appendices.

the Lesser Known, through trace-Lincolnesque idealities. Specifically, as anthropomorphic difference, the Foundling Father manipulates the Lesser Known's idealized conceptuality of the Great Man, even as he differentiates their historical milieu within and through which their identities are defined, in showing that any attempt to locate originary structures of identity and history is problematic. In keeping with *The America Play's* self-interrogatory momentum, spatially differed and temporally deferred concepts of identity and history are supplemented through heterogeneous temporality within the inescapable historicizing and historicized space of "The Great Hole of History."

The differential impulse, undermining the metaphysics of assumed origin begins at the outset, whereby a supplement, an epigram, a heading to the play before the play within a heterogeneous double play is inscribed as follows:

*In the beginning, all the world was America.*

—JOHN LOCKE

## **ACT ONE: LINCOLN ACT**

*A great hole. In the middle of nowhere. The hole is an exact replica of the Great Hole of History.*

THE FOUNDLING FATHER *AS* [my emphasis] ABRAHAM LINCOLN

(TAP 159)

Proclaimed primordial grasp of origin as "American" delivered by Locke, which can be readily identified as nothing else but ideal and metaphysically supplemental, is deflected through economies of self-reflexive, deconstructive supplement. For indeed the seeming empirical assuredness invested in Locke's statement is imploded by the

enunciating colon(ed) space between the two phrases that follow.<sup>154</sup> That is, as the colon separates, even as it enables a syntactical differential, the colon defines performative possibilities of an “ACT” within an “ACT” in ambiguating the conventional structure of a theatrical model and, hence, affecting upon the Lockean expression a departure from a normative understanding of the primordial, “the beginning,” on the level of its accepted semantic integrity. Furthermore, the colon(ed) space between the double supplement of an act within an act, explanation as to its multi-supplemental values is forthcoming, is mirrored by the absent presence of “*a great hole*.” This “nonpresence,” an absence of a coreless structure, is a supplement of yet another hole, *The Great Hole of History* with which historicizing contents we shall soon be familiar. For now, I would like to demonstrate how *The America Play*’s repeating trace-supplements are the precarious core of its formal, “architectural” like structure, which is a seminal part of its plot.<sup>155</sup> In fact, when introducing the Foundling Father for the first time, (THE FOUNDLING FATHER AS [my emphasis] ABRAHAM LINCOLN: ) Parks creates a structural binary so as to

<sup>154</sup> Parks emphasizes spatial silences with variety of textual markers, which reflect elements inherent in the structural differential. I think that Derrida explains the value of “nonphonetic ‘signs’” in classifying them as differential silence best: “What is called phonetic writing can only function . . . by incorporating nonphonetic ‘signs’ (punctuation, spacing etc.); but when we examine their structure and necessity, we will quickly see that they are ill described by the concepts of signs. Saussure had only to remind us that the play of difference was the functional condition, the condition of possibility, for every sign: and it is itself silent. The difference between two phonemes, which enables them to exist and to operate, is inaudible. The inaudible opens the two present phonemes to hearing, as they present themselves. If, then, there is no purely phonetic writing, it is because there is no purely phonetic phone. The difference that begins out phonemes and lets them be heard and understood [*entendre*] itself remains inaudible” (“Differance” 133). Liz Diamond is specific in addressing the fact that Parks’s texts call attention to those “inaudible,” yet, crucial signs: “I think that periods and comas and semi-colons and dashes and the distance between the heading and the line of text and the way it is written on a page are all full of rich clues for the director” (“Suzan-Lori Parks and Liz Diamond . . .”69).

<sup>155</sup> Says Parks, “Form should not be looked at askance and held suspect – form is not something that ‘gets in the way of the story’ but is an integral part of the story . . . Also, ‘form’ is not a strictly ‘outside’ things while ‘content’ stays ‘inside’ . . . form is not merely a docile passive vessel, but an active participant in the sort of play which ultimately inhabits it” (“Elements of Style” 7-8). Christopher Innes is right to observe that “In her view, ‘the question of form runs parallel to the question of the way the world is set up. If you are questioning form in theatre then you are questioning the form of the world’” (“Staging Black History: Re-Imaging Cultural,” *South African Theatre Journal* 13.1-2 (2000): 20-29) p. 25.

qualify its suggested dialectic by inserting the destabilizing sign, “AS.” “As” as such is the morphemic catalyst with which Parks interlaces the supplemental fabric, textum, of the play; Parks follows Heidegger, who views the term “as” as the structural component of all metaphysical discourse. Deconstruction radicalizes our understanding of Heideggerian “as structure,” explaining the metaphysical impulse and steeps it with signs. The significance of the deconstructive action is monumental because it forces any analysis of philosophical aporetics to consider the problematic of linguistic differential, even as such analysis investigates the effects of its ontic elements.

In devising a textual design with specific consciousness to repeating structures, Parks, I argue, acknowledges the necessity of deconstruction’s expansive treatment of language; she stages the supplemental movement of its concepts, its signified, through signifiers whose textual performance evidences the problematic spatiotemporal inception of these concepts’ absent, yet, repeating traces. In effect, the Foundling Father’s, *AS* Abraham Lincoln, first words culminate in the ultimate self-evident supplement of them all – dictionary excerpts!<sup>156</sup> Of all words, the Foundling Father brings excerpts of “An example of chiasmus, by Oliver Goldsmith, cited under ‘chiasmus’ in Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA, Inc, 1983) p. 232.”<sup>157</sup> It comes to no surprise that Parks uses footnotes to perform what is necessarily supplemental; what is more, that she performs the anticipated failure of reducibility of a term to its origin, can

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<sup>156</sup> Here I must make mention of Dr. Phillip Sipiora’s remark in asking whether the Supplement to the Oxford Dictionary is not, in effect, a supplement to THE supplement—The Oxford Dictionary. Indeed, I think that the Foundling Father theatricalizes the supplement per excellence in showing the multi-layered condition of each morpheme and the regenerative potential it regressively holds.

<sup>157</sup> (*TAP* n1, 159) I here must call attention to the fact that I am quoting a footnote, explaining the meaning of chiasmus. Footnotes are but one of the “citational” elements characterizing Parks’s text, adding to reflexive consciousness of tenacious supplementarity. Hence, I agree with Innes that “As with all Parks’ techniques, the footnoting offers multi-layered meanings,” but I disagree that, “as an academic trope, it substantiates the historicity of what is being presented on the stage” (“Staging Black History” 24), rather I view such “layered meaning as complicating processes of historicity altogether.

be identified as discretely deconstructive. We cannot ignore the deliciously ironic choice of a term such as “chiasmus”<sup>158</sup> in which certain ambiguity emanates from its positioning and repositioning within syntactical and contextual differentials, through specific process of spatial regression. Follow are the Foundling Father’s first utterances in the play, most of which are samples of chiasmus:<sup>159</sup>

#### THE FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN:

“To stop too fearful and too faint to go.”<sup>160</sup>

(*Rest*)

“He digged the hole and the whole held him.”

(*Rest*)

“I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed.”<sup>161</sup>

(*Rest*)

“He went to the theater but home went she.”<sup>162</sup>

(*Rest*)

Goatee. Goatee. What he sported when he died. Its not my favorite.

(*Rest*)

“He digged the hole and the whole held him.” Huh.

(159)

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<sup>158</sup> “*n. Rhetoric.* reversal in the order of words in one of two otherwise parallel phrases, for example, *Do not live to eat, but eat to live* (Collier’s Dictionary, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.: New York, 1973) p. 172.

<sup>159</sup> So as to give readers a clearer image of how the following quote from *The America Play* is presented in the text, I have transferred the quote onto the next page.

<sup>160</sup> This expression is footnoted by Parks in *The America Play*’s n1 as: “An example of chiasmus, by Oliver Goldsmith, cited under “chiasmus” in Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA, Inc, 1983) p. 232. Notes 2 and 3 also refer to examples of chiasmus” (*TAP* 159).

<sup>161</sup> This expression is footnoted by Parks in n2 as: “A Dictionary of Modern English Usage, H.W. Fowler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 86” (*ibid.*).

<sup>162</sup> This expression is footnoted by Parks in n3 as: “The New American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, William Morris, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981) p. 232” (*ibid.*).

The Foundling Father's, *as* Abraham Lincoln, "overabundance of the signifier"<sup>163</sup> persists through performance on stage in his theater, which is a replica of "The Great Hole of History," in systematically supplementing semantic values of a rhetorical function. As the Foundling Father *as* Abraham Lincoln utters supplements as to the meaning of chiasmus, he regresses to his past, as a gravedigger and the Lesser Known, and, paradoxically, to a projected future, through which the Lesser Known hopes to emulate a dead president's idealized past life. The differential gesture is indeed invested in the trace's spatiotemporal matrix. For the Foundling Father as an anthropomorphic representation of difference, fissures his presence, in which he actively brings examples as to how chiasmus functions, with retentive traces of his past life as a gravedigger and protentive traces of a-would-be-reality as Abraham Lincoln. More to the point, as we read the footnoted chiasmus samples in their context, we can make a qualified inference as to why the Foundling Father chooses to use them. He, in effect, introduces the environs within which he can situate, even as he differentiates, his thematically heterogeneously supplemented trace chiasmus about his former self as the Lesser Known, the gravedigger, and the Lesser Known's idealized self as the Great Man.

Thus, in the Foundling Father's first utterances, we are introduced to the fecund trace of "theater" with which supplements *The America Play* "echoes" with retentive traces that are re-localized, re-contextualized through the haunting gunshot in the Ford Theater: Lincoln's assassination, the "hole in the president's head," Marry Todd's "hysterics," Lincoln's "guffawing" to a "very thin joke" from "*Our American Cousin* [the play staged that night] with Ms. Laura Keen," John Wilkes Booth's "purportedly" last words, and, most significantly, the perpetuity of a multi-layered representation of theater

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<sup>163</sup> (SSPDHS 279).



as manipulated by an impersonating nonpresence, the Foundling Father. It is then within such conceptual heterogeneity that the Foundling Father self-reflexively situates, even as he differentiates, a trace that carries elements of his personal narrative; that is, a trace element, as chiasmus, describing the Lesser Known's historicized state. Therefore, the utterance, "He digged a hole and the whole held him" is not only invested in the retentive temporality of the Foundling Father's own past as a gravedigger, but can be also identified as carrying spatial dynamic, locating the Lesser Known in his "hole," which is, not surprisingly, a defining absence. In the next utterance, made before he repeats his authentic chiasmus about his temporal past, the Foundling Father interjects a seeming arbitrary, unquoted, direct address to his audience, in which he comments on his dislike of the impersonated, the Great Man's, Abraham Lincoln, choice of a beard: "Goatee. Goatee. What he sported when he died. Its<sup>164</sup> not my favorite." In so doing, the Foundling Father as differance introduces, yet, another retentive temporal value, one belonging to the American historical past and one onto which the Foundling Father projects<sup>165</sup> the Lesser Known's self-image as a president through retentive and protentive,

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<sup>164</sup> Omitting apostrophes is one of the ways Parks calls attention to the physicality of her signifiers in factoring their assumed conceptuality as signified. Aside from unconventional syntax and noticeably fragmented sentences, Parks changes words' morphological structure and, hence, their phonemic economies. Parks's word-play and morphological neologism is expressed by join words, "heud" for, he would, "Ffhe sspast" for, if he is past, adding a glottal sound in the end of a "the" to create a new phoneme as "thuh," drop apostrophes as in Great Mans for Great Man's. The neo in logos, for both Parks and Derrida, means a redeployment of language so as to interpose on a complacent consciousness an awareness of our discursive metaphysical practices. Mark Lilla discusses Derrida's "a-communicative strategy" a tactic employed self-consciously by Derrida "for combating logocentrism." Derrida explains, "what I try to do through the neutralization of communication, theses, and stability of content, through microstructure of signification, is to provoke, not only in the reader but also in oneself, a new tremor or a new shock of the body that opens a new space of experience" ("The Politics of Jacques Derrida" *The New York Review of Books* 25 June, 1998) p. 38. In a similar vein, says Parks: "Language is a physical act. It's something which involves your entire body—not just your head. Words are spells which an actor consumes and digests—and through digesting creates a performance on stage" ("Elements of Style" 11).

<sup>165</sup> Here I use the term in its Heideggerian sense whereby projection is a kind of thinking through which individuals have specific understanding about their future, which effectively molds their past whereby Dasein's past "happens" out of its future on each occasion" (*Being and Time* 41). I intend to discuss

temporalities; such temporalities are regenerated through idealized, metaphysical discourse throughout *The America Play*. If, as I argue, the Foundling Father anthropomorphizes the movement of deconstructive difference, then the grand metaphysic he helps to interrogate is the substantive “presence” of his own identity and the history in which “hole” he is historicizing and historicized—held by its whole. And if, as I argue, the Foundling Father is an anthropomorphic difference, then he must function self-reflexively, aware and, hence, outside the discursive idealization of the Great Man, overtaking the Lesser Known, his former self. To be sure, the temporal ambiguity underscoring his personal past in addition to the temporality of historically collective past, which is personalized through concentrated impersonation—reproduced through repetitious, spatiotemporal, discursive trace-structures—complicate any attempts of understanding the Foundling Father’s discourse as nothing more than supplemental and as such necessarily open to interrogation. What is more, the rigorously intersecting temporalities are accentuated by the textual spaces with which Parks fissures her pages, spaces that are not always empty.

Hence, when the Foundling Father *as* Abraham Lincoln repeats his *authentic* chiasmus, the tremor of Parks’s repetitious, regenerative, spatiotemporal trajectory begins to reveal itself. For indeed, the utterance, ““He digged a hole and the whole held him’ Huh.” is repeated and revised by the addition of a phoneme, “Huh,” which is outside of original quotation marks so as to indicate a revised repetition. Moreover, as those preceding it, the repeated expression is distinctively surrounded by space within which

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Heidegger’s temporal trajectory limitedly in revealing the ways in which the Lesser Known is influenced by the Great Man’s “traditionalized” and idealized historicity, a process marked by a temporal ambiguity in which the Great Man’s “footsteps” are impossibly ahead of the Lesser Known’s.

Parks situates repeating parenthesized, italicized terms<sup>166</sup> that though potentially understood as conventional stage directions, are instead reinforcing a suggestion that the utility of conceptual spatiality is part of Parks's deconstructive design. Parks is creating a milieu, *on the page*, within which she attempts to perform the ways repeating temporalities are hypostatized through the spatial, signified (v.) reemergence of the Derridian trace. As we progress, we shall be able to grasp the scope of Parks's Rep & Rev structures and the profound deconstructive understanding their utilization lends to the reading of her drama. For indeed a progressively diachronic movement of repetition with revision suggests that the subjective and objective presences their signs convey semantically are not excisable in their substantive totalities. Even so, this is exactly the point in which I identify Parks as contributing to the deconstructive dynamic and its possible impossible irreconcilable dialectic. That is, I contend that Parks's Rep & Rev matrices, just through the sheer sequence of their repetitions, represent a viable opening for metaphysics, which can potentially arise through the repetition of a trace-supplement as ideal—*complete and repeatable in its completion*. Yet, antithetical to repeating ideality, is Parks's deconstructive revision, which undermines the repetitious impetus of the trace in its completion; in so doing, Parks's revisionary structures testify to the impossibility of the trace's tenable state as ideal and, therefore, as metaphysic. Hence, before we embark on the Foundling Father's articulation of supplemented sign traces of

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<sup>166</sup> (*Rest*) is a technique Parks uses throughout the play, which is an italicized stage direction that is solitarily set in a parenthesis, defining blank, spatial values in relation to written inscriptions that surround it. The fact that Parks chooses a term denoting a musical pause to implement a literal pause is in step with her jazz-like method of Rep & Rev. "*(Rest)*" fissures the page and potentially demarcates the materialization of passing time in the performative space. Also transitional, is another spatial textual device specific to Parks's dramatic texts, a *spell*: "An elongated and heightened (*rest*). Denoted by repetition of figures' names with no dialogue. Has sort of an architectural look. This is a place where the figures experience their pure true simple state" ("Elements of Style" 16). For a deconstructive reading, any usage of the term "pure" might be problematic. In my view, rest and spell are spatiotemporal devices, conveying a transition, a conceptual passage of time.

the Great Man's idealized history and identity, which are historicized through the Lesser Known's "mind's eye," I would like to discuss Parks's understanding of Rep & Rev,<sup>167</sup> through which structure I see the Foundling Father perpetuating deconstructive, self-reflexive supplement in showing the absent origin of repeating and, hence, idealized traces.

Parks follows dramatists such as August Wilson in admitting to the influence of jazz on their writing: "Through listening, with its solos sculpted around revisions of repeated theme, Parks says she's recently realizes 'how much this method is an integral part of the African and African-American literary and oral traditions.'" <sup>168</sup> Parks's dramatic works contrast conventionally written plays with their noticeable structures of Rep & Rev, which guide her writing. Parks says, "In such plays we are not moving from  $A \rightarrow B$  but rather, for example, from  $A \rightarrow A \rightarrow A \rightarrow B \rightarrow A$ . Through such movement we refigure A. And if we continue to call this movement FORWARD PROGRESSION, which I think it is, then we refigure the idea of forward progression. And if we insist on calling writings structured with this in mind PLAYS, which I think they are, then we've

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<sup>167</sup> Taking a theoretical cue from Henry Louise Gates Jr., argues James Frieze, "Parks draws on the African-American tradition of 'repetition [and] difference'. . . . Rep & Rev found its apotheosis in jazz composition, a central principle of which is the establishment of a particular phrase or harmonic line which is then repeated with signal difference. Parks's theatrical application of the technique conjures up the experience of meanings changing, often barely perceptibly, over time" ("*Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom: Suzan-Lori Parks and the Shared Struggle to Perceive.*" *Modern Drama* 41.4 (1998): 523-32) p. 524. Interestingly, Marc Robinson describes Parks as "a fanatic reviser. Her plays sound like fugues of language, always turning back on themselves in order to travel again through significant perceptions" ("Four Writers" *Theater* 24.1 (1993): 31-42) p. 37.

<sup>168</sup> ("Signifying on the Signifyin" 79). Discussing *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, Louis Bernard observes that "Parks experiments with the rhythmic complexity that is the foundation of scat, be-bop, or free jazz. As Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane chose to 'ignore bar lines, chord-based improvisation and even tonality . . . ,' so Parks constantly violates rules, her dialogue becoming the spoken equivalent of 'suprasegmentals'—the variations in pitch, stress, and dynamics" ("The Musicality of language: redefining History in Suzan Lori Parks' *The Black Death Man in the Whole Entire World.*" *African American Review* 31.4 (1997): 687-96) p. 687.

got a different kind of dramatic literature.”<sup>169</sup> The relevance of incorporating into her drama a sense of temporal flux is significant to Parks’s theater theorem. Parks asks, in fact, “How does this Rep & Rev—a literal incorporation of the past—impact on the creation of the theatrical experience?”<sup>170</sup> Moreover, discussing one of her earlier plays, *Betting on the Dust Commander*, Parks points out that “the ‘climax’ could be the accumulated weight of the repetition—a residue that, like city dust, stays with us.”<sup>171</sup> Indeed, “a residue” readily describes the potentially accumulating, yet, effacing trace, which as a nonoriginary origin is the supplementing and supplemented movement underlying conceptual metaphysics. Hence, when the Foundling Father Repeats & Revises his introductory utterances, “Goatee. Huh. Goatee.,” and ““He digged the Hole and the Whole held him.,”” they are spatially re-contextualized within monologues that mobilize supplementing traces about identity—economies of Lincoln’s beards and the historicizing effects of the “Hole” within which the “Whole” holds the Lesser Known. The absent origin as trace, attesting to the supplemental, idealized state of concepts such as identity and history, is presented through the following template:<sup>172</sup> the Foundling Father’s metatheatrical, self-reflexive intervention in presenting the concept of theater as striving on its representational and supplemental impulse, the Great Man’s historicity against which the Lesser Known’s is differentiated within the historicizing Great Hole of

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<sup>169</sup> (“Elements” 9-10).

<sup>170</sup> (ibid.) In fact, Parks describes all of her early plays through illustrated equations in which one is asked to solve for X, calculation which involves values of time and space. Photocopies of Parks’s illustration-equations of *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, *Betting on the Dust Commander*, *Pickling*, *The Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, *Devotees in the Garden of Love*, and *The America Play* may be found in our appendix.

<sup>171</sup> (ibid.)

<sup>172</sup> I refer to the forthcoming triple structured excerpt from *The America Play* presented on p. 111, which, as I argue, underscores the conceptual fundamentals of my argument. The sub-thesis I present here parallels to the three parts distinctively noticeable in the excerpt, which ultimately indicates the treble conceptuality of difference.

History, and, finally, Rep & Rev structures within which the Foundling Father's as difference shows how idealization is perpetuated through supplementation.<sup>173</sup> Hence, on the one hand, the double life of the trace as iterative movement sustains an opening for idealities and their return, attesting to the possibility of presence, while, on the other hand, iterative traces deconstructively reject the viability of presence through their reemergence as impossibly revised presences. Therefore, nothing signifies such revision as Parks's fragmented syntax and abundance of morphemic neologism, in repeated and revised structures; such structures are deconstructive, effectively suggesting sensibilities to postmodern avant-garde and its suspicion of a discursive unity of meaning.<sup>174</sup> Parks's postmodern drama, I argue, targets modern pastiche by staging a deconstructive momentum that directs *The America Play's* "rage of mimesis"<sup>175</sup> against a sense of certainty, a familiar gesture of dogmatic, metaphysical intransigency, in showing the inherent problematic of language as communicating unified meaning. Hence, Parks's fragmented language communicates its anticipated failure and, at the same time, its anticipated success, gained through a perceptual opening necessary for structures of repetition and revision and the tenability of the deconstructive undecidable.

<sup>173</sup>Rep & Rev structures introduce idealities, absent presences, within which *The America Play's* protagonist is a metaphor for the ultimate absence: difference. In playing with absences, Parks seems to follow jazz great Miles Davis, who was quoted as saying, "don't play what's there, play what's not there" (Morning Edition, *NPR* January 6, 2007).

<sup>174</sup>Discussing Derrida's view of modern avant-garde, Caputo reveals postmodern angst. Caputo stresses that for Derrida European modernity, the "paradigmatic gesture," is an "'auto-biographical' project in which European thinkers tell the story of Europe as the avant-garde and 'promontory' of the West . . . . composing a eulogy to a Europe that sets the heading for Western, indeed global destiny." He continues to say that "Derrida would have Europe eschew this closing off within destiny so that opening for the 'tout autre' occurs 'beyond this modern tradition'" (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 118). In the same vein, Lyotard decries European "nostalgia of the whole and the one" obtained through "the nostalgia for the unattainable" in which "reconciliation of language games" is "the transcendental illusion" that "can hope to totalize them into real unity" ("What is Postmodernism?" 81-82).

<sup>175</sup>(*Agitated States* 197). I here invert the meaning of Kubiak's phrase, who suggests that Parks's *The America Play* fails to preserve the integrity of its hidden trauma, by inscribing the double trauma of postmodern "agitation" in questioning modernist longing for totalities of meaning and modernist failure to anticipate the onslaught of dogmatic worldview which such totalities help create.

*The “Structure” of Parks’s Differance—Its Absent Idealized Traces and the Self—  
Reflexive Dramaturge Who Regenerates Them*

Investigating accumulating absences in *The America Play*’s supplemental structures, we follow the Foundling Father’s deconstructive iteration in showing that idealization is both rejected by and indispensable for his dramaturgical labor. As the anthropomorphic representation of the deconstructive differance, the Foundling Father indicates as he differentiates retentive and protentive traces in giving emphasis to the ontological status of a concept and its signs’ spatiotemporal/ontic birth, as they accommodate the impulse of its supplementation. Deconstructive Rep & Rev are the tools of his trade, with which idealities of regenerative, morphemic repetition belonging to conceptual metaphysics stand returning *ad infinitum* with, nonetheless, revision, which superposes and ultimately imposes self-interrogatory momentum on idealities of origin as presence.

To achieve an interrogatory self-reflexivity, the Foundling Father creates a topologically textual movement, *on the page*, within which as the deconstructive differance he differentiates as he supplements historicized temporal traces of the Great Man and the Lesser Known. In so doing, the Foundling Father accommodates an ontologically defining environment which, through spatiotemporal traces, must vie with possibilities of ontic realities. The following excerpt from *The America Play*’s first act represents the Foundling Father as differance and the traces with which he supplements metaphysical aporias such as identity and history, problematizing their viable conceptuality as presence. I aim to represent the heterogeneity of deconstructive conceptualization through the textually tripled passage, which is, in effect, congruent to the values of my initial design of the Foundling Father’s anthropomorphic,



spatiotemporal state of difference. Since my intent is to treat each of the parts separately in showing the impossibility of conceptual totalities, I distinct between them as parts A, C, and B respectively. What is more, staging the Foundling Father’s monologue in the play’s first act reveals textual dramatics, which attest to the inherently fractured condition of seeming lexicological, signified integrity. Hence, as he addresses *his* audience, on *his* stage, in *his* Hole “out west,” the “whole” system is interrogated:

A While the **Great Mans** livelihood kept him in **Big Town** the **Lesser Knowns** work kept him in **Small Town**. The **Great Man** by trade Was a **President**. The **Lesser Known** was a **Digger** by trade. From a Family of Diggers. Digged graves. He was known in **Small Town** to Dig his graves quickly and neatly. This brought him a steady business.

(Rest)

C **A wink to Mr. Lincolns pasteboard cutout.** (*Winks at Lincoln’s Pasteboard cutout*)

(Rest)

B It would be helpful to our story if when the **Great Man** died in Death he were to meet the **Lesser Known**. It would be helpful to our story if, say, the Lesser Known were **summoned** to Big Town by the Great Mans wife: **“Emergency oh Emergency, please put the Great Man in the ground”**<sup>176</sup> (they say the Great Mans wife was given to hysterics: one young son dead others sickly: even the Great Man couldn’t save them: war was on then off and surrendered to: **“*Play Dixie I always liked this song*”**<sup>177</sup>: **the brother against the brother: a new nation all conceived and ready to be hatched**: the Great Man takes to guffawing guffawing at thin jokes at bad plays: **“You sockdologizing old man- trap!”**<sup>178</sup> haw haw haw... and one moment guffawing and the next moment the Great Man is gunned down in his rocker. **“Useless Usless.”**<sup>179</sup> And there were bills to pay.) **“Emergency, oh Emergency please put the Great Man in the ground.”**

(160)

<sup>176</sup> This is Parks’s n4, it reads: “Possibly the words Mary Todd Lincoln after the death of her husband.”

<sup>177</sup> Parks’s n5 reads: “At the end of the civil war, President Lincoln told his troops to play “Dixie,” the song of the South, in tribute to the Confederacy.”

<sup>178</sup> Parks’s n6 reads: “A very funny line from the play *Our American Cousin*. As the audience roared with laughter, Booth entered Lincoln’s box and shot him dead.”

<sup>179</sup> Parks’s n7 reads: “The last words of President Lincoln’s assassin, John Wilkes Booth.”

So as to stress Parks's Rep & Rev impulse in the play, I choose to underline, italicize, and bold-face repeating expressions; these, as we are about to witness, will repeat, *again*, throughout the play in semi-revisionary structures, which are subtly re-contextualized as the play negotiates the meaning it interrogates.

And so, as the personification of deconstructive self-reflexivity, the Foundling Father must begin with a deconstructive point of interrogation, that is, he must begin with signs that reveal the ontological strife of their arrival—the questionability rooted in their spatiotemporal origin as reproductive, supplemental traces. Henceforth, looking at the distinctively partitioned passage, we notice that, at the outset, beyond the textual rupture of footnoted, supplemented traces, temporal values are ambiguous at best: part (A) represents the differentiated identity of the Lesser Known, gained through the historicizing traces of the Great Man, a reality the Foundling Father locates in the past; part (C) is the paradoxically potent temporality of the Foundling Father, as difference, and dramaturge, through which dramatic schism *on the page* he is able to self-reflexively differentiated retentive and protentive traces in the impossible state of “the pure actuality of the now”; lastly, part (B) takes the action to the 1800's, “time immemorial,” representing events in the Great Mans past that though are most distant in time, are idealized, relocated, and projected onto a future to which the Lesser Known could have had a recourse. The Foundling Father, I argue, attempts to unsettle suggestions of chronicled, normative conceptualization of history.<sup>180</sup> Further, in addition to historicized

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<sup>180</sup> There is very little doubt that Derrida's concept of “play,” as in the play of absence and presence, directs the disturbance of normative history in *The America Play*. When Derrida, therefore, states that “the reference to play is always caught up in tension. Tension with history first of all” and that “The thematic of historicity . . . has always been required by the determination of Being as presence” (SSPDHS 290-1), he problematizes attempts to reduce history to teleological, metaphysical sum, suggesting that locating it as presence lends history a persistent unity for which it might fail to account. Certainly, Parks fractures form

temporality, the dramatically schismatic irreconcilability between the passage's distinctive parts can be traced to the Foundling Father's consciousness about the supplemental reproductive state of the language he manipulates *as* the anthropomorphic representation of differance and the condition of the trace *as* protowriting. Anterior to "making history," therefore, is the language of its making and remaking. Hence, though I disagree that Parks "denies" history, I accept Una Chaudhuri's analysis of *The America Play*'s manipulation of history as a function of language. Chaudhuri notes that,

Parks's denial of history occurs at the level of language, or rather of the recognition that history, because it exists as language, is always subject to revision. . . . Every fresh repetition of one of history's privileged textual fragments rewrites the meaning, the substance and affect, of that fragment.<sup>181</sup>

Similarly, Bernard Wilmer remarks, "Parks questions the historical moment by repeating and revising it, thereby denying its timelessness and even its authenticity"<sup>182</sup> In Parks's view, is historical truth available? Responding to Parks's statement that "Theater is an incubator for the creation of historical events," Katy Ryan correctly points out that this statement implies "an understanding that history is always mediated knowledge and that cultural spaces, like theatre, like Lincoln's tomb, serve as incubators for historical events."<sup>183</sup> As I argue, in *The America Play* Parks vacillates between revealing how

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that dialectically comments on a content that proscribes any call for teleological opening, including historically persistent temporality.

<sup>181</sup>(*Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) p. 265.

<sup>182</sup>("Musicality" 446).

<sup>183</sup>("No Less Human": Making History in Suzan Lori Parks's *The America Play*," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 13.2 (1999): 81-91) p. 83. "Cultural spaces," or if you will contexts also mark Derrida's understanding of history. Hugh Rayment-Pickard argues that Derrida's fidelity to history rises through his meditation on contextualizing historical events in showing that historical truths are viable only

history is produced as a metaphysic and the viability of propagating it in its black design in some of her other early “history plays.”<sup>184</sup> She does follow Derrida in understanding that

The concept of history . . . . cannot be subject to a simple and instantaneous mutilation, the striking of a name from the vocabulary. We must elaborate a strategy of the textual work which at every instant borrows an old word from philosophy in order immediately to demarcate it . . . . We must first overturn the traditional concept of history, but at the same time mark this interval, take care that by virtue of the overturning, and by the simple fact of conceptualization, that the interval not be reappropriated.<sup>185</sup>

For example, In *The Last Dead Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (TLDBMWEW), Parks treats the concept of history with certain temporal circularity, within which her figure, BLACK MAN WITH WATERMELON, never dies, his lynching continues *ad infinitum* as his wife, BLACK WOMAN WITH FRIED DRUMSTICK, says: “Yesterday today next summer tomorrow just uh moment uhgoh in 1317 dieded thuh last black man in thuh whole entire world,” when another figure, YES AND GREENS BLACK-EYED PEAS CORNBREAD, urges her “you should write it down and you should hide it under a rock.”<sup>186</sup> As many commentators agree, the practices of “writing it down” in TLDBMWEW are expected to provide a promise of

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through a reflexive realization of their interpretational impetus. (“Derrida and Fidelity to History,” *History-of-European-Ideas* 28 (2002): 13-20) p. 16.

<sup>184</sup> As I view *The America Play* as an attempt to disquiet metaphysical certitude, I disagree with Janette Malkin, who contends that *The America Play* is an attempt to “implant a different memory of America’s past, restoring a black presence” (*Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) p. 176.

<sup>185</sup> (*Positions* 59)

<sup>186</sup> (*The America Play and Other Works* 102).

regained historical permanency for people whose history was never narrated in the first place. The play is full of retentive, repeating traces, which recall the African past, “Before Columbus” and the forced slavery and persecution of blacks in America. Certainly, Parks’s *Imperceptible Mutabilities of the Third Kingdom*, is a sobering observation of black life drained out of its memory, reconstituted with subversive white imprint. For example, in the play’s first part, MOLLY, formerly known as MONA, tells CHARLENE formerly known as CHONA, that she is expelled from school because she fails to recite “The-little-lamb-follows-closely-behind-at-Marys-heels-as-Mary-boards-the-train . . . [because she has] never seen no woman on no train with no lamb.” Both Molly and Charlene are observed by THE NATURALIST, “who came to teach, enlighten, and tame . . . observe the objects of study . . . through experimentation” while hiding in a cockroach costume.<sup>187</sup> In part two of *Imperceptible*, we regress to the Middle Passage whose echoes reverberate in the figures’ names. US-SEER warns of the ensuing calamity: “Com home come home dont say out too late. Bleached Bones Man may get you n take you far uhcross thuh waves. . .”<sup>188</sup> In part three, ARETHA SAXTON, a slave, mistress, wife, and mother is having her teeth extracted absurdly to make room for a passage, while readying for her last passage. Aretha’s life is marked by a complete subservience to her master CHARLES SAXTON, who is introduced interchangeably as god. She is being told that based on “Amendment 1807,”<sup>189</sup> she is “expiring” and must die. In part four, Greeks, Parks drives the nail all the way in whereby SERGEANT SMITH, wife and daughters, BUFFY AND DUFFY have no recourse to black heritage; in fact, the interwoven theme in part four is of total assimilation, which leaves him with

<sup>187</sup> (ibid. 25,27,29).

<sup>188</sup> (ibid. 38)

<sup>189</sup> Parks’s n6 reads: “In March of 1807, England’s slave trade was abolished” (ibid. 47).

“Distinction,” and limbless. Most subversive in identifying the viability of black metaphysic is Parks’s *Venus*. The play is based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century African Khoikhoi woman, Saartji Baartman, who had a “remarkable bottom” and was exhibited in England like a circus animal. Though Parks does not exculpate Baartman from being a coconspirator of her own demise, Baartman, introduced as “The Hottentot Venus,” is caged, lusted for, dismembered, and studied. Nothing can “deconstruct” the bottomless abyss opened by The Baron Docteur, Venus’ lover, whose possession and meticulous dissection analysis and of her body can be transposed with evils of Africa’s colonization.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, this kind of un-deconstructible pit reveals a black hole through which no metaphysical supplement can proliferate. Certainly, dealing with historically black themes of loss and subjugation, introducing a metaphysical opening for the viability of black identity, and the reconstitution of black history, locate Parks’s theater in the black drama scene with one significant caveat: Parks’s persistent relocation of her work within the historical consciousness of Western philosophy.<sup>191</sup> This kind of consciousness is also clear in her remaining early plays, *Devotees in the Garden of Love*, *Pickling*, and *Betting on the Dust Commander*; that is, her characters and authentic plotlines indicate very little affiliation to black ethnicity. For instance, in *Devotees*, love,

<sup>190</sup> As Elam and Rayner note that “It was not uncommon to exhibit Hottentot woman in Europe, but the Hottentot Venus stands as a single emblem for figuring nineteenth century colonial discourse on race and sexuality” (Harry J. Elam Jr. and Alice Rayner, “Body Parts: Between Story and Spectacle in *Venus* by Suzan-Lori Parks,” in *Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theater*, Jeanne Collieran, and Jenny S. Spencer, Eds. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1998) p. 265.

<sup>191</sup> To be sure, Suzan-Lori Parks invalidates European prejudices about black history. Quoting from James S. Snead’s essay, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” Antonia Rodriguez-Gago introduces Hegel’s reflection on “African history,” communicating the sentiment on the continent: “[In] Africa there can be really no history. There is a succession of accidents and surprises . . . . Thus we find nothing other than man in his immediacy . . . . The Negro represents the natural man in all his wildness and indocility: if we wish to grasp him, then we must drop all European conceptions. What we actually understand by Africa is that which is without history or resolution [and which turns] . . . . all European categories of logic” (“Re-Creating Herstory: Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Venus*,” *Staging a Cultural Paradigm: The Political and the Personal in American Drama*, Barbara Ozieblo, and Miriam López-Rodríguez, Eds. Brussels, Belgium: Presses Interuniversitaires Européennes (P.I.E.)-Peter Lang, 2002) p. 259.

though thematically universal, takes on Parks's ludicrously hilarious pathologies when Lily and her daughter George, both devoted to wedded love, are sitting on a hilltop watching how Odelia Pandahr, a French matchmaker, is directing a battle between ThisOne and ThatOne to win George's hand.<sup>192</sup> Here, nonetheless, if we are to decipher historicist structures at all, then we will have to trace them through Heidegger's view of the effects of technology on modern lives and, antithetical to it, his understanding of the manifold sway of "gathering" and its significance for a community.<sup>193</sup>

Whether general about black historicity and the subversive white structures that define it, or specific in treating ontologically crucial themes, Parks's Rep & Rev in *The America Play* is overarching in permeating the Foundling Father's dialogue with deconstructive self-reflexivity, which accentuates the possibilities of spatiotemporal and

<sup>192</sup> As we can easily recognize, Parks is one of few American writers with distinctively wicked sense of humor. Of course, one feels just as tickled with Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*'s protagonist Tyrone Slothrop and his eventful English-candy miseries at Mrs. Quoad's, not to mention Slothrop's unseemly intimate liaisons with the V-Bomb; Pynchon's *Vineland* and its nun motorcycle gang; Pynchon's, Oedipa Mass, protagonist of *The Crying of Lot 49*, in ludicrous search for an illusive stamp carrying the imprint of a bugle, which becomes a fecund metaphor for a pynchonesque anarchical strand. Finally, there is no surpassing the humorously iniquitous moment in which Mickey Sabbath, Philip Roth's protagonist in *Sabbath's Theater*, visits his divorcee in a rehabilitation center, furtively reads her diaries, which contain letters to her deceased father, and writes her a destructive response—as her father!

<sup>193</sup> Very nostalgic, Lily tells George: "In my day thuh vision uh future battle bride envisioned was her table. Her place settings was thuh place holders for her company. Who would come tuh dine throughout her generations. Seeing the vision of her table was thuh most important thing. Guess it aint like that now. Now you got—technology" (*The America Play and other Works* 142). Parks's late, more "representational" plays, *In the Blood, Fucking A* (compiled in one volume and called *The Red Letter Plays*), trace Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, both protagonists called Hester, both have children and are husbandless), and *Topdog Underdog* (2001 Pulitzer winner), are disturbing in their depiction of characters, who are entrapped within darkly deterministic, below the poverty line existence. Indeed, though alluding to Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, Hester La Negrita in *In the Blood* and Hester Smith in *Fucking A* also "allude to Medea who kills her own children as an act of vengeance against their father, and to mothers in slave narratives—exemplified by Sethe in Tony Morrison's *Beloved*—who kill their children to save them from worse fate" (Verna A. Foster, "Nurturing and Murderous Mothers in Suzan-Lori Parks's *In the Blood* and *Fucking A*." *American Drama* 16.1 (2007): 75-89) p. 75. Parks's *Topdog Underdog*'s deterministic structure stems from Parks's pathological fascination with the Lincoln assassination. Two brothers, Link (for Lincoln) and Booth share a seedy room without running water, the real, tragic shot at the play's close echoes all the way from The Ford Theater via *The America Play* to remind audiences of violence's particular white color.



lingual investigation. Hence, on a deconstructive level, no matter the content, revision within re-written repetitions occurs through “fragments,” traces, only because they carry discontinuous temporalities, a movement that is essential to our understanding of the Foundling Father, the dramaturge of the play, and his differential impulse.

### *Part (C)*

Deconstructing the already performatively deconstructed, I first approach part (C) of the quoted passage in attempts to show the self-reflexive supplemental state of the Foundling Father. Moreover, I aim to show how the differential supplemental traces he produces create an opening for heterogeneity, which, as I argue, poses viable opening of indeterminacy that prohibits any claims to the Foundling Father’s identity. Hence, unlike Elam and Rayner who argue that “. . . the Foundling Father in the first act seeks recovery of an identity through repetition of the Lincoln scene,”<sup>194</sup> I argue that regenerative differential repetition and revision is exactly the point through which the Foundling Father consciously maneuvers away from self-evident, supplemental structures of identity. Radically, self-reflexivity is the turning point of the Foundling Father’s vanishing identity. Though I view the Foundling Father’s conscious loss of identity as the point of his impossible empowerment as difference, Brustein, like most critics, understands the process of the Foundling Father’s diminishing identity differently:

The Foundling Father, already a fallen version of the real Lincoln, dwindles further over the course of the play, present only as a Lincoln bust early in Act II, then a Lincoln penny, then even further reduced to an

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<sup>194</sup>(Harry Elam, Alice Rayner, “Echoes from the Black Whole: An Examination of *The America Play* by Suzan-Lori Parks,” *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater*, Jeffrey D. Mason and J. Ellen Gainor Eds. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1999) p. 181.

intangible face on the TV that reruns the play's first act, now, in a final diminishment, played in silence. So runs down memory. As Lucy and Brazil try to retrieve the past, it dissolves in their hands and before their eyes. This erosion of character has its equivalent in just about every Parks play.<sup>195</sup>

*The America Play's* first act, I argue, shows that dissolution of identity is necessary. Indeed, the Foundling Father rejects his identity as a gravedigger, rejects the idealized identity of the Great Man that he, as a gravedigger, aspired to, and finally rejects the origin of his idealized aspiration, revealing it as a mythologized narrative of a president.

In examining the Foundling Father's performance as difference, observing the cited passage and the post-structural design in our Appendices, we can readily identify the same kind of a treble demarcation of difference and the spatiotemporal perpetuity that propagate it deconstructively. We can, moreover, conceptually and hence textually visualize the ways in which the Foundling Father topographically and strategically superposes simultaneous intervention in the retentive and protentive traces of a dead president, an affected gravedigger, and a mimicking nonself, nonpresence in the elastic absent of "the pure actuality of the now." Furthermore and if possible at all, to gain a status of anthropomorphic difference, the Foundling Father must indicate his signs self-reflexively, calling attention to his impossible, yet, necessary isolation from temporalities of past and future, even as he fissures, *on the page*, a spatial nonterritory within which he rigorously regenerates his signs. Henceforth, the onto-lingual, non-edifice of

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<sup>195</sup> "Remarks on Parks: A Symposium on the Work of Suzan-Lori Parks." *Hunter online Theater Review* 30 April 2004. 24 September 2006 <<http://www.hotreview.org/articles/remarksparks2.htm>>

deconstruction within and through which the Foundling Father functions as difference comes to a head when he utters,

*(Rest)*

A wink to Mr. Lincoln's pasteboard cutout. (*Winks at Lincoln's Pasteboard cutout*)

*(Rest)*

dislocating his presence as the protagonist of the play therein. The Foundling Father in effect ambiguates his position as the protagonist of the play by displacing his temporality (fissuring the space between the proscenium arch and audience through ontic spatiality) with the suggested temporality of his formal status as an actor outside the context of the illusionist presence of the stage. Moreover, the Foundling Father's supplemental and anthropomorphic state as difference continuous its exponential signification when we consider the fact that by pronouncing the stage directions he becomes the dramaturge of the play, privy to the playwright's designs, which is yet an additional contextual temporality to his formal position as an actor. The plethora, "over abundance of the signifier," increases yet again when we consider the fact that the Foundling Father is the protagonist of his own show "out west," narrating a story about his former self, the Lesser Known, even as he impersonates, yet, again someone else altogether. Parks does not end her ambivalent, deconstructive *tour-de-force* here. Like Derrida she seems to look for an ontological *mises-en-abyme*<sup>196</sup> whereby her consciously, self-reflexive, anthropomorphic difference-ial protagonist aptly maneuvers within the multiple, repetitious, supplemental contexts he perpetuates. That is, as he reflexively verbalizes

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<sup>196</sup> As Shain points out, "Mises-en-abyme is a French heraldic term referring to a coat of arms which contains its own image, reduced within itself . . . the reduced image will also contain an image of itself, one has a figure of infinite mirroring. Derrida is constantly on the lookout for the conceptual mises-en-abyme, as they illustrate self-reference, not as a kind of harmony or reintegration, but as a kind of infinite complication" ("Situating Derrida" 395).

the stage directions, he calls the audience's, the one attending *The America Play*, attention to the possibility that temporally speaking he has recourse to their temporality; next, the Foundling Father, as a Lincoln impersonator, is the protagonist in a show he puts on "out west," reenacting the Lincoln assassination and, as we are about to see the Foundling Father has his own audience "out west," who carry a double duty of audience of a play within a play and of characters, who "shoot Mr. Lincoln!"; what is more, the Foundling Father's show is staged in his "replica of The Great Hole of History" within which he creates yet another "replica," The Ford Theater, the fatal space within which Abraham Lincoln is murdered; and finally, the Foundling Father reproduces an illusionary allusion to what is already illusory: the play staged at the night of the murder, *Our American Cousin* within which retentive temporality the Great Man laughs and within which "(Booth shoots. Lincoln "slumps in his chair." Booth jumps)." <sup>197</sup> That the supplemental impetus of *The America Play* can be potentially viewed as a document in metatheatrical (metadramatical) analysis is not surprising. <sup>198</sup> For indeed, the Foundling Father as the dramaturge of the play comments on the medium he creates within the Great Hole of History, which is nothing but an receptacle to an absence, revealed, as it must be, through the juridical concept of theater and the theatricality marking all of its reproductive repetitions. As it were, in the original Great Hole of History, where the Lesser Known and "his Lucy honeymooned," processes of mimesis, underlying the representational impetus of theater, manifest in the dynamic of its repetitious return:

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<sup>197</sup> (TAP 171)

<sup>198</sup> Elinor Fuchs identifies "theatricalist," metadramatic, processes in *The America Play's* re-inscription of "traditional theatricalism," through the play's efforts to "undermine ontological difference between theatrical and the real" ("Clown Shows: Anti-Theatricalism in Four Twentieth-Century Playwrights." *Modern Drama* 44.3 (2001): 337-80) p. 350. That Parks attempts to question the real through a rigorous representational play, it is certain. The question is, of course, if *The America Play* affords an opening to "the real" altogether.

“Cannons wicks were lit and the rockets did blare and the enemy was slain and lay stretched out and smoldering for dead and rose up again to take their bows.”<sup>199</sup> As we are about to see, the *(Rest)s* and *Spells* within which Parks situates her “signifyin” signifiers are none other than ontological openings to what is ontically differential. Hence, as we consider the *again and again* of theater, we must consider Parks’s Rep & Rev and its textual appearance within the spaces she opens *on the page*. Crucially, moreover, we must consider how the Foundling Father becomes the locum from and through which such repetitious, theatrical and, hence, always already self-reflexive regeneration occurs.

As I propose, the hyletic absence within the hole is the spatiotemporal environs within which the Foundling Father as deconstructive differance propagates repetitious traces of history self reflexively, traces which are noticeable through structures of ontic Rep & Rev, inscribed within the spatial pathologies of Parks’s *(Rest)s*. Hence, the *Founding* Father is slain repetitiously *again and again*, in a murder reenacted by an actor, impersonator, in effect, a simulating “faker”— the Foundling Father, whose name, I argue, marks his fluid, changing condition as supplement.<sup>200</sup> Mentioned by Brazil as “My faux-father,” who, gets “Uh medal for fakin” because “Diggin was his livelihood but fakin was his callin,” a phrase revisionally retorted by Lucy as, “faking was your Daddy’s callin but diggin was his livelihood,”<sup>201</sup> the Foundling Father becomes a paradigm of metaphorically hypostatized nonpresence, the faker and hence the actor par-excellence, who, at every turn, performs the self-reflexivity he owes to his state as

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<sup>199</sup> (*TAP* 163)

<sup>200</sup> Most commentators view the term “Foundling” as a form of nominal diminution. I view it as part of the play’s persistent attempt to resist codification of historical norm.

<sup>201</sup> (*TAP* 179, 181, 184, 186).

deconstructive difference.<sup>202</sup> It might come to no surprise that at the outset Parks's consciously-performing, deconstructive protagonist is indebted to Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect, *verfremdungseffekt*, for his consciousness of the medium within which he functions. For as I claim such state of detachment is necessary for the Foundling Father's state as anthropomorphic difference, which demands that he gains a measure of spatiotemporal isolation within the ontic signification he differentiates. Henceforth, in addition to the repetitiously revised and re-contextualized verbalized stage-directions, which, as I argue, lends the Foundling Father a certain detachment from the progressing action of the play, his narrative about his former self, the Lesser Known, is done in the third person: "There was once a man who was told that he bore a strong resemblance to Abraham Lincoln."<sup>203</sup> Talking about himself, while impersonating someone else, even as he pronounces his alliances to the playwright by verbalized stage directions, the Foundling Father's position as difference can be traced to Brechtian attempts to undermine Aristotelian illusionism and help actors avoid "the idea of total transformation":

1. Transposition into third person
2. Transposition into the past
3. Speaking the stage directions out loud<sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> As I interpret the Foundling Father as a fluid nonpresence, let me present views that politicize him. For example, "Steven Winn reminds us, that the Lesser Known's 'fleet little glances at the pasteboard-and-plaster Lincolns are half respectful and half irreverent, signals of the black man's paradoxical importance and invisibility in American history'" ("Instability" 15). Like wise, Elam and Rayner follow by stating that "by 'being' a visibly black performer portraying a white figure, the actor demonstrates the performativity of race itself" ("Echoes" 181).

<sup>203</sup> (TAP 159).

<sup>204</sup> (Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect," *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, Ed. and Trans. John Willet. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) p. 137-8. Here is how Parks explains her usage of verbalizing stage directions: "the action goes in the line of the dialogue instead always in a pissy set of parentheses. *How* the line should be

As the Foundling Father in Hake Frank's words, "transposes into the past," becoming "the narrator of his self-mediated biography,"<sup>205</sup> he deliberates on the viability of his fleeting, impossible presence, even as he manipulates repetitious retentional and protentional traces. Further, even as we contemplate the Foundling Father's prowess as a "faker," that is, his status as one who is self-reflexively aware that he is not what he is, and, thus, closely allied to deconstructive differance, we must also take into account his retentive, past mastery of "diggin."

Hence, as we examine part (C) as underlying our proposition's claim that we view the Foundling Father as inhabiting the interval of differance and as a pathological case in point of its self-reflexive state, let us "temporarily" detour in attempts to understand the Lesser Known's penchant for "digging" as such. Characteristic to Parks and thematically speaking, the Foundling Father's Rep & Rev (ing) in the first act echoes in Lucy and Brazil's discourse in the second act. In fact, echoing the Foundling Father's words from his chiasmus and specifically from part (A) of our quoted passage, "The Lesser Known was a Digger by trade. From a Family of Diggers. Digged graves. He was known in Small Town to Dig his graves quickly and neatly," Lucy tells Brazil, "back East he was always diggin. Was uh natural. Could dig uh hole for uh body that passed like no one else. Digged em quick and they looked good too."<sup>206</sup> The fact that in addition to "diggin" graves the Lesser Known digs a "Big Hole," an exact "replica of the Great Hole of History," reveals "diggin's" unique conceptual designation for Parks. For indeed,

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delivered is contained in the line itself. Stage directions disappear. Dialogue becomes rich and strange" ("Elements of Style" 15-16). Liz Diamond explains, ". . . finding stage directions embedded in the writing that is an enormous part of my task and it's through that process that the actors start to discover the code by discovering that (unlike traditional "psychological" American acting training) there is no code outside of what's on the page" ("Suzan-Lori Parks and Liz Diamond" 70).

<sup>205</sup> ("Instability" 9-10).

<sup>206</sup> (TAP 181)



nothing more than digging a Great Hole in stressing the idea of repetitious, reiterative historical histrionics, can invoke an allusion to persistent processes of philosophical reduction. Moreover, reproductive, supplemental self-reflexive acting, marking the Foundling Father's unique consciousness, can be viewed as contingent upon the perpetual regression, digging, marking his former state as the Lesser Known, who, as the Foundling Father tells us, "had dug over 7 hundred and 23 graves . . . excluding his Big Hole. Excluding the hundreds of shallow holes he later digs the hundreds of shallow holes he'll use to bury his faux-historical knickknacks."<sup>207</sup> Even if the Foundling Father's ontic survival as an anthropomorphic differance depends on the spatiotemporal, reproductive traces he propagates, his former occupations as a digger reveals him as Greek,<sup>208</sup> a reducing philosopher, who follows the tradition of "falling back," "bending back of a return," "*regressus ad infinitum* . . . regression to the beginning," all in an attempt to recover "the presence of the present."<sup>209</sup> To be sure and as I read it, Parks introduces incessant "diggin," thus misspelled to accommodate her Lesser-Known-than-a-white-president, as a pervasive metaphor for processes of phenomenological eidetic reduction, intended to reveal structures of origin. Diggin, moreover, becomes an activity which, as we shall see when we treat parts (A) and (B), corresponds to processes of idealization; therefore, when the Foundling Father Reps & Revs about the Lesser Known's "diggin," "falling back," he engages in narration of retentive, idealizing traces, performing the supplemental state of language therein. And so, if in *The America Play's* first act, **THE LINCOLN ACT**, the Lesser Known's digging is a set in a supplemental binary

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<sup>207</sup> (ibid. 169)

<sup>208</sup> Parks's forth act of her first major play, *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, is titled Greeks [or The Slugs], satirizing a black sergeant and his family and their attenuated assimilation.

<sup>209</sup> (Dissertational draft, passim).

opposition to the Great Mans status as a president, in the second act, **THE HALL OF WONDERS**, “diggin,” according to our playwright, philosopher-queen, Suzan-Lori Parks, becomes an intriguing parable to white, occidental analytical epistemology, structures of which are readily identifiable in Lucy and Brazil’s dispelling, at this point, the so called “black identity.” Lucy does what we all perpetually do: reduce, reveal, and categorize.<sup>210</sup> She tells Brazil, “Cant stop diggin till you dig up somethin. You dig that something up you brush that something off you give that something a designated place” (176); Lucy continues by Rep & Rev (ing) on the inevitable heredity of “diggin,” that is, reducing, “Dig on, Brazil. Cant stop digging till you dig up something. Your Daddy was uh Digger” (174), stressing to Brazil, yet, once more that he will continue his father legacy of reduction, “Youre uh Digger. Youre uh Digger. Your Daddy was uh Digger and so are you” (192). Nonetheless, Brazil’s “Daddy” is also the Foundling Father, who well understood the deconstructive implications of phenomenological reduction and its anticipated failure to excavate originary structures through language, within which spatiotemporal and reproductive differentials are revealed. The Foundling Father chooses to stop “diggin” and instead become a self-reflexive commentator on the impossibilities of revealing, if you will, reducing proto-constitutive structures of phenomenon and principle such as history and identity.

Observing Lucy and Brazil in asking if structures of black metaphysics of identity in *The America Play* are possible, we can readily assert that Lucy’s and Brazil’s occidental regressive reduction fails to support them. Lucy and Brazil, who come to bury the Foundling Father in his Great Hole, a replica of The Great Hole of History, are, in

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<sup>210</sup> We must nod to Foucault here, who identifies activities such as notation, tabulation, and registration as substantiating means of investigation, which no longer targets the specie but which manipulates the individual through the formation of scientific mechanism.

fact, digging for his traces, his, “faux-historical knickknacks,” even as a trace, in the form of gunshot-echo of the Foundling Father’s stage, simulate assassination of a president, “(. . . . *echoes. Loudly. And echoes.*)” Hence, throughout the second act “(*A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes. Rest. A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes. Rest*)” (178), repeatedly, while surrounded by a defining textual space, which Parks accentuates with her semantically spatial *Rests*. In addition to the traces of replicating-Booth-imitators-assassins’ shots, Lucy and Brazil are hard at work in attempting to catch the Foundling Father’s “Whispers.” Echoing gunshots and “Whispers” of the dead are examples of the ways through which Parks hypostatizes deconstructive traces, traces, that is, which can never substantiate the reality they “echo.” And, hence, conceptually present, that is, empirically absent, traces, nonetheless persist through idealization, which, as Derrida proves, is part and parcel of phenomenological reduction. Absence also marks spatiotemporal impossibilities of the return of the trace, whose return, nonetheless, depends upon sustained idealization’s *ad infinitum* return. So, when Lucy circulates with an ear trumpet and in great efforts attempts to listen to the “Whispers” of her dead husband, whose death becomes suspect when Lucy remarks “Heresay says he’s past,” Lucy hopes to revive the kind of defining idealization, informing his actions: of incessant diggin of The Great Hole of History. Listening and digging for “wonders,” Lucy is persistent in telling Brazil to “DIG!” When Brazil finally “unearths something . . . Uh bust,” and identifies it as a “Uh Wonder!,” Lucy reiterates, “Uh Wonder!” and tells him to “Dust it off” and store it “with the rest of the Wonders.” To Lucy’s inquiry as to whose bust is it, Brazil self-reflexively reads the bust’s label first:

Brazil : “‘A. Lincoln.’ A. Lincolns bust. –. Abraham Lincolns bust!!!

Lucy : Howuhboutthat!

(Rest)

(Rest)

Woah! Woah!

Brazil : Whatchaheard?

Lucy : Uh –. Cant say.

Brazil : Whatchaheard?!!

Lucy : SSShhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhht!

(Rest)

*dig!*

(183)

Brazil excavates the Foundling Father’s Lincoln bust to which he blinks and nods in the first and through which blinking and nodding, he makes known his status as a self-reflexive commentator of his former self, the Lesser Known, narrating the story of his former self in performing the differential impulse to the Great Man, through which the Lesser Known gains his nonidentity. Lucy and Brazil continue with the Lesser Known’s perpetual idealization of one of “The Greats,” trace of whose materializes through its “look-alike” bust. Crucially, we cannot ignore the textual theatrics Parks stages *on the page*; for indeed, such textual performance, as we shall continue to see, is a reminder that the semantics putatively substantiating Lucy’s and Brazil’s repeating idealization is absent and that the signification we see *on the page* is represented by nothing more than reproductive signs, which cannot represent their purported signified.

This is why when Lucy and Brazil come to gather the Foundling Father’s **whispers** and are experiencing difficulties, Lucy explains that “Whispers dont always

come up right away . . . . Whispers could travel different out West than they do back East . . . .,” suggesting that in addition to certain utility of space and time traces’ context might complicate the meaning of the signs they ostensibly represent. If we argue that in *The America Play* Whispers are another form of the deconstructive trace, then we might argue that its emergence is always understood within specific contexts. And so as we nod to Wittgenstein here, the underlying argument might be that as the trace’s contextuality changes so does its meaning. Maybe this is why Parks, much in the spirit of Wittgensteinian language games, introduces clichéd idiomatic phrases, in showing that authentic, possibly so called “black,” “Whispers” can become just as insignificant as an empty idealization such as, “So much to live for [and] look on the bright side.” This platitude comes from Lucy while Brazil replies in what we can safely assume is a form of exasperation:

Brazil: Look on thuh bright side. Look on thuh bright side. Look

onnnnn thuhhhh briiiiiiiiiight siiiiiiiiid!!!!

Lucy dismisses Brazil apparent disgust with “white” banality by reminding him of their mission, that is, reduction, which is as rooted in “white” consciousness:

Lucy: DIIIIIIIIIG!

Brazil: Dig.

(178)

And once more, the textual impetus here is unmistakable.

The self-reflexive vim we identify in part (C) can be traced from protagonist to dramatist. For indeed, why else will Parks title scenes of the second act of the play, Big Bang, Echo, Archeology, Echo, Spadework, Echo, The Great Beyond? Not dwelling

here on the implications of suggestive deconstructive “division” of the “primordial”—“Big Bang,” and “delay”—“The Great Beyond,” marking the impulse of difference, we intend rather concentrate on the echoes Lucy and Brazil hear, which, as I argue, mark the repetition of the trace and the idealization that perpetuates it—even as textual repetition underpins the play’s unique consciousness to the supplemental state of metaphysical language. We are, moreover, cognizant of the retentive inevitability of these traces and the protentive expectancy with which they are defined. Subsequently, Parks’s dramatic rubric can be anticipated when under the heading of **B. Echo**, the echoes, the traces are those of *Our American Cousin*, the play performed in the Ford Theater the night of the murder, recreated and restaged by the Foundling Father in his Great Hole of History, traces of which are still echoing indefatigably in the same hole after his “hearsayed” death. In a reflexive, deconstructive mises-en-abyme dynamic, the Foundling Father presents traces from the play in constructing trace-retention invested temporality, which portends to revivification of the Lincoln narrative as a form of idealization. That is, through the Rep & Rev of the Foundling Father’s chiasmus introduced in the first act, we reveal traces of the event of the murder Parks strews in the play, effort which underlies Parks’s fundamental understanding of deconstructive conception of processes of phenomenological idealization. Hence, when under the heading of scene **B. Echo** in the second act of *The America Play*, the hearsayed dead Foundling Father’s announcement, “*Our American Cousin*, Act III, scene 5” (183), the play staged in The Ford Theater on the night of the Lincoln assassination, followed by an actual scene from the play, is echoed in his Great Hole, though we lack a clue as to what the characters are looking for, we might not be completely surprised to learn that

Miss Keen, a character in the play, cannot “find a trace of it” and that Mr. Trenchard, the protagonist of the play, declares, “I cannot survive the downfall of my house but choose instead to end my life with a pistol to my head!” (ibid). If the first act of *The America Play* presents the Foundling Father’s “show out west,” the second act of the play gathers the echoes of the historical traces the Foundling Father propagates and that Lucy and Brazil continue to perpetuate. As Lucy and Brazil circulate, dig, and attentively listen for whispers, intent on giving the Foundling Father “proper burial,” events in The Ford Theater re-materialize; such hypostatization takes place in the hole within which absence, non-original interpreter of originary echoes demonstrated their fundamental phenomenological absence. Nonetheless, their materialization begins with the influence the original Great Hole of History had on the Lesser Known and his idealization of “the greats” he had seen there. To that effect Lucy tells Brazil: “Ssonly natural that heud come out here tuh dig out one of his own. He love that Great Hole so. He’d stand at thuh lip of that Great Hole: ‘OHWAYOHWHYOHWAYOH!’ . . . . He loved that Great Hole so. Came out here. Digged this lookuhlike” (181). In coming back to the same Hole, Lucy and Brazil perform “the ‘again and again [*immer wieder*] the iterative ‘over and over again . . . . as fundamental forms of idealization,’”<sup>211</sup> in continued fascination with the same repeating historical traces. On his part, the Foundling Father recreates a retentive space within which one of the *founding* fathers perpetually loses his life to a bullet shot through a pistol; as we examine part (B), we shall discover that the Foundling Father’s replica of The Great Hole converges with the absent space of The Great Hole of History from which influence the Lesser Known never recovers. For indeed, why else when Lucy and Brazil are listening to the

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<sup>211</sup> (*Origin* 135)



“Whispers” of the “dead” Foundling Father, he, to the applause of *Our American Cousin*, utters *again* the phrase he uttered on his honeymoon, standing on the “Lip” of The Great Hole, as an idealizing young gravedigger, “OHWAYOHWHYOHWAYOH!” and after two consecutive (*Rest*s), “Hellloooooo!”(ibid)? In the second act, the ghost of Foundling Father, once again, returns to his hole; not as the reflexive, ironic impersonator but rather, once more, as an idealizing trace of his former nonself, the Lesser Known. We intend to prove the lack of the Lesser Known’s identity in our examination of part (A). For now, let us continue with part (C) through which examination we hope to show parallel structures of self-reflexivity and repeatability, defining the Foundling Father’s theater and the idealization, which examination, founds it.

Propelling the triple Rep & Rev—of Lucy and Brazil’s temporality (revisiting the Lesser Known’s replica of the Great Hole), of the echoed temporality of the Foundling Father’s, and of the assassination’s repeating temporality within the absent, yet, replicated space of The Ford Theater—under Parks’s scene **D. Echo** in the second act of *The America Play*, the trace of the Foundling Father echoes on his simulated stage of The Ford Theater “out west” *again*: “Ladies and Gentleman: *Our American Cousin*, Act III, scene 2.” In this re-visitation of the play within his own play, the Foundling Father presents the moment of the murder, and a comic dialogue from *Our America Cousin* which paradoxically underlines the inane, banal nature of its content and the fatal moment Booth shoots Lincoln. The indelible, yet, absent trace is dramatically hypostatized when the Foundling Father utters Asa Trenchard’s line, “you

sockdologizing<sup>212</sup> old man-trap” (188), which is, according to Parks, “A very funny line from the play *Our American Cousin*. As the audience roared with laughter, Booth entered Lincoln’s box and shot him dead” (160).<sup>213</sup> In the echoing replica of the Great Hole of History, the dead Foundling Father is heard through hunting, absent, yet, historicizing traces affecting his former self and which relentlessly continue to affect his wife and son. The supplemental and textual avalanche of retentional traces with which the Foundling Father describes the moment of the assassination is unmistakable. What is more, the fact that the Foundling Father manipulates historicizing traces in such textual supplemental avalanche, underscores his understanding of the inevitability of idealization, the necessary repetition of the trace, and finally the revisionary impulse, which underlies the trace’s textual phenomenon in problematizing sustained repetition in his own spatiotemporal presence, which can be putative at best:

Uh Hehm. The Death of Lincoln!:—. The watching of the play, the laughter, the smiles of Lincoln and Mary Todd, the slipping of Booth into the presidential box unseen, the freeing of the slaves, the pulling of the trigger, the bullets piercing above the left ear, the bullets entrance into the great head, the bullet lodging behind the great right eye, the slumping of Lincoln, the leaping onto the stage of Booth, the screaming of Todd, the

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<sup>212</sup> Kubiak explains the expression as “a deliverer of heavy blows, one who gives ideology a public berating, one who wears the sock or buskin” (*Agitated States* 201). Interestingly, Kubiak claims that there’s a connection between the semantic value of the term and Booth’s historical utterance, “Thus to the tyrants.” Nonetheless, I agree with Parks that Booth anticipates the laughter in reaction to a common joke and uses it to conceal the noise of his “derringer.” The *Founding* Father’s laughter repeats throughout the play, in emphasizing Abraham Lincoln’s penchant for “thin jokes.”

<sup>213</sup> Parks’s claim is well documented and is in fact mentioned in Ken Burns’ *The Civil War*. The Lincolns came to see Ms. Laura Kin and as Asa Trenchard utters the lines, “Don’t know the manners of good society, eh? Wal, I guess I know well enough to turn you inside out, old gal—you sockdologizing old man-trap” John Wilkes Booth anticipates the audience’s and the president’s laughter and shoots. (*The Better Angels of Our nature: The Civil War*, Dir. Ken Burns. DVD. PBS, 2004).

screaming of Todd, the screaming of Keene, the leaping onto the stage of Booth; the screaming of Todd, the screaming of Keene, the shouting of Booth “Thus to the tyrants!,” the death of Lincoln!

(189)

Booth’s gunshot is still heard when in scene **F. Echo** of the second act “*A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes*” (194). Nonetheless, when the Foundling Father’s image appears on a television screen, in reenactment of his own Lincoln Act (which is the first act of *The America Play* an effect which once again is an intervening dynamic of Parks’s Brechtian design) and he is gunned down *again*, the assassination’s historical veracity is undermined.<sup>214</sup> Indeed, Parks’s deconstruction of the possible tenability of phenomenal value of historical event is revealed when Lucy and Brazil view “*a replay of ‘The Lincoln Act,’*” wherein the Foundling Father is gunned down again. Here the reductiveness of “the again and again” is being questioned, whereby a phenomenon’s origin is concealed by its own absence and the uninterrupted double absence of the murder’s actual event and the Foundling Father’s actual performance. Therefore, the only opening to the possibility of the trace’s return is invested a revision, a qualified return. Maybe that is why in particularly metaphysical titled scene, **G. The Great Beyond**, Parks’s deconstructive qualification is further elucidated; that is, Lucy

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<sup>214</sup> I disagree therefore with Marc Robinson who argues that “Every time the Foundling Father sits in ‘Lincoln’s Chair’ at ‘Ford’s Theater’ and ‘dies,’ he is doing more than merely returning to a legendary moment. He is also forcing the past back into the present, and thus enabling himself to revise history” (“Four Writers,” *Theater* 24.1 (1993): 31-42) p. 39. The Foundling Father’s intent is not re-present the past, nor is intent is to revise history per se. Rather, the Foundling Father manipulates revision as a means of disquieting the notion that historical truth as such is viable altogether.

and Brazil watch the Foundling Father reenact the murder again and again, not grasping the scope of the ebbing reality his historical reenactment represents. Parks, I argue, shows how idealization of an absent, dead president is buttressed by yet another absence, the Foundling Father's, and how the latter's ability to "fake," that is to supplement, functions as, yet, continues reemergence of the trace as ideal:

Lucy : Howuhboutthat!

Brazil : He's dead but not really.

Lucy : Howuhboutthat!

Brazil : Only fakin. Only fakin. See? Hesupuhgain.

(195)

Lucy's exclamatory expression "echoes" the Foundling Father's in his Lincoln Act, which is, in effect, the first act of *The America Play*; Brazil reassures her that "Hesupuhgain" and in so doing reminds us of Parks's deconstructive design in the play—the play on idealized absences and their spatiotemporal repetitions as they reemerge through conceptual reproductivity of language. Hence, to end our examination of diggin as a trope for the whole undertaking of phenomenological reduction, I suggest that we look at an example of Parks's textual subversion in communicating the deconstructive discontent:

*(A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes)*

LUCY

BRAZIL

THE FOUNDLING FATHER

LUCY

BRAZIL

THE FOUNDLING FATHER

LUCY : That gunplay. Wierdiduhntit.<sup>215</sup> Comes. And goze.

(196)

The textual impetus persists through Parks's silent spaces, which manifest through her conceptual "*Spell*," a metaphor, I argue, for the spatiotemporal state of her figures. In this case, spatiotemporal structures are defined, as they must be, by suggested repetition of stage directions of "*A gunshot echoes*," and Lucy's remark of its return. In a nutshell, the repetition of the trace occurs in an impossible spatiotemporal none-region; yet, in *The America Play*, Parks seems to suggest, echoed idealization will continue to come and go.

It is precisely within spatiotemporal incertitude that the Foundling Father utters his inverted stage directions in a Parksian Rep & Rev structure, whose ontic supplemental inscription of repetition with revision, spatially defined by the conspicuously absent presence of her (*Rest*)s, underpins the reproductive reemergence of metaphysical, as it must be, ideal discourse. It is the metaphysic of the Lesser Knowns idealization that the Foundling Father wishes to reveal. He gains such an impossible ontological detachment from his former self by anthropomorphizing the deconstructive differance, a state of tenable self-reflexivity. As we still dwell on part (C), our examination as to how the Foundling Father establishes himself as a deconstructive, supplementing differential, who, above all, forgoes any conception of self-identity and in so doing, assures an opening of indeterminate heterogeneity, let us delineate his self-reflexive perpetuity with which he gains such diaphanous indeterminacy. Re-inscribing part (C) here,

(*Rest*)

A wink to Mr. Lincoln's pasteboard cutout. (*Winks at Lincoln's Pasteboard cutout*)

(*Rest*)

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<sup>215</sup> I think that I am correct in translating this expression as "Weird isn't it." I follow Parks's own glossary of neologisms: "*iduhnt* /id-ənt/, a variant of *is not* or *isn't*" ("Elements" 17).

we persist with our reading of the Foundling Father as function of metadramatic, theatrical consciousness, which ultimately substantiates a reading of *The America Play* as a drama of deconstructive undecidability. Henceforth, when the Foundling inverts stage directions, addresses an audience within an audience on his stage, uses third person in discussing his idealizing former self, whose self definition is begotten through iconic American ideal, he self-reflexively interrogates his status as a “figure,” character in the play. Realizing that Parks subverts traditional theater and makes theater part of her supplemental play is not surprising; nonetheless, realizing that uncertainty is the interlacing differential, defining her supplemental design is strictly speaking deconstructive.

Deconstructive in its more complicated sense, we might not be surprised that when narrating the story of his former self, the Foundling Father “falls back” onto his nonoriginary original trace, the interjected phrase within his chiasmus, “Goatee. Goatee. What he sported when he died. Its not my favorite.” For indeed Parks’s Rep & Rev here is deconstructively dramatic when the Foundling Father’s intricately transforms Lincoln’s iconic beard to a metaphor for historical stasis, complicating conception of self-evident recognition of the famous beard by subverting it to an hypostatized deconstructive trace; that is, by ambuating its origin, by showing how its repetitious retelling metaphorically underlines infinite reproductivity inherent in signification, by, finally, showing how deferred temporality fissures a spatial, ontic opening for such signification at which bottom ideality, outmost and foremost, resides.

For this reason, when the Foundling Father tells the story of how the Lesser Known, enthralled by the Great Man, acquires beards, looking like those of the dead

president's and are in effect worn by the Foundling Father, the temporal ambiguity is unmistakable. If our current concern is deconstructive heterogeneity, resulting from inherent state of uncertainty, deviation from unified notion of factual historicity begins with *plurality* of Lincoln "fake" beards, which announce the absent presence of their original wearer. In addition, tangible objects such as beards, fake as they maybe, attest to the ease with which any conception of origin can be invariably substantiated with substitution, replica as such. And so, in third person the Foundling Father tells of how he (no longer he) acquired his(not really his) beards: "The beards were his although he himself had not grown them on his face but since he'd secretly bought the hairs from his barber and arranged their beard shapes and since the procurement and the upkeep of his beards took so much work he figured that the beards were completely his. Were as authentic as he was, so to speak" (159-60). Origin, authenticity, "so to speak," is substituted by "upkeep," taken on by the Lesser Known, whose idealization of the Great Man and his ". . . strong resemblance to Abraham Lincoln" (159) propels him to a life as a Lincoln impersonator. Impersonating, "fakin," and, hence, deviating in *The America Play* begins with inauthentic Lincoln beards. As self-reflexive difference, the Foundling Father proactively detaches himself from the Lesser Known not only by telling his story in the third person but by also addressing the audience, on his stage and in the theater directly: "This is my fancy beard. Yellow. Mr. Lincoln's was dark so I don't wear it much. If you deviate too much they won't get their pleasure . . . some inconsistencies are perpetuable because they're good for business" (160). The Foundling Father in fact never lets us forget that his "business" is to inhabit the differential cusp of the theatrical dichotomy of illusion and reality, whence repeating signification marks the impossibility





Woman's accusation is to Rep & Rev the yellow beard motif, which indeed puts into question the viability of re-phenomenalizing the event of the murder altogether:

THE FOUNDLING FATHER (*Rest*): I think I'll wear the yellow one. Variety. Works like tonic.

(*Rest*)

Some inaccuracies are good for business. Take the stovepipe hat!  
Never really worn indoors but people don't like their Lincoln hatless.

(*Rest*)

Mr. Lincoln my apologies. (*Nods to the bust and winks to the cutout*)

(*Rest*)

[Blonde. Not bad if you like a stretch. Hmm. Let us pretend for a moment that our beloved Mr. Lincoln was a blonde. "The sun on his fair hair looked like the sun itself."<sup>217</sup>

The intended spatiotemporality of Parks's "*(Rest)s*," within which traces appear in iterative reemergence, create, I argue, a convincing metaphorical design of fundamental ontological structures, paradoxically marking a deferred temporality. Moreover, the bizarrely subversive deferred temporality is that of a murdered president, whose ontic artifacts, "fake" as it were — yellow beard, stovepipe hat, shoes, bust and a cutout—are nothing more than signifiers, which mark absences, their signified, in form of returning traces. Crucially, regenerative, ontically historicizing metaphoric signifiers are the tools of the Foundling Father's trade, who through differential self-reflexivity re-pronounces the inaccuracies inherent in processes of re-historicizing, that is, re-presencing. He in

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<sup>217</sup> Parks n11 as this quote as "From 'The Sun,' a composition by the Foundling Father, unpublished" (168).

effect satirizes the idealization that forces such attempts in the first place by composing “The Sun,” which description is implausibly absurd. Maybe this is why Parks keeps Reps & Revs, in staging, once and again, an inscription *on the page* of the Foundling Father’s self reflexive intervention:

(*Rest*)

This beard I wear for the holidays. I got shoes to match. Rarely wear them together. It’s a little *much*.

(*Rest*)

(161)

And once again,

(*Rest*)

Sunday. Always slow on Sundays. I’ll get thuh shoes. Youll see. A wink to Mr. Lincolns pasteboard cutout. (*Winks at Lincoln’s cutout*)

(*Rest*)

(162)

Here, the textual play is clear. The deconstructive conception of the textual is essential in understanding that as the Foundling Father addresses the audience here, he dramatically, in this case visually *on the page*, fissures a spatial opening through which temporalities of returning idealities maybe interrogated. That the textual for deconstruction belongs to the conceptual realm may support our argument that the Foundling Father can be understood as anthropomorphic differance.

Thus, when the Foundling Father in an obvious Parksian Rep & Rev conjoins a seemingly ontic trace, a beard, to uncertainty, his ultimate *raison d’être* as differance, the effect is distinctively deconstructive:

I'll wear this one. He sported this style in the early war years. Years of uncertainty. When he didn't know if the war was right when it could be said he didn't always know which side he was on not because he was a stupid man but because it was sometimes not 2 different sides at all but one great side surging toward something beyond either Northern or Southern. A beard of uncertainty. (166)

Ambiguous at best, the Great Man's retentive Civil War temporality is reproduced and invested in a specific "style," commenting on a possibility beyond two possibilities, which is altogether impossible; for indeed, deconstructively speaking the "beyond" of two sides is differentiation, which is absent and which without, no sides as such are viable. Decisively, what makes "uncertainty" function as the locum of differentiability is the Foundling Father's persistent reflexive acknowledgement that the signs with which he manipulates the narrative about the Great Man's "years of uncertainty," are reproduction of yet inexcisable reproducing signifiers. Hence and first of all, the Foundling Father as difference must treat the Lincoln beard for what it is: an idealized American icon. Nevertheless, as difference he must show that idealization is intrinsic to reproductivity of signification, through which regeneration it must exist. To demonstrate the inherent reproductive nature of his signifiers, the Foundling Father substitutes, even as he supplements, the self-evident idealization invested in Lincoln's famous beard as signified with "uncertainty," which is intentionally scare-quoted here, in announcing its interrogatory affect on idealized icon. The primary intent is to open any form of idealization to heterogeneity of possibilities. Thenceforth, deconstructive manifold, the underlying impulse of its adherence to a philosophy of undecidability, marks Parks's

play. For when after the first shooting the Foundling Father addresses us (characters as audience/and attending audience),<sup>218</sup> we are no longer spectators; rather, we are actively implicated in processes of historicizing evolving on the stage, even as we repetitiously view simulacrum array of Booths “Shoot the president!” Parks’s postmodern irony is clear: she represents a historic reenactment, which according to the Foundling Father occurs “By the book,” while undercutting its suggested archival accuracy by repeatedly restaging the event, revising its account each time, and inviting us to partake in its revision. In fact, the Foundling Father talks to us about *The America Play*’s first shooter: “The ones who choose the Derringer are the ones for History. As it Used to Be. Never wavers. No frills. By the book. Nothing excessive.

*(Rest)*

A nod to Mr. Lincoln’s bust. *(Nods to Lincoln’s bust)*

*(Rest)*

(167)

By addressing us and by telling us that he is nodding “to Mr. Lincoln’s bust,” the Foundling Father allows for a conceptual opening through which the preservation of the event’s temporal purity, presence as such is questioned. As I have stressed, I see part (C) and its persistent emergence as Parks’s commentary on her own medium. As difference then, the Foundling Father’s self-reflexivity becomes a trace through which playwright and protagonist both, *again and again*, comment on the impossible temporality of theater and the fact that its temporal impossibility is mediated only by the spatial opening of the inscription of its dramatic texts.

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<sup>218</sup> Parks implication of spectators is more prominent in her play *Venus*. Hence, Greg Miller is correct in stating that drawing audiences as accomplices “posits an additional subject beyond Baartman, and this subject is that of the spectator in all its guises” (“The Bottom of Desire in Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Venus*.” *Modern Drama* 45.1 (2002): 125-37) p. 128.

As we still reference part (C), let us contemplate on the textual value of the Foundling Father's singular line as ontic spatiality. As a former gravedigger, the Foundling Father well understands measurements of space. He repetitiously tells us in fact that "What interested the Lesser Known most about the Great Mans murder was the 20 feet which separated the presidents box from the stage" (167). By regenerating signs textually *on the page*, the Foundling Father also indicates his manipulation of the theatrical spatial divide when, while verbalizing his stage directions throughout *The America Play's* first act, he winks, nods to Lincoln's pasteboard cutout and to Lincoln's bust parenthetically; in this way, he creates a topographical distance within which he is able to assert his positions as a performer, a "faker." We soon discover that performances in the play are not restricted to our differentiating impersonator alone, rather, it is a family business: "Lucy kept secrets for the dead. And they figured what with his digging and her Confidence work they could build a mourning business. The son would be a weeper" (162). "Mourning business" here underscores the exponential force of theater in *The America Play* through which latent deconstructive traces are hypostatized in a form of authentic, possibly black, practices of "mourning," which are, in effect, just another version of "fakin." We here follow Parks in "signifying on the signifier" of African American fluid vernacular and manipulate "fakin" as an ethnic-group-specific term, suggesting that when in *The America Play* theatrical mimesis is self-reflexive, it does problematize a forms of "fakin." Brazil continues the narrative of how he was introduced to performances of mourning: ". . . the Father showed the Son 'the Weep' 'the Sob' and 'the Moan.' How to stand just so what to do with the hands and feet (to capitalize on what we in the business call 'the Mourning Moment') Formal stances

the Fatherd picked up at the History Hole” (182). The History Hole is the receptacle within which definitions of historicizing and historicized absences may occur. Lucy as a “whatcha call uh Confidence” (179), then, is a performer whose performance is defined by yet another historically known and absent performer. In other words, if as Confidence Lucy listens to the last words of the dying, in *The America Play*, no other last words of the dead are more prominent than those of John Wilkes Booth’s, an actor from a *well-known* family of actors. As an array of Booth imitators “Shoot the President!,” they methodically utter Booth’s “purportedly” last words. As absent traces, Booth’s last words, materialize dramatically every time “(Booth shoots. Lincoln ‘slumps in his chair.’ Booth jumps)” and one of the consecutive shooters says, “(Theatrically): ‘Thus to the tyrants!’”<sup>219</sup> However, when Parks masterfully parallels Booth’s historically familiar utterances to those of a “Con-fidence” woman, any conceptual materialization of historicized traces is soon sapped out of its status as codified history. Parks, in effect, parodies, even as she undermines, the significance attributed to Booth’s last words by bringing Bram Price’s last words: “Lifts.” Now, Bram Price Senior was Lucy’s first client whose word, “‘Lifts’ [really meant that] He wore lifts in his shoes [and hence] he was not the man he claimed to be” (176). In *The America Play*, no one is who they are claiming to be. The only one who perpetually dramatizes such intersubjective absence though is the Foundling Father. As he nods and blinks to simulating traces of the absent Great Man, he consciously supplements as he regenerates supplemented signs, traces, which perform economies of differentiation and idealization.

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<sup>219</sup> Parks’s n8: “Or ‘Sic Semper tyrannis.’ Purportedly, Booth’s words after he slew Lincoln and leapt from the presidential box to the state of Ford’s Theatre in Washington, D. C. on 14 April 1865, not only killing the President but also interrupting a performance of *Our American Cousin*, starring Miss Laura Keane” (165).

### *Part (A)*

In referencing part (A) of our passage, we aim to show how its overtly, seemingly playful, differential play calls attention to a juridical spatiotemporal definition in conjointly permitting and problematizing processes of idealization. We intend to show how difference is contributing to the constitution of its own impossible status of importunate, persistent repetition. We mean to suggest that as anthropomorphic difference, the Foundling Father manipulates repeating traces, always already spatiotemporal as they must be, in showing the impossibility of their complete and hence idealized presences. The Foundling Father as difference inhabits the nexus from which reproductive signifiers, through structures of Parksian Rep & Rev, represent possible differential trace fragments of history and identity therein. Moreover, we realize by now that these so called “trace fragments” are metaphysical, for indeed we here dwell on the conceptual realm; nonetheless, we must determine if Parks’s traces are presented as conceptual whole, and are therefore idealities, while at the same time, we must discern if, as I argue, Parks’s traces are perpetual deconstructive depositories, which interrogate the idealities they propagate.

First off let us, on the one hand, identify the spatial ambit within which the Foundling Father as difference operates, while on the other, let us reveal the temporal absence through which such spatial opening becomes viable; crucially, we must remember that this is the opening through which all traces hypostatize as metaphysical signification. Hence, metaphysic, conceptual absences as such are propelled through the conspicuous temporal absence underlying history in *The America Play*, *The Great Hole of History*.

Although most critics trace Parks's Great Hole to Beckettian barren settings, none connect it to deconstructive spatiotemporal absence. Whereas I argue that Parks's Great Hole is a deconstructively defining absence, Una Chaduri views it as "a postapocalyptic no-place, a Beckettian void where meaning stubbornly refuses to arrive or rise," while, at the same time, ascribing it significant meaning when she identifies it as "the great hole of racism."<sup>220</sup> David Richards follows suit by contending that Parks's Great Hole is a "Beckettian wasteland par excellence. But also represents the absence of black history in a society that has long defined itself by the exploits of a few select white men."<sup>221</sup> Similarly, assigning The Great Hole the trauma of "the disintitiled," Joseph Roach argues that "The Great Hole of History and its replicas . . . . dominate the scene of *The America Play* . . . . it is the place where deep silences can either follow significant revelations or create the emotional space into which revelations can enter." Those silences, Roach argues, are fashioned on Beckett's paradigmatic silences in *Godot* whereby, "Silences follow catastrophes that occur to the disintitiled."<sup>222</sup> All of her figures being black, arguing that Parks's "silences" within The Great Hole of History discount black historicity and its supplemental metaphysic might be problematic.<sup>223</sup> Nonetheless, I believe that interpreting *The America Play* as revealing intent to "rewrite history"<sup>224</sup> and by so doing rekindled black metaphysics is just as problematic. Elam and Rayner in fact

<sup>220</sup> (*Staging Place* 263, 265).

<sup>221</sup> Name of article, date New York Times p. 86

<sup>222</sup> ("The Great Hole of History: Liturgical Silence in Beckett, Osofisan, and Parks." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.1 (2001): 307-17) p. 307-8. In his interview with Parks and Diamond, Drukman also says that he views Liz Diamond staging as "somehow, *Godot*-like . . . . [also reminding him] of the mound in *Happy Days*, sort of the inverse of it" ("Parks Diamond" 72).

<sup>223</sup> Mary F. Brewer goes as far as identifying Parks's play as "intervening in the process by which history is created" (*Staging Whiteness*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005) p. 167

<sup>224</sup> ("Echoes" 181).



claim that the theatricality of Parks's representation of the assassination "points to Parks's commitment to right and rewrite history."<sup>225</sup> If theatricality as such is meant self-reflexivity, then Parks is, indeed, intent on rewriting history. In an interview she asks, "Where is history? I take issue with history because it doesn't serve me—it doesn't serve me because there isn't enough of it. In this play I am simply asking, 'Where is history?', because I don't see it. I don't see any history out there, so I've made some up."<sup>226</sup> Making "some up," is a form of performance, a reflexive mimesis that is self-differentiating; in fact, the stress on reflexivity is crucial here because, as I persistently argue, in *The America Play* Parks reject the acceptance of metaphysics—black or white. Rather, she effects a deconstructive, self-mimetic differential, the Foundling Father, our anthropomorphic differance, who will textually perform for us the double absence of the Hole within the Whole of which traces, as "neither hyle nor object [but] language in its possibility, language as a fundamental ontological structure,"<sup>227</sup> Rep & Rev (v.) in distinctive Parksian poetics.

We discuss holes, we discuss absences; we discuss absences, we discuss temporal deferral and the idealities that seemingly complete it—*always already* through signs, *always already* through absent traces. The upshot is that when the Foundling Father tells us about The Great Hole of History and the affect it had on the Lesser Known, he is discussing the pervasive phenomenal absence of historical events. What is more, as anthropomorphic differance, the Foundling Father performs the fundamental, yet, paradoxically, differentiating absences of the signs he promulgates by self-reflexively repeating and revising them textually. Hence, discussing the Hole, Bernard Louis

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<sup>225</sup> (ibid.)

<sup>226</sup> ("Alien Nation" 26).

<sup>227</sup> ("Seam" 75).

observes that Parks “excavates the great hole of history and thus produces an ‘archaeology of knowledge’ wherein the gaps and fissures that rupture the dominant record are parodied and laid bare . . . . Parks ‘writes over’ the palimpsest of Western thought and discipline.”<sup>228</sup> Rather than functioning a-deconstructively by “writing over,” I argue, the Foundling Father deconstructs the palimpsest of Western metaphysics by showing the absent idealities which define them.

In *The America Play* the absent locum of all idealities is indeed The Great Hole of History. For now, we choose to concentrate on the “original” Great Hole, “back East,” and its lasting affect on the Lesser Known, well realizing that its origin is regenerated replica of re-signified absent traces.<sup>229</sup> Deconstructively, then, absent traces indicate and are being indicated by the spatiotemporal state of a concept, which, may be understood through Heidegger’s ontological/ontic differential—for Derrida, the liminal differential which within traces spatially fracture the temporal totality of their concepts. Thus, rather than viewing the Great Hole as restricted to an absence that is substantiated by the lack of black history, I see it as a mold, affecting hyletic absence, which indicates, just like the Idea in the Kantian sense, its traces as supplementing idealities. And so although absent, ideal historical traces, specifically those of the Great Mans, “give shape” to the life of the Lesser Known, which he “could never shake.” Thus, *falling back* on his own chiasmus utterance, “He digged the hole and the whole held him” (159), the Foundling Father tells us how absent idealities influenced the Lesser Known within the Hole, which continued to “hold” him “whol”ly. Fluid anthropomorphic differance, the Foundling Father promulgates his narrative about the Lesser Known with the performing lingual

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<sup>228</sup> (“Musicality” 687)

<sup>229</sup> Katy Ryan note, “This simulacrum has been variously interpreted as the absence of African-American history, a theme park, and a hole in Lincoln’s head” (“No Less Human” 83).

differentials he introduces in part (A) of our passage. Hence, setting the Great Mans “log cabin” in binary opposition, the Foundling Father tells us that unlike the

Great Mans log cabin . . . . The Lesser Known had a favorite hole. When he and his Lucy were newly wedded and looking for some postnuptial excitement: A Big Hole. A theme park. With historical parades. The size of the hole itself was enough to impress any Digger but it was the Historicity of the place the order and beauty of the pageants which marched by them the Greats on parade in front of them . . . . The Hole and its Historicity and the part he played in it all gave a shape to the life and posterity of the Lesser Known he could never shake. (162)

The Great Hole of History is an accumulation of temporal deferrals, absent, yet, indicating traces, which propel absent historical idealities that assure their return deconstructively. Therefore, in analyzing processes through which supplemental idealization defines the Lesser Known’s identity, we must follow the Foundling Father’s lead in investigating the historicizing effect of The Great Hole, the “original back east” and the replica “out west” both. First off, when the Foundling Father tells us of the idealities— “the historicity” “the Greats on parade,” “pageants”—he emphasizes the fact that the “original” Hole was substantiated by replicating, regenerated absences and is, therefore, itself a replica. So, when the Foundling Father narrates the story of the Lesser Known and his fascination with The Great Hole of History, he shows us, as difference, the absent, yet, influencing environs from which the Lesser Known’s idealization of Lincolnesque historicity grew. The Lesser Known’s intense idealization of the Great Hole pervades the play; so much so that, as Lucy tells Brazil, “Ssonly natural that heud

come out here tuh dig out one of his own. He loved that Great Hole so. He'd stand at thuh lip of that Great Hole: 'OHWAYOHWHYOHWAYOH!' . . . . He loved that Great Hole so. Came out here. Diggged this lookuhlike" (181). What is more, the Lesser Known's "lookuhlike," "replica of The Great Hole of History," is a reproductive absence—of conceptual history and of ontic historicity, both underlying processes of idealization. Reproduction of absences, Parks persistently shows us through her Rep & Rev, are staged through textual repetition so as to attest to the reproductive nature of signs; such reproductive energy, moreover, underlies deconstructive spatiotemporal traces, which supplement absent idealities. Further, when he repeats his narrative about the Lesser Known's indelible visit to The Great Hole of History, using "echoes," of retentive temporality, the Foundling Father divulges the absent, idealized traces comprising the Lesser Knowns nonself:

"Traveling home again from the honeymoon at the Big Hole . . . . the Reconstituted Historicities he has witnessed continue to march before him in his minds eye as they had at the Hole . . . . On the way home again the histories paraded again on past him although it wasnt on past him at all it wasnt something he could expect but again like Lincolns' life not 'on past' but *past. Behind him.* Like an echo in his head." (163)

The "echoes," as idealized traces in the Lesser Known's head never pass him, they are never restrictively observed as in "the past," rather they become potent Husserlian protentive traces, which "continue to march before him" and which indeed "give shape" to his life. Parks's Rep & Rev here is a textual affirmation of performing historicist traces molding the Lesser Known's perception.

Anthropomorphic difference, assuring idealities' return, even as he interrogates them, the Foundling Father dispossesses his own identity as a way of showing its conceptual nature; at the same time, the Foundling father performs the inherently absent state of identity as a form of presence. In so doing, the Foundling Father deconstructively, that is, self-reflexively, questions the viability of identity. As he "fakes" someone else's identity, the Foundling Father, as difference, traces the ways in which the Great Man's idealization affects the Lesser Known, manipulating the process paradigmatically, as a way of showing how historicity as idealization dislocates identity. Henceforth, we intend to treat the Great Hole as a vacuity of historical and historicizing deferred, repeating absences; in addition, we plan to show how differential, repetitious traces become a primordial "nonpresence," that is, the Lesser Known's other, in qualifying any opening for phenomenological reduction of identity and its constitutive origin. Here, we are of course very much involved in Parks's deconstruction of origin. Thus, through a juridical absence, the history of The Great Hole and absent identity of a gravedigger, I shall attempt to show how Parks interrogates metaphysical concepts such as history and identity, revealing them as supplemented idealities. Parks's collaborator in the first act is the Foundling Father, who, to obtain his position as difference, disavows his identity as a gravedigger, while "faking," performing the identity of a president, in both cases problematizing the idea of the tenable state of identity. Therefore, I agree with Robert Baker-White who argues that in *The America Play*, "American identity (racial or otherwise)—the grounding of personal and national purpose in a solid idea of self and community—is agonizingly absent."<sup>230</sup> However, as far as *The America Play* is concerned, the question is not that of agony over a loss of identity; rather, the question

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<sup>230</sup> ("Questioning the Grounds" 83).

seems to be of the need to deconstruct the viability of identity. Malkin follows Baker-White by observing that the play conveys, “a grievous sense of rupture from a grounded past . . . and postmodern dramaturgy that summons the past(s) and seeks identity, through an appeal to memory and its erasure.”<sup>231</sup> Elam and Rayner also follow by stating that “In his search, the Foundling Father seeks an identify, a meaning and an understanding of his significance within the (w)hole of American history.”<sup>232</sup> On the other hand, Drukman’s view is somewhat of a departure when he contends that Parks’s figures tell these stories to speak their way into history “In the telling, identities (including but not limited to racial) are performed, reinhabited, reimprinted . . . but never for the first time”<sup>233</sup> Kerstin Schmidt also examines the significance of repetition in the play, seeing it as a theater of transformation. Schmidt is closer to deconstructive understanding when she argues that in *The America Play*, “the process of the constitution of self and identity is consequently turned into a playful exercise in transformation. And since transformation delineates a movement of continually designing, decomposing, and redesigning representations of the alleged self, postmodern drama no longer presents unmistakably identifiable characters”<sup>234</sup>

As concerning our proposition, we are following Parks’s “playfulness” in undermining openings for substantive structures of identity. Nevertheless, as we attempt to deconstruct the Idea of identity, revealing its constitutive elements as ideal, we must call attention to the fact that we are involved in processes of self-censored idealization—that is, deconstruction. In marking our investigation as ideal, we indeed follow Parks,

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<sup>231</sup> (*Memory Theater* 155).

<sup>232</sup> (“Echoes” 180).

<sup>233</sup> (“Suzan-Lori Parks” 57).

<sup>234</sup> (*The Theater of Transformation: Postmodernism in American Drama*. Amsterdam: Rodopi 2005) p. 49.

who, as I argue, does away with accepting idealization as self-evident while, at the same time, confirming that such idealization is inescapable. We can readily discern such degree of inescapability in the Foundling Father's declaration that "Everyone who has ever walked the earth has a shape around which their entire lives and their posterity shapes itself" (162). To be sure, contextual embeddedness here marks the impossibility of authentic structures of identity. What is more, according to the Foundling Father and as it concerns the Lesser Known, such contextuality effectuates ideality through protentive traces in the form of projected, anticipated temporality; we follow Derrida in asserting that such anticipated temporality partakes in constituting subjective identity in the form of protentive constituents, which are differentiated by identity's retentive constituents in revealing subjective identity as constitutively differentiated through temporalities other than its "presence." The Foundling Father *as* the Derridian difference, although already a supplement, for he cannot be identified outside the reproductive signs he regenerates, narrates as he self-reflexively performs the temporal impossibility of Lesser Known as a "subject." Reading the following lines, the deconstructive ethos is unmistakable: "the subject and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of *differance* . . . . [and] is not present, nor above all present to itself before *differance*."<sup>235</sup> When, as an anthropomorphic metaphor for a temporal differentiating locum, the Foundling Father makes the point about differentiated, temporally constitutive, subjectivity, the temporal absence of the Lesser Known's nonpresence is unmistakable; moreover, the idealized supplementation with which such deconstructive absence is substantiated is sufficiently apparent:

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<sup>235</sup> (*Positions* 9).

The Lesser Known living his lifelong after all this had happened . . . .  
knew only that he was a dead ringer in a family of Diggers and that he  
wanted to grow and have others think of him and remove their hats and  
touch their hearts and look up into the heavens and say something about  
the freeing of the slaves. That is, he wanted to make a great impression as  
he understood Mr. Lincoln to have made. (166)

Here, the Foundling Father explicates on processes of idealization as manifesting through differentiated historicity, that is, historically and temporally defined “traced” (of the trace) subjectivity, whereby a past that no longer exists is overtaken by a future.<sup>236</sup> Specifically, the Lesser Known lives “long after” the Great Man; yet, the Great Man’s memorialized past, although no longer in existence, manifests through the Lesser Known’s idealization of the Great Man’s legacy—defining idealization, which overtakes the Lesser Known’s future and always already substantiates his past. Thus, the Lesser Known’s temporality is marked by differentiated, idealized (other-than-his-own), retentive and protentive traces, which reveal his identity as absent, supplemented idealization—an anticipated, defining manifestation within which he might be perceived as slave emancipator.

Crucially, when we reference idealizing traces as historicist, we mean, indeed, to say that the Lesser Known’s temporality is defined by differentiating, supplementing signs of retentive and protentive traces. Here, however, rather than following Husserl’s understanding of historicity,<sup>237</sup> we choose to apply Heidegger’s, who complicates it.

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<sup>236</sup> We must note to Beckett, who well understood dynamics of projected temporality. In *Endgame*, Clov asks Hamm if he “believed in the life to come?” to which Hamm answers: “Mine was always that” (1934).

<sup>237</sup> Husserl’s is a transcendental subject, having constitutive mastery over the meaning of the history and historicity [s]he affects. Yet, as Derrida argues, one must assume “historical teleology” in any analysis of



Heideggerian ontological sensibilities seem to underscore Parks's treatment of the Lesser Known's historicist temporality. I maintain, in fact, that Parks follows Heidegger by demarcating the Lesser Known's identity as historicist, whereby Heideggerian historicism means that Dasein, the subject, "being of the there" and hence always culturally contextualized, is temporally defined by a past, which, in effect, materializes in its future and is defined by it. Says Heidegger: "Dasein 'is' its past in the way of *its* own Being, which, to put it roughly, 'historicizes' out of its future on each occasion . . . . Its own past—and this always means the past of its 'generations' is not something which *follows along after* [Heidegger's emphasis] Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it."<sup>238</sup> Heideggerian historicity of the subject is marked by a dialectic of temporal fluctuation and historically determining past, defining the ways "Dasein has grown up both **i n t o** and **i n a** traditional way of interpreting itself."<sup>239</sup> Relating Heideggerian historicity of the subject to the Foundling Father's narrative about the Lesser Known, we can evince, on the one hand, the temporal succession of future defining the past, while on the other, the ways in which the same self past as supplemental idealization become the constitutive element through which the Lesser Known gains his nonidentity.

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historicity. In *Positions* Derrida remarks: "Of course, the critique of historicism in all its forms seems to me indispensable. What I first learned about this critique in Husserl . . . seems valid to me in its historical teleology of truth. On this last question the issue is to be reopened. The issue would be: can one criticize historicism in the name of something other than truth or science" (58n32). Deconstructively speaking, one must always assume a "truth," a meaning; nevertheless, one must be persistently mindful of problematic undercurrents constructing so called "truths" as such.

<sup>238</sup> (*Being and Time* 41).

<sup>239</sup> (*ibid.*) It might be necessary to clarify here that if we are to relate tradition in the Heideggerian sense to idealization the way we have been reading it, it might be through what he claims to be tradition's "mastery" in "taking what has come down to us and deliver it over to self-evidence" (43). That is, we must make clear that tradition for Heidegger means the baseless assumptions that come down to us and that we mindlessly enact. Necessarily, I relate this kind of indiscriminate practices to processes of idealization in general and, in our case, to the Lesser Known in particular.

In *The America Play*, the theme of identity as nonpresence, as temporally deferred absence, affected through idealization, is as omnipresent as the reproductive, differential signifiers that perpetuate it. Henceforth, differentiating the temporalities of Derrida's retentive and protentive traces, in addition to utilizing Heidegger's decisive temporal picture, the Foundling Father manipulates the Lesser Known's conception of his own temporality, past and future, in showing how idealization of the past becomes a defining future. Through double self-reflexive verve, telling of his former self and of his former self's attainment of self-reflexivity, the Foundling Father reveals the temporal, absent structure underlying the Lesser Known's Heideggerian historicity: "Much much later the Lesser Known had made a name for himself he began to record his own movements. He hoped he'd be of interest to **posterity**. As in the Great Mans **footsteps**" (162). In a thematically significant Parksian Rep & Rev, the Foundling Father differentiates "posterity" as defining a future element and "footsteps" as defining a past element. I read "posterity" and "footsteps" as part of the retentive and protentive temporal machinations of the trace's "primordial division and delay," whereby the trace "retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element."<sup>240</sup> Such temporal trace machinations become essential in understanding the Lesser Known's fragmented agency. Furthermore, the constituted state of the Lesser Known's identity is evident when in addition to trace differentiated temporalities, which achieve their perpetuity through returning idealities, we factor, as we must, the idea of deconstructive ontic, spatial sign supplement—in *The America Play*, traces of the life and particularly the death of idealized president. Spatiotemporal traces distinctively mark the following Rep & Rev, wherein the Foundling Father locates the Lesser Known's

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<sup>240</sup> ("Différance" 142)

historicizing and historicized binary of footstep/posterity within the differential structure, indicating his narration in part (A) of our cited passage. At the outset, when the Foundling Father connects elements of “time” and “space” to the Lesser Known’s idealized and historicized state, the suggestiveness of the trace’s spatiotemporal structures seem perceptible:

The passage of time. The crossing of space. [The **Lesser Known** recorded his every movement.] He’d hoped he’d be of interest in his **posterity**. [Once again riding in the **Great Mans footsteps**.] A nod to the presidents bust. (*Nods*)

(*Rest*)

(*Rest*)

The **Great Man** lived in the past that is was inhabitant of time immemorial and the **Lesser Known** out West alive a resident of the present. And the **Great Man’s** deeds had transpired during the life of the **Great Man** somewhere in past-land that is somewhere “back there” and all this while the **Lesser Known** digging his holes bearing the burden of his resemblance all the while trying somehow to catch to equal the **Great Man** in stature, word and deed going forward with his lesser life trying somehow to follow in the **Great Mans footsteps footsteps** that were of course behind him....

(*Rest*)

A wink to Mr. Lincolns pasteboard cutout. A nod to Mr. Lincolns bust.

(*Rest. Time passes. Rest*)

When someone remarked that he played Lincoln so well that he ought

to be shot it was as if the **Great Mans footsteps** had been suddenly revealed.<sup>241</sup>

To emphasize his state as differance and the fact that he is dealing with differentiating and differentiated deferred temporalities, the Foundling Father mentions metaphysically and ontologically fecund signifiers such as time and space. Further, to attest to the

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<sup>241</sup> (170-1). So as to accentuate the persistence with which Parks consciously “constructs” a deconstructive textual design, I once and again present her repeating expressions and the (*Rest*)s defining them, which help, of course, to deconstruct the concepts they represent. When passages are particularly lengthy, I choose to alter the size of font and spacing. Again, I bold-face repeating motifs in attempts to emphasize Parks’s Rep & Rev.

inherent supplemental state which such metaphysical terms carry, Suzan-Lori Parks reflexively and therefore textually performs repeating words, phrases, passages, which comment on her suspicion of such supplemental, unchecked conceptual fecundity. Moreover, such supplemental progression is complicated by the idea of the reproductive, morphemic ideality Husserl identifies language as carrying and which Derrida renames as “protowriting.” Henceforth, I relate idealities of concepts and the ideality invested in infinitely anticipated reproductive repetition of signs to the textual repetition apparent in Parks’s dramatic text. More to the point, I maintain that the Foundling Father, as difference, is cognizant of idealities defining his former self as the Lesser Known and of the deconstructive processes through which such idealization displaces the Lesser Known’s identity; as to the question of the reproductive ideality invested in language, the Foundling Father’s overt performance of differentiating signifiers seem to suggest a promise of infinite repetition.

As we examine the Foundling Father’s lines, we address the question of identities and their definition through processes of idealization. Furthermore, we adhere to Derrida’s onto-lingual scheme and its distinctive denotations of Husserlian intersubjective temporality and Heideggerian historicist narrative. In so doing, we must follow Derrida in relating the trace to structures of repetitious idealization characteristic to it. In fact, repetition, as in Parksian Rep & Rev, tenaciously forces examination of idealization as fundamentally spatiotemporal and, for our purposes, as textual and thus as ontic simulation of the supplement *as writing on the page*. For this reason, the Foundling Father repeats even as he ambiguates the seemingly discrete temporal footsteps/posterity

design underlying the Lesser Known's historicized, always- already- other- than- his, identity:

**Little ringing in the ears. Slight deafness.**

*(Rest)*

Little ringing in the ears.

*Rest)*

**A wink to the Great Mans cutout. A nod to the Great Mans bust. (Winks and nods)**

Once again striding in the **Great Mans footsteps**. Riding on in. Riding to the rescue the way they do. They both had such long legs. Such big feet. And the **Greater Man** had such a lead although of course somehow still "**back there**." If the **Lesser Known** had slowed down stopped moving completely gone in reverse died maybe the **Greater Man** could have caught up. Woulda had a chance, Woulda sneaked up behind the **Lesser Known** unbeknownst and wrestled him to the ground. Stabbed him in the back. In revenge. "**Thus to the tyrants!**" Shot him maybe. The **Lesser Known** forgets who he is and just crumples. His bones cannot be found. The **Greater Man** continues on.

*(Rest)*

**"Emergency, oh Emergency, please put the Great Man in the ground."**

*(Rest)*

Only a **little ringing in the ears**. That's all. **Slight deafness**.

*(Rest)*

**Huh. Whatdoyou say I wear the blonde.**

*(Rest)*

*(A gunshot echoes. Softly. And echoes)<sup>242</sup>*

Looking at both passages, the spatiotemporal perpetuity of traces is instantly recognizable. We first must call attention to the copious usage of Parksian *(Rest)s*, impossible spatial structures, which denote unempirical "passage of time . . . crossing of space." For indeed, it is within such absence that traces hypostatize through what they no longer are, that is, retentive and protentive temporalities. Here, past and future elements are not limited to the definition of the trace's temporal nature; they are, in effect, temporally absent and hence temporally defining the impetus underlying the repetitious

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<sup>242</sup> (172-73)

movement of idealization, which overtakes the subject, defining its already absent identity *as* supplementing trace-signification. As “echoes,” traces of gun-shots simulacra of the fatal shooting still ring in the Foundling Father’s ears—the “little ringing in the ear” never diminishes—he self-reflexively nods and winks “to the presidents bust and to the Great Mans pasteboard cutout,” verbalizing his stage directions so as to territorialize a differential, impossible space. In *The America Play*, the idea of impossible space, that is, the deconstructive topos, maybe traced to a movement of replication rather than a source of origination, a movement which underlies the structure that permeates the play. Therefore, every time someone “shoots the president!” in the Foundling Father’s show out west using blank (replicating) bullets, simulated gun-shots echo repeatedly. It is within such supplemented repetition that signifiers, presented as unconventional, unparenthesized stage directions, are manipulated by the Foundling Father as self-reflexive deconstructive devices with which he announces his state as difference and calls attention to the reproductive nature of Lincolnesque signified idealities he differentiates. It is, moreover, within such regenerative atmosphere that the Foundling Father narrates the story of the ways through which the Lesser Known’s identity is displaced, substituted, and supplemented with that of an idealized president. Any structure of idealization begins with temporality and the spatial opening of its traces through ontic signification. Idealized past in *The America Play* is invested in one signifier: “footsteps.” Paradoxically and as the Foundling Father intends it to be, “footsteps” are all but tangible historical factuality. Therefore, when the Foundling Father tells us that the Lesser Known is, “*once again* [my emphasis] riding in the Great Mans footsteps,” we might restrictedly surmise that his repeated ride, the *again and again*, traces a changing

historical economy, which, at every turn, is projected onto the future, that is, the “hope  
 hed be of interest to his posterity,” in defining and shaping the Lesser Known historicity.  
 What is fascinating about Parks’s manipulation of historicist structures is her profound  
 understanding of the interchangeable, shifting values of past and future, as she questions  
 the legacy of Lincoln’s historic grip on the nation’s “time immemorial . . . somewhere in  
 past-land”; in so doing, Parks agitates calcified, unquestioned conceptualization of  
 idealized president. In her examination of temporality, Parks manipulates conception of  
 Heideggerian historicity as necessarily dialectically temporal and hence malleable. Such  
 malleability, I contain, disallows an argument that in *The America Play*, “Parks enters the  
 skin of American history through a black door—and tries to revision it, to remake  
 “history.”<sup>243</sup> There is no evidence of “remaking history,” or “dream [ing] of solutions  
 [and] healing cures”<sup>244</sup> in the play; rather, Parks partakes in deconstructive processes in  
 showing history as ontology that never stops and, therefore, cannot be remade in any  
 controllable, definitive fashion.<sup>245</sup> Her consciousness to Heideggerian historicist  
 ontology, for Heidegger always already structurally temporal, is blatantly apparent in  
 BLACK MAN WITH WATERMELON’s “signifyin lingo” from Parks’s *The Last Dead  
 Black Man in the Whole Entire World*:

There is uh Now and there is uh Then. Ssall there is. (I bein in uh Now:  
 uh Now bein in uh Then: I bein, in Now in Then, in I will be. I was be too  
 but thats uh Then thats past. That me that was-be in uh me-has-been.  
 Thuh Then that was-be is uh has-been-Then too. Thus me-has-been sits in

<sup>243</sup> (“Echoes” 177).

<sup>244</sup> (Todd London, “Epic-cure History that Heals,” *American Theater* 11.6 (1994): 43-5) p. 43.

<sup>245</sup> Says Parks: “history is time that won’t quit” (“Elements” 15).

thuh be-me . . . . Thuh Then thats been somehow sits in thuh Then that  
will be . . . . (126)

*Falling back regressively and self-reflexively* in examining the Foundling Father's lines about the Lesser Known's temporally historicized idealization, even as we read Parks's lines from *TLDBMWEW*, it is not surprising that Heideggerian uncanny historicist fluidity marks the Lesser Known's differentiated, deconstructive temporality. Furthermore, although Heidegger rejects investigations of intersubjective temporal epistemologies and concentrate on the intricacies of Dasein's cultural contextualization, his temporal historicist design aids in elucidating the use Derrida makes of Husserlian intersubjective temporality and its retentive and protentive traces. The Lesser Known's historicity is defined by idealization of the Great Man, whose historical past as retentive traces become the Lesser Known's protentive, idealized traces in his attempts to "equal the Great Man in stature, word and deed." Specifically, the Lesser Known, is "trying somehow to follow in the Great Mans footsteps," internalizing, the Great Mans temporality. It is here that we may propound Husserlian intersubjective temporality, which in *The America Play* occurs through processes of Derridean examination of idealization, that is, metaphysics. We must of course begin with repetition, that is, the opening for idealization that assures the trace's *ad infinitum* return. We find it in the Foundling Father's self-reflexive narration of the Lesser Known's obsession with the Great Man, which stages the supplemental state of idealization through textual repetitions. For indeed, the Foundling Father's repeating trace-signification becomes the matrix for a deconstructive examination of the Lesser Known's loss of subjectivity and attainment of idealized identity of a president. We here emphasize ideality as underlying



displacement of subjective temporality, for Husserl the locum of all intersubjective temporality. We follow Derrida in arguing that temporality is at bottom of deferred retentive and protentive traces, which, in the Lesser Known's case, substantiate his identity. Crucially, we must understand that the Foundling Father's staged assassination of Abraham Lincoln is a methodical, repeated assassination of the idealization marking Lincoln's valorized retentive, memorialized traces. So when we discuss the Lesser Known's idealized retention of the Great Man, we reveal "footsteps" as Lincolnesque, temporal traces, "deeds [which] transpired during the life of the Great Man"; these trace retentions, become the Lesser Known's design for his "posterity," projection of which underscores the dynamic of protentive traces. As idealized retentive and protentive traces re-temporalize the gravedigger's identity, "the Greater Man continues on" while "the Lesser Known forgets who he is and just crumples"; in fact, although temporally the Great Man is located "somewhere in past-land," Mary Todd's urgent request to "please put the Great Man in the ground," echoing throughout *The America Play*, is never fulfilled—the Great Mans output of historicizing metaphysic is interminable. Reading the Foundling Father's lines about the unrelenting influence the Great Man had on the Lesser Known, for indeed he never stop to "Once again [stride] in the Great Mans footsteps," we discover that temporality of retention becomes the temporality of protention, subjective temporality is all but present while identities are never what they are. In describing the Lesser Known's historicized and hence diminishing identity, the Foundling Father deconstructively shows how processes underlying supplementation of the Lesser Known's temporal "presence" as such are metaphysical and, as they must be, ideal. As we deal with Derrida's concept of the trace, we look for those instances in

which traces hypostatize through the supplemental signifying ideality they help perpetuate. At the outset, defining idealization begins with the Lesser Known's fascination with the Great Man, ". . . in his youth the Lesser Known familiarize himself with all aspects of the Great Mans existence. What interested the Lesser Known most was the murder and what was most captivating about the murder was the 20 feet—" (166). Retentive traces here rise from the Lesser Known's generic introduction to the Lincoln narrative; interestingly, what makes the narrative attractive, however, is the murder, which, as Lucy points out, the Lesser Known "couldnt get that story out of his head: Mr. Lincolns great head. And thuh hole thuh fatal bullet bored . . . Changed your Fathuhs life . . . (Rest) . . . Couldn't get that story out of his head" (190). The historically absent event of the murder is substantiated by the Lesser Known's idealization of the "hole," yet another absence, whereby absences both represent retentive traces that assure the return of the Lesser Known's idealization *ad infinitum* within The Great Hole—the one replicated, the "original," and the one replicating, the one he "dug up." Energy of replication, or if you will, deconstructive supplementation prompted by the trace begins with the Lesser Known's uncanny resemblance to the Great Man. We treat resemblance here as one of the supplementing signs pronouncing the hypostatization of the trace. In setting the tones for a continuously performing textual differential, noticeable in part (A), the Foundling Father's trace supplements are noticeable through the Great Mans ineffaceable images, which describe his former self: "He was tall and thinly built just like the **Great Man**. His legs were the longer part just like the **Great Mans** legs. His hands and feet were large as the **Great Mans** were large" (159). Supplementary traces here underscore entrenched images of the Great Man. Still, and as

Derrida tells us, “effacement must overtake the trace,” treating images of Lincoln as an indelible eponym of American self-image therefore might be problematic. Rather, Parks and her dramaturge deconstruct par excellence qualify images of Lincoln, showing that in the act of discursive supplementation, specifically in relating historicized traces, calcified, immutability is unlikely; thus, as trace images of Lincoln repeat, they must perform their deconstructive dissent by showing that identities and the histories that recount them are volatile. When the Lesser Known travels west, “As it had been back East everywhere . . . people remarked on his likeness to Lincoln. How, in a limited sort of way, taking into account of course his natural God-given limitations, how he was identical to the Great Man in gait and manner how his legs were long and torso short [he is also] taken to wearing a false wart on his cheek in remembrance of the Great Mans wart” (163). This likeness, these trace-images from “gait” to “false wart,” which overtake the Lesser Known, are manipulated by the Foundling Father in evidencing their “effaced” qualities. In this case, effaced traces are apparent when the Foundling Father deconstructs his own claim by telling us that accepting the Lesser Known’s “likeness to Lincoln” might be problematic since we must take into account “his natural God-given limitations.” Here, Parks’s reflexivity is invested in specific dramaturgical heterogeneity, which locates the Foundling Father as difference on a topography within which Lincoln’s idealized trace-images satirize the viability of black identity, even as they protentively accommodate an opening for a black Lincoln. Here dramaturgical plurality is noticeable when the Foundling Father pronounces the processes through which he becomes a black impersonator of Abraham Lincoln, commenting on the Lesser Known’s transformation

into a black replica of the Founding Father and consequently on the inexorably alterable state of history and the metaphysical supplement that defines it.

The deconstructive economies of the Derridean trace gain greater eminence in the play when trace-images are inverted from inane, benign “likeness,” the Lesser Known being “in virtual twinship” with the Great Man, to the malignant, fatal shots echoing still in American collective memory. When the Lesser Known stages a show in his Hole, it consists of Lincoln “speaking” whereby “the Lesser Known was a curiosity at best”; however, “when someone remarked that he played Lincoln so well that he ought to be shot, it was as if the **Great Mans footsteps** had been suddenly revealed” (164). The “Great Mans footsteps,” through which traces the Lesser Known perception of Lincoln become idealized, gain certain sanguinity and hence suggested hypostatization when:

The Lesser Known returns to this hole and, instead of speaking, his act would now consist of a single chair, a rocker, in a dark box. The public was invited to pay a penny, choose from the selection of provided pistols, enter the darkened box and “Shoot Mr. Lincoln.” The Lesser Known became famous overnight. (164)

Not only do retentive traces repeatedly return in idealized infinite multiplicity, marking the *again and again* of the assassination in the Foundling Father’s show, the simulation of the murder is absurdly staged within the simulated space of The Great Hole of History. The mimetic moment is augmented by the fact that the Foundling Father is the one staging the assassination, even as he manipulates the story of the Lesser Known’s idealization of Lincoln as self-reflexive deconstructive intervention, in qualifying merits of historical factuality and its supplemented re-narrativization as a form of idealization.

To be sure, as we discuss historical factuality, we must consider its topographical genesis, which in *The America Play* seems to be the source of its metaphysical state on the whole.

Deconstructively speaking, we mention topos as the impossible spatial plan through which concepts lose the status of their temporality as transcendent purity when sign traces transform their retentive and protentive elements to metaphysical, supplemental language. In *The America Play*, Parks shows that the topographical locum within which concepts such as history actualize is the source of their indeterminate, irreducible origin and protoconstitution. In other words, the Lesser Known's The Great Hole of History as "Uh exact Replica of thuh Great Hole of History" (179), Brazil Re & Revs the play's setting here, is a replica of a theme park, in and of itself constituted by substituting simulations:

Thuh original ssback East. He and Lucy they honeymooned there. At thuh original Great Hole. Its uh popular spot. He and her would sit on thuh lip and watch everybody who was ever anybody parade on by. Daily parades! Just like thuh Tee Vee. Mr. George Washington, for example, thuh Fathuh of our County hisself, would rise up from thuh dead and walk uhround and cross thuh Delaware and say stuff!! Right before their very eyes!!!!

(ibid.)

Like his father, *as* the Lesser Known, Brazil's understanding of history is idealized, his discourse distinctively metaphysical. Standing in his father's replica of the "original" hole, Brazil's historicity is marked by an "overabundance" of signifier supplementing traces, which carry a returning, reproductive idealization of American past. Ludicrously, Brazil's idealization, in believing that Washington "would rise up from thuh dead," is

similar to his father's, who was convinced that Mary Todd's summoning to bury, to "put the Great Man in the ground" was addressed to him. Brazil's idealization locates its fecund lifeline in "thuh original" Hole within which constitutionality of historical events can be traced to an origin, to protoconstitutive structures of temporal presence within which presidents, although long dead, still come to life. It is exactly such naiveté, marking metaphysical thinking, which never self-reflexively interrogates its self-assured and hence dogmatic assumptions that Parks reveals and problematizes. Retentive, ideal traces may become potent tools in the construction of nationalistic discourse, which is historically metaphysical, and monolithically white. Elam, Rayner view Parks's effort in the play as politically defining. They claim in fact that *The America Play* is an attempt to "implant' a different memory of America's past, restoring a black presence." I fail to see Parks's attempts as that of restoring presence; rather, I see her efforts as deconstructing any viability of presence.<sup>246</sup> Maybe this is why Lucy is quick to contest Brazil's historicized idealization through Parksian textual performance, accentuated by Beckettian spaces and spare dialogue:

Lucy : Son?

Brazil : Huh?

Lucy : That iduhnt<sup>247</sup> how it went.

Brazil : Oh.

Lucy : Thuh Mr. Washington me and your Daddy seen was uh lookuhlike of thuh Mr. Washington of history fame, son.

Brazil : Oh.

Lucy : Thuh original Mr. Washingtonssbeen long dead.

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<sup>246</sup> ("Echoes" 177).

<sup>247</sup> For Parks, a neologized morphemic combination for "is not."

Brazil : O.

Lucy : That Hole back East was a theme park son. Keep your story to scale. (ibid)

Narrations must be kept up to scale and the scale is always already metaphysical because revealing, that is reducing history to its empirical originary constitution will always involve ontic, supplemental signs, which will always account for absent constitutionality of a concept. From first to last, the discourses of the Foundling Father, Brazil, and Lucy, are deferred temporal traces auto-affectively hypostatize through the supplemental textual vigor in *The America Play*. The grand deferral in the play is The Great Hole of History, origin of which, according to Brazil, is similar to another constitutive absence: “thuh creation of thuh world . . . . In thuh beginning there was one of those voids here and then ‘bang’ and then *voila!*” (184). For Parks deconstructive nonpresence is primordial, its presence always already an absence, that is, a “present” in form of supplemental conceptuality. That the supplementary agency in the play is represented through the differentiating mimeses of a hole maker, impersonator, and “faux-father,” who, in effect, represents the absent double of pro-*constitutive*-genitor, it is not surprising. At the outset, the Foundling Father *as* a digger, a hole maker, who “was *known* [my emphasis] in Small Town to Dig his graves quickly and neatly” (160), goes off “out west” to dig a “lookuhlike of the Great Hole,” creating an ineradicable absent within which he performs its hypostatized traces as supplemental, idealized historicity. When our absence maker becomes a dramaturge of his own theater in staging multiple retentive traces of the Lincoln assassination and their protentive affect on his retentive self, he repetitiously revisions his fractured, affected, idealizing self to become a deconstructive entity. Nonetheless, before his “death” *as* anthropomorphic differance, the Foundling Father

continues to dig multitude of holes, “hundreds of shallow holes he’ll use to bury his faux-historical” (169) Americana artifacts, “a bag of pennies, Lincoln’s bust, Washington’s wooden teeth (nibblers), peace pacts, writs, bills of sale [the list goes on ending with] medal for fakin” (185-6), possibly demonstrating processes within which absences gain definition through historical detritus as supplemental traces.<sup>248</sup> Deconstructively speaking, supplemented primordial absences constitute origin of historical recollection, which is, as *The America Play* shows, open to economies of idealization and metaphysics. Furthermore, metaphysicalized history is possible only because identities are fundamentally historicist in gaining their definition by *falling back* to what they no longer historically are, while supplementing their protractedly infinite deferred historical absence, a deconstructive primordial nonpresence, with what they *always already* are not. Historical identities, Parks suggests, are never traceable to presences as such. For indeed, the Foundling Father’s retentive, supplemental traces overtake Brazil in defining his identity through the reproductive impulse of concept and discourse, invested in the play’s representation of a digger and a faker both. Brazil gets his “Daddys digging spade” and tells his mother, “We could say I’m his spittin image . . . . We could say I just may follow in thuh footsteps of my foe-father” (191). Protentively following the past, Brazil will also incur his “foe-father’s fakin”; Lucy tells Brazil, “Oh, he was uh faker. Uh greaaaat biiiiig faker too. He was your fathuh. Thats thuh connection. You take after him” (181). Sounding somewhat naturalistic, Lucy goes beyond deconstruction in telling Brazil, “Youre uh Digger. Youre uh Digger. Your Daddy was uh Digger and so are you” (192).

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<sup>248</sup> Kubiak claims that such historical detritus in *The America Play* displaces the trauma that is at the heart of the play and “the history that hurts” (Agitated 197). History hurts, no doubt; as a deconstructive play, nonetheless, I interpret *The America Play* as a play about the unlimited openings of possibilities through which practices, one might prepare the ground for checked, reflexive metaphysical thinking. Though metaphysical in and of itself, such thinking I argue may eventually stave actions “that hurt.”



If structures of authentic identities are viable at all, Brazil fails to reveal them. Brazil becomes the proprietor of The Great Hole, renaming it “The Hall of Wonders,” wherein besides the Foundling Father’s archival traces, he presents:

The newest Wonder: One of thuh greats Hissself. Note: thuh body sitting propped upright in our Great Hole. . . . Note the top hat and frock coat, just like the greats. Note the death wound: thuh great black hole—thuh great black hole in thuh great head. –And how this great head is bleeding. Note: thuh last words. –And the last breathes. –And thuh nation mourns.

(199)

Mourning an assassination of a president *The America Play* seems to suggest, becomes a metaphysic which ceases to recognize the sources of its own absences and, hence, the problematic origin of its own idealization. For indeed, its supplemental vigor no longer carries absent spatiotemporal traces, repeating in a nation’s historical narrative; rather, traces seem to hypostatize in outlandish Disnesque images.

### *Part (B)*

Suzan-Lori Parks’s supplemental virtuosity is most noticeable in our treatment of part (B) of the cited passage. Parks’s Rep & Rev emerges through textual performance, which supplements subjective temporality as nonpresence and absences that emerge from inherent temporal deferral of objective idealities. In part (B), the Foundling Father, as anthropomorphic differance, shows us in fact how returning sign traces ambiguate the deferred temporalities of their concepts, even as they ontically supplement their concepts’ absent presences. Heideggerian ontology/ontic dichotomy, viewed by Derrida as crucial

in understanding the structure of the sign as trace, becomes fundamental in reading Parks's deconstructively histrionic strife *on the page*. Retentive overabundance of differentiating traces is marked by temporal, lingering absence of a president, his wife, and his assassin. These absences, nonetheless, are hypostatized through trace phrases, which become the supplemental matrices of the Lesser Known's idealization and also the Foundling Father's tool of his trade—showing the impossibility of substantive states of identity and history in *The America Play*. What the Foundling Father as difference stages for us, however, are the processes through which signification becomes the supplemental performative nexus of idealization, which is always empirically absent. More to the point, absences mark both phenomenon and concept—historical assassination and a murdered president's identity. In repetitiously assassinating Abraham Lincoln, on his stage, the Foundling Father presents tenacious retentive traces while narrating their idealized protentive affect on the Lesser Known on his stage and *on the page*. The fact that the Foundling Father repeats and revises the assassination *again and again* is due to Parks's textual sensibilities in underlying the Lesser Known's undying idealization of the Great Man. Therefore, idealization, as that of the unsubstantiated form of the Great Man's historicity and identity, materializes through inexorable textual Parksian Rep & Rev, which performatively announce idealization's impossible lexicological and temporal repetition through its ontic sign-traces. Significant to a deconstructive reading of *The America Play* is a realization that such lexicological and temporal absences inaugurate an opening for interrogatory economies, initiated by the indecipherable state of concepts' origin, that is, their presence as such. So, as I argue, supplemental signification, that is,

metaphysical language in *The America Play* warrants deconstructive questioning in interrogating its performative state as self-evident.

When we carefully examine part (B), the supplemental historicist fabric [textum] of *The America Play* is apparent. Mary Todd urgent “possible,” summoning, “*Emergency oh Emergency*, please put the Great Man in the ground,” is used to introduce the Lesser Known to the temporality of the murder and, although impossible, suggest his viable participation in the Great Man’s burial. Textually, Mary Todd’s urgent cry ends part (B), hinting, I contend, to its anticipated, continual affect on the Lesser Known in precipitating his idealization of the Great Man. Noticeably parenthesized are historically documented phrases such as “the brother against brother: a new nation all conceived and ready to be hatched [and] Play Dixie for me I always liked that song,” footnoted as “President Lincoln’s” request to pay tribute to the Confederacy after the war; we have a “very funny line from Our American Cousin” and “John Wilkes Booth last words . . . . Useless, Useless.”<sup>249</sup> As Lincoln’s and Booth’s sign traces repeat, within the Foundling Father’s narrative in showing their indelible affect on the Lesser Know, the Foundling Father teases Lincoln’s iconic hold on the Lesser Known’s and American consciousness by claiming that “the Great Man takes to guffawing guffawing at thin jokes at bad plays . . . haw haw haw and one moment guffawing and the next moment the Great Man is gunned down in his rocker” (160). In differentiating Abraham Lincoln’s memorable lines with disagreeable “guffawing,” the Foundling Father as differance exposes the

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<sup>249</sup> According to Ken Burns’ *The Civil War*, when John Wilkes Booth was caught and shot, he looked at his hands and uttered “Useless, Useless” (“The Better Angels of Our nature”). Kurt Bullock argues that Parks manipulates last words in the play as an oral and textual tool, which aids in filling the silenced gap left after Lincoln’s death. He identifies these last words as historical markers and claims that Parks “tinkers with the stability of those markers . . . and leads readers to question the markers’ role in establishing a ‘history’” (Bullock, Kurt. “Famous Last Words: The Disruptive Rhetoric of Historico—Narrative ‘Finality in Suzan Lori Parks’s *The America Play*.” *American Drama* 10.2 (2001): 69-87) p. 72.

idealistic nature of metaphysical language, deflating the identity of its originator. In so doing, the Foundling Father undercuts the Great Man's historically constituted identity by showing its narration as idealization, which persistently reemerges in the Lesser Known's conceptualization of Abraham Lincoln. The defining, historicizing trace is the assassination from which the Lesser Known could never recover. Its hypostatization, continuous and unrelenting, is staged in the Foundling Father's show "out west." Although repetitious, the assassination's idealization is questioned by the Foundling Father's self-reflexivity as well as that of his shooters "as John Wilkes Booth." As we are about to see, the repetitious textual impulse is inseparable from the dramatized staging, *again and again*, of the absent assassination it is supplementing:

*(A Man, as John Wilkes Booth, enters. He takes a gun and "stands in position": at the left side of the Foundling Father, as Abraham Lincoln, pointing the gun at the Foundling Father's head)*

A MAN: Ready.

THE FOUNDLING FATHER: Haw Haw Haw

*(Rest)*

HAW HAW HAW HAW

*(Booth shoots. Lincoln "slumps in his chair." Booth jumps)*

A MAN *(Theatrically)*: "Thus to the tyrants!"<sup>250</sup>

*(Rest)*

Hhhh. *(Exit)*

(164)

"Thus to the tyrants!" is footnoted as, "Or 'Sic semper tyrannis.' Purportedly, Booth's words after he slew Lincoln and leapt from the presidential box to the stage of Ford's

<sup>250</sup> According to Ken Burns' *The Civil War*, audience members attending *Our American Cousin* were divided on what specifically John Wilkes Booth uttered after he shot the president, some heard "Sic semper tyrannis!" while other heard "The south is avenged!"

Theatre in Washington, D.C. on 14 April 1865, not only killing the President but also interrupting a performance of *Our American Cousin*, starring Miss. Laura Keene” (ibid). Parks’s footnoting is essential in understanding her dramatization of the deconstructive supplement.<sup>251</sup> The “purported” nature of Booth’s famous words affects Abraham Lincoln’s historically documented words by their sheer metonymic association. The textually distinct “guffaw” reasserts the Great Man’s penchant for bad jokes, problematizing idealization of his historically *known*<sup>252</sup> life. Moreover, the fact that the Foundling Father’s participating actors are from his audience “out west,” makes them historicizing accomplices of the Foundling Father’s interrogation of the Great Man’s past as an ideal. As a matter of fact, the “theatricality” with which they execute their shots testifies to their self-reflexivity, which is always already deconstructive.

In the Lincoln Act, the Foundling Father’s shooters “as John Wilkes Booth” are A MAN, A WOMAN, B WOMAN, B MAN, C MAN and C WOMAN respectively. These are figures who have no names, no identities, and who partake in historicity that conjoins their temporality to that of Abraham Lincoln’s assassin.<sup>253</sup> Every time the Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln is shot, the trace as “Uh echo . . . . Of gunplay . . . . goes on playing KER-BANG! KERBANG-Kerbang-kerbang-(kerbing)-((kerbing))” (186), an echo of an absent event, gaining materiality through retentive, deferred temporality, whose purity of presence is put to question by the dramatization of supplementation

<sup>251</sup> According to Innes, “As with all Parks’ techniques, the footnoting offers multi-layered meanings. On the surface, as an academic trope, it substantiates the historicity of what is being presented on the stage” (“Staging” 24).

<sup>252</sup> Lucy is idealistic and ironic, the emphasis on “Known,” however, is Parks’s: “At thuh Great Hole . . . . at thuh Original Great Hole, you could see thuh whole world without going too far . . . . you could see someone who’s done somethin of note . . . . You know: *Known*” (197).

<sup>253</sup> That the actors on the Foundling Father’s stage are all black, assuming the role of one of America’s most notorious assassin who was white, is to say the least intriguing.

through signification. Not surprisingly and as, yet, another construct of Parksian Rep & Rev, textually dramatizing the repetition of the Derridean trace, A MAN comes back:

*(A Man, as John Wilkes Booth, enters. He takes a gun and “stands in position”: at the left side of the Foundling Father, as Abraham Lincoln, pointing the gun at the Foundling Father’s head)*

THE FOUNDLING FATHER : Like clockwork.

A MAN : Ready.

THE FOUNDLING FATHER : Haw Haw Haw Haw

*(Rest)*

HAW HAW HAW HAW

*(Booth shoots. Lincoln “slumps in his chair.” Booth jumps)*

A MAN *(Theatrically)* : “Thus to the tyrants!”

*(Rest)*

Hhhh.

LINCOLN

BOOTH

LINCOLN

BOOTH

LINCOLN

BOOTH

LINCOLN

BOOTH

LINCOLN<sup>254</sup>

*(Booth jumps)*

A MAN *(Theatrically)* : “The South is avenged!”

*(Rest)*

Hhhh.

*(Rest)*

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<sup>254</sup> Running figures’ names here is an example of Parks’s “*Spell*.”

Thank you.

THE FOUNDLING FATHER : Pleasure is mine.

A MAN : Next week then. (*Exit*)  
(171-72)

In this “shooting,” the only significant change is Booth’s other historically documented cry: “The south is avenged!,” footnoted by Parks as, “Allegedly Booth’s words.” Here we may find deconstructive interrogatory openings in *The America Play*; whereby referencing historically documented words, Parks undermines their historical, archival quality by inserting words such “purportedly” and “allegedly.” Fascinatingly and, as I argue, deconstructively suggestive qualification of historical factuality is itself qualified *again and again* by the inevitable occurrence of repeating traces—noted by the fact that A MAN and the Foundling Father both anticipate continued shooting “Like clockwork.” Nevertheless, deconstructive reflexivity is accentuated by the small talk whereby basic niceties of “thank you [and] the pleasure is mine” together with the president’s guffawing deflate, even as they question the historic poignancy of the event. What contributes to such questionability, moreover, is the fact that Parks perpetually substitutes, even as she supplements Booth’s historically documented last words. Hence, when shooters as Booth continue their interactively historicized performances on the Foundling Father’s stage, their interjected cries uttered “theatrically” *as* Booth’s are: “Strike the tent,” which is footnoted as, “The last words of General Robert E. Lee, Commander of the Confederate Army” (167); “Now he belongs to the ages,” which is footnoted by Parks as, “The words of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, as Lincoln died” (169);<sup>255</sup> “Theyve killed the president!,” footnoted by Parks as, “The words of Mary Todd, just after Lincoln was

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<sup>255</sup> Secretary of War Edwin Stanton’s words are documented and mentioned in Burns’s *The Civil War*.







please put the Great Man in the ground.” The following passage describes how the Lesser Known’s ideality of the Great Man overtakes him:

***Emergency ho Emergency please put the Great Man in the ground.***

*(Rest)*

It is said that the Great Mans wife did call out and it is said that the Lesser Known would . . . leave his wife and child . . . it is said that he would leave his wife and his child and after the blessing had been said and [the meat carved during the distribution of the vegetables] . . . stand out there where he couldnt be seen standing with his ear cocked.

***Emergency, oh Emergency, please put the Great Man in the ground.***

*(Rest)*

It would be helpful if she had called out and if he had been **summoned** been given a ticket . . . boarded the train . . . If he had been **summoned**. [Been **summoned** between the meat and the vegetables and boarded the train . . .

*(Rest)*

**A nod to the bust of Mr. Lincoln. (*Nods to the bust of Lincoln*)** But none of this was meant to be. For the Great Man had been murdered long before the Lesser Known had been born. Howuhboutthat . . . So any calling that had been done he couldnt hear, any **summoning** he had hoped for he couldnt answer . . . although you should note that he talked about the murder and the mourning that followed as if hed been away on business at the time and because of business has missed it. Living regretting he hadnt arrive sooner. (161)

For the Lesser Known as a skilled gravedigger, the Great Man’s death becomes a potent trace, idealized and hence infinitely repetitious; it is this relentless, differentiating repetition which, through phenomenological and deconstructive understanding of intersubjective temporality, dislocates the Lesser Known’s presence—first, with a vision of interring the Great Man and second as someone, who can potentially become as important. Following Derrida, Parks takes summoning as an example of the dwelling of a concept upon its projected temporal infinitude. Summoning as a trace becomes a temporal signifier, phonemically, yet, impossibly heard from Marry Todd all the way to the Lesser Known, who “talked about the murder and the mourning that followed as if

hed been away on business at the time and because of business has missed it.” Mary Todd’s summons repetitiously continues at the end of the play’s second act when the Foundling Father finally climbs to his grave. Here, the metaphysics of supplementation, that is, idealization is revealed through processes of retention, the summons, and protention, the Lesser Known’s continually affected response, in creating repeating, infinite blink of an eye beyond Marry Todd’s finitude. Nevertheless, empirical continuity of historical events is not viable, even if signification reproductively sustains them through processes of idealization; for indeed, Mary Todd’s summons can be rewritten *again and again*. In my view, *The America Play* holds such a process suspect. Furthermore, such suspicion becomes amply noticeable when as anthropomorphic differance the Foundling Father reveals the unsubstantiated nature of the Lesser Known’s claims to the Great Man’s temporality in life and in death. Obvious Parksian Rep & Rev demonstrates the rigor with which signification, itself an ideal, supplements past historicity that is all but available to the Lesser Known. Although idealized traces of the Great Man “march before his mind’s eye,” the Lesser Known’s borrowed temporality is spatially stretched all the way “back then,” displaced by idealized conceptuality through which he is convinced that he can hear Marry Todd. Of course, Mary Todd’s identity, as a wife to the Great Man, already a nonpresence defined by her position, is shuttered. According to the Foundling Father, “On that sad night she begged her servant: ‘Bring in Taddy, Father will speak to Taddy’<sup>256</sup> But Father died instead unconscious. And she went mad from grief . . . Mad Mary claims she hears her dead man . . . **Summoning** . . . **Emergency, oh, Emergency please put the Great Man in the ground**” (168).

<sup>256</sup> Parks’s n12 reads: “Mary Todd Lincoln, wanting her dying husband to speak to their son Tad, might have said this that night” (168). The inconsolable state of Mary Todd is corroborated by Ken Burns’ *The Civil War*.

Looking at part (B) once again, we immediately notice that the trace supplementation of Mary Todd's temporality, represented by the fact that "she was given to hysterics," is added to metonymically supplemented temporalities of a president and his assassin.

The suggestion in *The America Play* seems to be that historically originary, pure temporalities, presences as such, are not available. What is available are supplementing, reproductive signs, which are metaphysical because they supplement substance-less temporalities and because their ontic state is conceptual and they are, therefore, inherently absent. Even as the Foundling Father's phonemic, morphemic, and syntactic differentiated, spatiotemporal trace-signification show how absent semantics of idealization repetitiously overtakes the temporality of the Lesser Known, his own self-reflexive, Brechtian intervention only aids in emphasizing the untenable nature of his own temporality. *As* difference the Foundling Father's requiem sounds like the supplemented narrative he used to describe his former, idealizing self, with, I argue, certain suggestion of parody:

"Uh henm: I was born in a log cabin of humble parentage. But picked up few things. Uh Hehm: 4score and 7 years ago our fathers—you know the rest. Lets see now. Yes. Uh house divided cannot stand! You can fool some of thuh people some of thuh time! Of thuh people by thuh people and for thuh people! Malice toward none and charity toward all! Ha!

The Death of Lincoln! (Highlights): Haw Haw Haw Haw

*(Rest)*

HAW HAW HAW HAW

*(A gunshot echoes. Loudly. And echoes. The Foundling father "slumps in his chair")*

(198)

Mounting his coffin, the Foundling Father's re-staging of "The Death of Lincoln!" co-insides with his own. If, however, we view the Foundling Father as differance, how can we reconcile differance, a metaphysic of differing, yet, uninterrupted nonconceptuality, with mortality? Claiming that we have manipulated the Foundling Father as an ontic, and, hence anthropomorphic metaphor might be the easy way out. Deconstructively speaking, nonetheless, we know that a so called way out is untenable.<sup>257</sup> To be sure, Parks does not offer resolutions, "ways-out." Maybe this is why Brazil continues his father's enterprise in The Great Hole—regressively, *again and again*.

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<sup>257</sup> I follow John Caputo in finding affirmation in the impossibility of deconstructive conceptual containment. He argues that "Deconstruction is structured by a movement 'beyond,' *über* or *au-delà*, which is itself the precisely undeconstructible element in deconstruction, what it always affirms" ("Looking the Impossible in the Eye: Kierkegaard, Derrida, and the Repetition of Religion," *Kierkegaard-Studies*. Yearbook (2002): 1-25) p. 3.

## Conclusion

Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* adheres to the deconstructive project by dramatizing conditions of relentless, interrogatory opening, going beyond limited postmodern jargon, in indeed readying the ground for postmodern rethinking the philosophical status-quo, whose metaphysical hold we may never escape. Parks's play gives opening to questioning, accompanied by a simultaneous realization and acceptance that in our attempts to attain substantive responses, we are sure to face mounting difficulties. Still, anticipating difficulties is fundamental to structures of postmodern suspicion, which mark contemporary drama and philosophy. In this way, Parksian sensibilities are necessarily postmodern. Parks's suspicion is most noticeable in her self-reflexive, referential theater. Parks's theater can be identified as preparing the groundwork for a drama which self-reflexively allies itself with ontology, theatricalizing its mimetic moment as a disquieting comment on representational theater. I view in fact subversion of illusionist, representational theater as going hand in hand with subversion of the metaphysics of certitude. It is within such subversive turn that we may reveal the deconstructive undecidable and its applicability to Parksian theater. Undecidability for Parks does not mean indecisiveness. Rather, I interpret Parks's drama as consciously questioning the merits of a theater that is race specific, even as she participates in its making. Although I have examined *The America Play* as a deconstructive case in point, arguing that Parks's design is predominantly onto-lingual, we can hardly avoid the fact that actors on Parks's stage are black—in *The America Play*, the Foundling Father and those who shoot Booth are all without exception black. The political implications of a color specific cast are significant. In this respect, interrogation of occidental philosophy

might pursue a compulsory self-analysis of its history as a production of hegemonic ideologies on a grand scale. Here, postmodern investigation targets concealed ideologies and their metaphysical discursive matrices, which are informed by insidious will to control in the guise of humanistic ideal of progress. Investigating humanistic thought as the product of white patriarchal metaphysic does begin with postmodern suspicion.<sup>258</sup> For example, and as mentioned above, Parks's *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* documents changes imposed on the black minority; whereby the man of science, The Naturalist, a white man in a cockroach guise comes "to teach, enlighten, and tame . . . creatures from the jungle," and "observes"<sup>259</sup> the naturalization of three black women. Conversely, when Molly, one of the women, says, "Once there was uh me named Mona who wondered what she'd talk like if no one was listenin" (28), one is immediately compelled to think of Husserl's relational and Derrida's differential structures of the ego, defined through a constitutive other. As we can see, Parks consciousness to African-American plight is interlaced with philosophical aporias, locating Parks on the cusp of philosophical inquiry and black sensibilities.

A combined dramatic effort in conjointly revealing philosophical questions and representing black historicity may prove to be the absent locum of yet another deconstructive trace investigation. For such deconstructive strife, we may find the unsettling affects of the Derridean trace in his later aporias. Specifically, Derrida point to inherent paradoxical states in acts of gift giving, hospitality, forgiving, and mourning,

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<sup>258</sup> Historically, we could trace origin of postmodern suspicion to Nietzsche's perspectivism, Husserl's epoche, Heidegger's destruktion of onto-theology, and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. I think that Michael Frayn's Niels Bohr explains the source of postmodern suspicion best when he says, "there is no precisely determinable objective universe . . . the universe exist only as a series of approximations. Only within the limits determined by our relationship with it" (*Copenhagen*, New York: Anchor Books, 1998) p. 72.

<sup>259</sup> (*The America Play and Other Works* 29).

whereby complete, unmitigated fulfillment of each is impossible, even if their fulfillment in the generic sense makes them possible. In showing potentially continued applicability of deconstructive concepts to Parks's drama, let us examine the aporetic state of mourning. The components of the binary, which underlie the aporetic state of mourning are on the one hand, "incorporation," in which the mourner retains the memory of the other, the deceased, as a foreign entity; while on the other, Derrida identifies "introjection" as that movement through which one preserves the memory of the other as a Husserlian already-other- within-one's self. Although introjection may be seen as a comprehensive way to mourn, Derrida problematizes it by pointing to the fact that such internalization of the deceased may not "be a normal response and instead becomes pathological."<sup>260</sup> Through process of introjection, moreover, the mourner might interiorize the mourned to such a degree, whereby metaphorically "cannibalizing" its memory. In this way, incorporation, as conscious none-assimilation, might leave room for differentiation, which always carries opportunities for heterogeneity. The aporetic state of true mourning then is a reality within which one's complete, uninterrupted mourning may result in the obliteration of the memory of the mourned; whereas a processes of mourning in which remembrance of the mourned is consciously held at some distance, may result in mourning that can be seen as inadequate.

Although I think that the applicability of the trace in its deconstructively onto-lingual form applies to all of Suzan-Lori Parks's early plays, I present the concept of mourning in attempts to show the inherent heterogeneity marking deconstructive thinking. For example, in Park's *The Last Dead Black Man in the Whole Entire World*,

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<sup>260</sup> I here use notes that I have taken sometimes ago. I regret to say that my efforts to find the South African website I have used failed. Derrida's observations of mourning appear for the most part in his *Memoires: for Paul De Man*.



examination of deconstructive understanding of mourning may help accentuate Parks's own metaphysical strife in treating the black past. In some respects, I view, *TLDBMWEW* as anguishly longing for African past. The aporia for Parks is how to uphold a continual interrogatory philosophical inquiry while, at the same time, represent the viability of a retrievable, African history, which carries a metaphysic of valorization. Here the concept of mourning may apply to the figures in *TLDBMWEW*, manipulated by Parks as allegories of the African and African American dead extend all the way to "QUEEN – THEN – PHARAOH – HATSHEPSUT." I see Parks as attempting to situate her figures on a liminal space within which they might be tenably mourned without being "cannibalized." Nevertheless, successful mourning as such is not viable. For indeed, the ultimate question for Parks is how to preserve the black past in ways through which total "introjection" does not occur and practices of "incorporation," metaphysical as they must be, leave an opening for reflexive contemplation. Yet, again, issues of history and identity prevail and in interchangeably maneuvering toward and away from a kind of metaphysic, which performatively assures the propagation of such concepts *as a* metaphysic, Parks might be successful in sustaining a memory of black historicity. Moreover, in sustaining black historicity, Parks must assure a condition in which the black entity avoids constructing its identity by internalizing, "cannibalizing," its own memory. Moreover, and as it touches my proposition, Parks's innovative language stages, even as it dramatizes, the supplemental structures of the substanceless, absent state of its concepts. Parks's theater is located on the cusp of a concept and its impossible materialization in the theatrical space. Actors performing in Parks's productions digest their signifiers, forced to emit phonemes that proclaim the temporal, deferred absent state

of the concepts they fail to represent. For Suzan-Lori Parks, “theater is the site of embodied uncertainty . . . . because theater is a site for the temporal disjunction between the present of performance, the inheritance of the past, and the future of its remains in memory and reproductions.”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> (Rayner Alice, “Rude mechanicals and the Specters of Marx” *Theatre Journal*. 54.4 (2000): 535-55) p. 551.

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## Appendix A

### *The Great Hole of History*

This is the absent locale of the onto-lingual, spatiotemporal movement of differance within and through which the Foundling Father operates. This great hole, dug by the Foundling Father, is a replica of “The Great Hole of History,” a “theme park,” itself a supplemented space, parading “the fathers of our country” daily. I view the great hole as a differentiating and hence defining historicized and historicizing absence. No presences here, just supplementing spatiotemporal traces that as part of the movement of differance, attest to the impossibility of substantive notions of history and identity. The Foundling Father, immersed in his self-created hyletic absence, narrates the story of the Lesser Known’s developing nonself; that is, a nonself supplemented by white historicity against which definition of blackness evaporates in the echoed hole. I intend to show how, through a self-reflexive economy, the Foundling Father is successful in revealing the “Great Hole of History’s” gossamer historicizing influences on the Lesser Known.

### *The Onto-lingual turn of Difference*

Values of differing: stress on spatial, textual processes of signifiers as they perform their reproductive regeneration, adding to what is already there.

Values of deferring: stress on temporal movement, materialized by falling back of signifiers, supplementing an absent, missing signified.

### *The Foundling Father’s Treble Temporal Scheme*

#### THE LESSER KNOWN

**[[with whose retentive traces the Foundling Father indicates “past-present”]]**

The gravedigger, the Foundling Father’s former self, his vicarious past is self-reflexively examined in differentiation to the Great Man’s, whose “footsteps” the Lesser Known is compelled to follow. The Foundling Father shows that the Lesser Known’s identity as a black gravedigger is fractured through historicized idealization of the Great Man, even as he demonstrates that conceptualization of identity as such is problematic.

### THE FOUNDLING FATHER

**[[a blink of an eye, “the pure actuality of the now”—“presence”]]**

As anthropomorphic differance, the Foundling Father differentiates past and future, as supplemented absences, in showing that original structures of historicity, as that of the Great Man’s, cannot be recounted in their completion and that the Lesser Known’s aspiration for a presidential identity will be indeed *ad-infinitum* idealized and delayed. Significantly, the Foundling Father as differance partakes in the play’s dramaturgy by self-reflexively performing the trace’s status as “protowriting”; that is, the regenerative ideality of writing, preceding all “real” significations.

### THE GREAT MAN

**[[future present as historicizing ideality through which opening the trace repetitiously returns]]**

The perennial American signified, Abraham Lincoln, whose idealized historicity underlies the possibility of an opening of “presence,” accumulation of primordial trace absences, which fail to represent [*vorstellung*] his signified history and identity in their substantive totality. As the Great Man’s retentive, “effaced” traces collapse in a movement of division and delay, their protentive dynamic in the play indicates their idealized form through their anticipated reemergence in the future. Hence, although he lives “in time immemorial,” his effaced traces are revived through the Foundling Father’s historically systemic discourse and impersonation, which specifically target the Lesser Known’s historicized, idealized identity.

## How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable

### The History of an Error

1. The true world—attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, *he is it* (Nietzsche's emphasis here and throughout).

(The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, "I Plato, *am* the truth.")<sup>262</sup>

2. The true world—unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents").

(Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible—it *becomes female*, Christian.)

3. The true world—unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it—a consolation, and obligation, an imperative.

(At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea as become elusive, pale, Nordic, (Königsbergain.<sup>263</sup>)

4. The true world—unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also *unknown*. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us?

(Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cockcrow of positivism.)

5. The "true" world—an idea which no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—*consequently*, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

(Bright day; breakfast, return of *bon sens* and cheerfulness; Plato's embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

6. The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.*

(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA<sup>264</sup>)

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<sup>262</sup> Either by choice or error, periods in this "fable" are inserted within and out of quotation marks.

<sup>263</sup> Nietzsche end notes it as "That is, Kantian."

<sup>264</sup> "Zarathustra begins." (The Portable Nietzsche, Ed., Trans. Walter Kaufmann New York: Penguin Books, 1982) pp. 485-86.



**Excerpt from Derrida's "Signature Event Context"**

There's no concept that is metaphysical in itself. There is a labor – metaphysical or not – performed on a conceptual systems. Deconstruction does not consist in moving from one concept to another, but in reversing and displacing a conceptual order as well as the nonconceptual order with which its is articulated. For example, writing, as a classical concept, entails predicates that have been subordinated, excluded, or held in abeyance by forces and according to necessities to be analyzed. It is those predicates (I have recalled several of them) whose forces of generality, generalization, and generativity is liberated, grafted onto a "new" concept of writing that corresponds as well to what has always *resisted* the prior organization of forces, always constituted the *residue* irreducible to the dominant force organizing the hierarchy that we may refer to, in brief, as logocentric. To leave to this new concept the old name of writing is tantamount to maintaining the structure of the *graft*, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective *intervention* in the constituted historical field. It is to give everything at stake in the operations of deconstruction the chance and the force, the power of *communication* [LI, 21, Derrida's emphasis throughout].

## ***New black math***

### **Suzan-Lori Parks**

10 years after writing the essay "the equation for black people on stage" Im standing at the same crossroads asking the same questions. No sweat. Sometimes you can walk a hundred miles and end up in the same spot. The world ain't round for nothing, right? What is a black play? The definition is housed in the reality of two things that occurred recently and almost simultaneously: 26 August 05, playwright scholar poet-king August Wilson announces he is dying of cancer, and hurricane Katrina devastates the Gulf Coast. It feels like judgment day. What Im talking about today is the same and different. I was tidy back then. And now Im tidier. Tidier today like a tidal wave.

What is a black play?

A black play is angry.

A black play is fierce.

A black play is double voiced but rarely confused.

A black play got style.

A black play is of the people by the people and for the people.

A black play is smooth but not slick, heavy but not thick, cant be tamed, often does not comb its hair, wipes its mouth with the back of its black hand or with a linen napkin whichever is more readily available.

A black play is late.

A black play is RIGHT ON and RIGHT ON TIME.

A black play is deep.

A black play is armed / to the teeth.

A black play bows to god then rows the boat ashore.

A black play makes do if it got to / fights / screams / sings / dreams / WORKS IT / talks in code and tells it like it is ALL UP IN YA FACE.

A black play gives you five. **[End Page 576]**

A black play is robust and alive.

A black play is in the house and looking *good*, too.

A black play is *bad* motherfucker.

A black play does not exist.

Every play is a black play.

SAY WHAT?

A black play is a white play when the lights go out.

A black play is a white play when you read between the lines.

A black play got its picture on the wall of your local post office.

A black play got its butt on death row for a crime it perhaps did not commit.

A black play got its black butt in the whitehouse, seated at the right hand of the man.

A black play keeps you up at night.

A black play is awake.

A black play gonna kick your ass.

A black play has genitals that people think about long after curtain comes down.

A black play is running for president.

A black play gotta get out the vote.

A black play is a leader, but seldom an elected official.

A black play as a child wondered why, if Jesse Owens won all them gold medals, then how come a black man couldn't beat a white man in a presidential race?

A black play is in the streets.

A black play aint no negro.

A black play is a nigger.

A black play is buck wild.

A black play is mixed.

A black play is on broadway, the great white way.

A black play is not on broadway, and furthermore, aint studying no broadway.

A black play is coming soon to a theatre near you.

A black play got a fro.

A black play know the know.

A black play go toe to toe, all the way out the do. **[End Page 577]**

A black play gonna burn that m-f down, Monday-Friday and twice on the weekends.

A black play is chronic.

A black play takes into account that pollsters have found that black folks dont attend the theatres in numbers large enough to influence the selection of plays produced.

A black play is very intellectual.

A black play has studied, conducts discourse, and, on certain days of the week, can be found living in the big house of tradition.

A black play got a mission.

A black play dreams the impossible dream.

A black play is such things as dreams are made on.

A black play was the first black play ever to be written and will be the last black play standing.

A black play takes shape just outside the reaches of your white understanding, no matter what your color, baby.

A black play aint for you.

A black play aint about you.

A black play aint integrated and don't want to be.

A black play aint playing.

A black play knows that when audiences read it primarily through the rubric of "race relations," that those audiences are suffering from an acute attack of white narcissism. (If you have a need to see yourself reflected in things that are not directly about you, then you are one of the afflicted.)

A black play dont give a shit what you think.

A black play knows all about the black hole and the great hole of history and aint afraid of going there.

A black play sometimes puts its foot in its mouth, but, hell, a black play sometimes gots mouths to feed and shoe leather tastes like chicken when yr HONGRY.

A black play wants to know where HARRIET TUBMAN stay at?

A black play fights the power.

A black play wants to uplift the race.

A black play just might set the race back 10 years.

A black play is not political—that term don't even begin to approach its complexity, especially these days, dog.

A black play knows how to play the game.

A black play IZ. **[End Page 578]**

A black play in the united states of america was ripped from the bosom of its motherland, caught by the man or sold down river by its brothers, crossed the atlantic in chains, had its gods smashed to bits and pieces, was handed Jesus as a pacifier (later, when Jesus wasn't working so good, welfare came into play), had its language ripped out its mouth, its family torn asunder—all this and more and a black play is still expected to play by the rules, is still expected to be interested in what the other deems interesting and valid and valued. HOW MUCH OF THAT SHIT CAN I BUY WITH FOODSTAMPS? Or, said another way: I PAY FIRST CLASS TAXES HOW COME I GET SECOND CLASS SERVICE? A black

play aint playing your game, it might look like it's playing your game, but if it looks like that to you, then that just means you been played, honey.

A black play KNOWS what time it is.

A black play aint gonna give you the time of day.

A black play kicks a man when he's down, eats its own, has a faith in the system which is less a function of trust than confusion and fatigue, waits for the man to shape up his ship, in short makes all the mistakes of a great people fallen on hard times and working on getting they game back.

A black play is the feel good show of the century.

A black play is the blues.

A black play dont forget that in the 1980s mtv didnt want colored faces on its airwaves.

A black play dont forget the numerous hard times back in the olden days and the numerous hard times going on right now.

A black play keeps on keeping on.

A black play asks, where Martin and Malcolm stay at?

A black play gets down.

A black play is old.

A black play is just getting started.

A black play asks, where Mr. James Baldwin stay at?

A black play asks, where Satchel Paige and Son House and Memphis Minnie and George Washington Carver and all them stay at?

A black play is often characterized by healthy doses of word play such as "snaps" and "yo Mamma" jokes.

A black play takes you to the bridge.

***The Bridge.*** A black play by Suzan-Lori Parks

Characters: MOMMA, an older woman, and YO, her husband.

Setting: they sit atop their house which is under 20 feet of water. Helicopters from the National Guard in the near distance are about to perform a heroic rescue of our characters, but first: **[End Page 579]**

YO: We just made the last payment on this house, too.

MOMMA: Yo, sometimes it be's that way sometimes.

YO: Everything we own is washed away.

MOMMA: Bank owned the house, then us.

YO: Now the flood owns everything, looks like.

MAMMA: You know it, Yo.

YO

MAMMA

(rest)

YO: How can you tell a nigger thats crazy from a nigger that aint crazy?

MAMMA: I don't know. How *can* you tell a nigger that's crazy from a nigger that aint crazy?

YO: The crazy nigger is the nigger that aint crazy.

*Curtain.*

A black play is black.

A black play is asked to explain itself.

A black play is tempted to expose itself.

The black play got a message.

A black play knows the real deal.

A black play is told that it is about race and a black play knows it's really about other shit.

A black play knows that racerelations sell.

A black play knows that race relations are a holding cell.

A black play is blacker than my new black cat, Hounddog, named after Hounddog Taylor, the blues guitarist, who is also a polydactyl brother.

A black play is blacker than black.

A black play is written by a black person.

A black play has black actors.

A black play is written by a white person and has white actors.

A black play doesn't have anything to do with black people. I'm saying *The Glass Menagerie* is a black play.

SAY WHAT?

EXCUSE ME?!?!

Cause the presence of the white suggests the presence of the black. Every play that is born of the United States of America is a black play because we all exist in the shadow of slavery. All of us. *The Iceman Cometh* is a black play. *Angels in America* is a black play and Kushner knows he's a brother. It's all black. **[End Page 580]**

## The Intermission

What in God's name are we gonna do to help our brothers and sisters get to the promised land in this lifetime? I know it's not fashionable to ask these questions. I know it's not fashionable to suggest that we have some housekeeping to do. I know it's uncool to suggest that we got to do something other than lay our problems on the doorstep of the man. I know it's unhip to confront our own trip but what should we do? Wait for the man to clean HIS house? Oh please.

*Sister on the Street*: How did this essay about black theatre turn into a diatribe?

*Brother on the Corner* (shouting from the sidelines): What you know about diatribe? You don't know what a diatribe is, yr just talking "diatribe" so she'll put you in her essay.

*Sister on the Street*: And me being in her essay's gonna be the end of your world? Sides, she's got a point. We gotta take more responsibility. We gotta quit



waiting on the man. Tomorrow is always a new day dawning, but dont it often smell of the Same Old Shit?

*Brother on the Corner.* SOS! Im with you on that!

*Sister on the Street.* If you waiting on the man you gonna be waiting all your life.

*Brother on the Corner.* Plus in your next life too, dont forget about *karma* and shit.

*Sister on the Street.* People wanna be free but they spend their entire existence waiting on the man.

*Brother on the Corner.* Instead of breaking FREE and leading a whole lot of people to FREEDOM with them.

*Sister on the Street.* Damn right.

*Black Playwright.* Either of you two got some change? My cellphone dont work around here and I need to use the payphone. Im putting in a call to Harriet Tubman. Im putting in a call to Nat Turner. Im calling up John Brown and Fredrick Douglass and Ms. Sojourner Truth. They are still here. Cause when they died they MULTIPLIED. Operator? We gotta crack the heart wide open cause when it healed up last time it healed up wrong, crack it open and reset it, heal it right. Crack the mind wide open cause when it healed up, our thoughts healed up wrong.

*Brother on the Corner (rest):* Do she know that pay phone don't work?

*Sister on the Street.* Yeah, she knows.

*Black Playwright.* Audiences still ask "what do black people think about such and such?" Black people think the world is fucked. Thats what black people think. Black people dont always use apostrophes neither. Black people took the rallying cry "burn baby burn" and turned it into the chorus of "Disco Inferno" and some of us danced all the way to the bank, thats what black people think. Black people know there is a war going on against our blackness and somehow we've been enlisted to fight on the front lines.

*Brother on the Corner.* Whats she talking about now? **[End Page 581]**

*Sister on the Street.* A black play.

*Brother on the Corner.* Go ahead, girl.

## End of Intermission

A black play fights the power.

A black play sometimes does not make it to the page or stage and consists of just some high-powered thoughts going on inside the bright blackness of yr head.

A black play is doctor heal-good cause theatre is a healing thing.

A black play gives us a role to play and, when someone steps into that role, the rest of us got someone like us to look at. Seeing yrself mirrored is a basic component of healthy psychological development. Im not talking about creating a series of model behaviors, but roles, like the roles in the passion play—you know what a passion play is—like when they reenact the journey of Christ on easter and the town gathers to watch an actor go through his moments as he carries his cross up the hill & c. So the black playwright gives us a role. Because it is in having a role that we have an opportunity to imaginatively participate. And it is through participation that we work out the demons.

A black play is a poem, like a life is a poem, like the bible is a poem, like the bhagavad-gita is a poem, a "song of god," "no effort is ever wasted," it says and "you have rights to your actions but not rights to the fruits of your actions," it says. The charioteer opens his mouth and shows us that he is the infinite.

A black play embraces the infinite.

A black play is . . . August Wilson. 2 Oct 2005: He died today.

A black play asks, where Mr. AUGUST WILSON stay at?

A black play is not ignorant of history, but neither is the play history's slave.

A black play is tragic.

A black play is funny as hell.

A black play has contempt for the other. And love too.

A black play is currently studying how such a love and such a contempt can coexist in the same heart, in the same breath.

A black play plays well in countries where there are no "black" people—and yet, helps those in those countries to identify themselves as "black."

A black play employs the black not just as a subject, but as a platform, eye and telescope through which it intercourses with the cosmos.

A black play has at least one panther in it.

A black play recognizes the importance of the evidence of things unseen.

A black play is too much.

A black play can take you there. **[End Page 582]**

A black play is simple.

A black play is COMPLICATED.

A black play is ALL THAT.

A black play is a piece of work.

A black play is worth the price of admission.

A black play is free.

PEACE

And

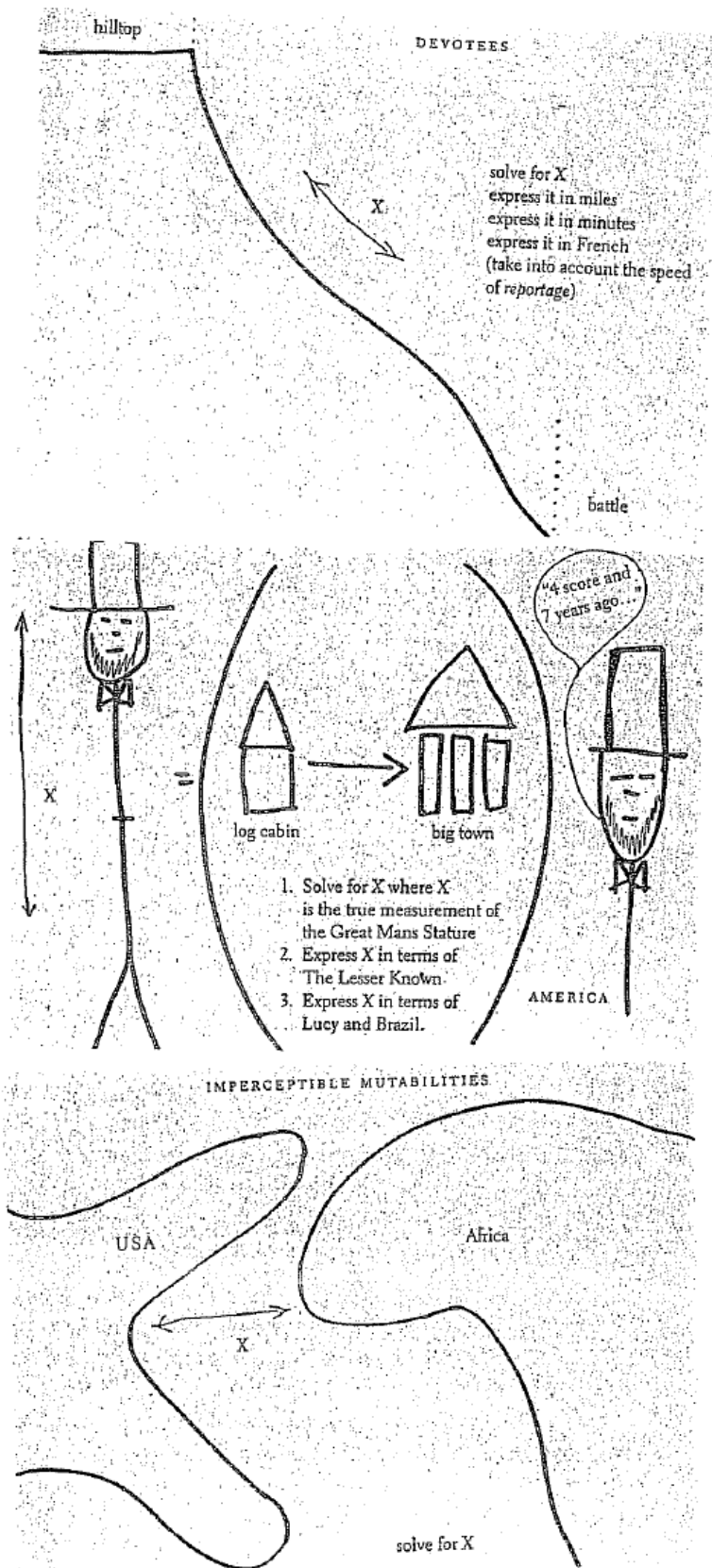
POWER

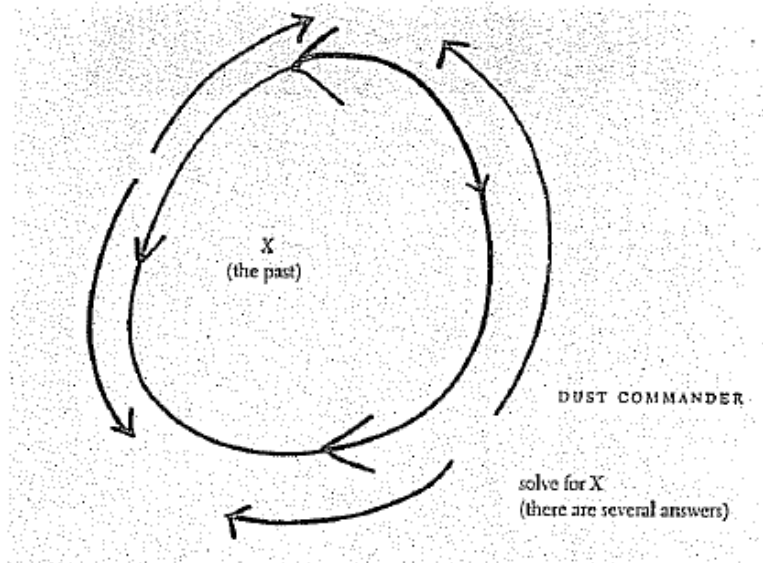
To the PEOPLE.<sup>265</sup>

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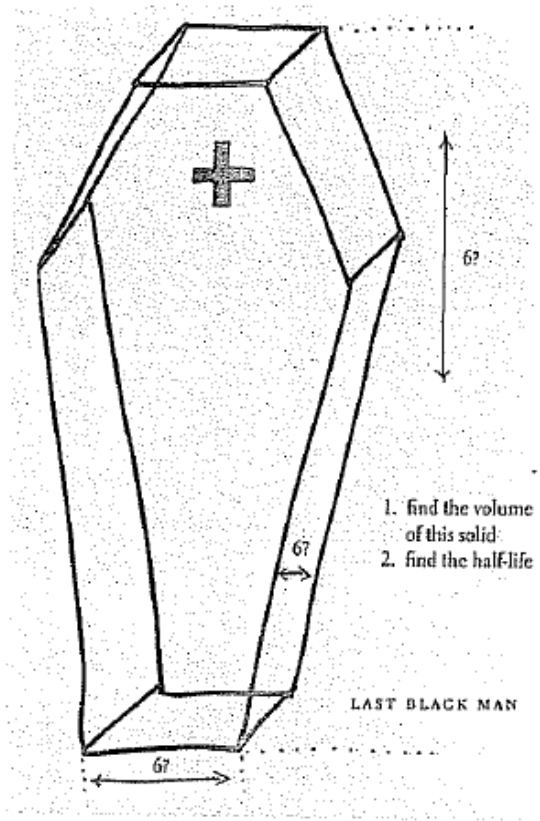
<sup>265</sup> *Theatre Journal* 57.4 (2005) 576-583.

Appendix E





**FIGGLING**  
 the play is trying to find an equation  
 for time saved/saving time  
 but theatre/experience/performing/  
 being/living etc. is all about  
 spending time. No equation or....?



### *About the Author*

Rachel Naor obtained her BA in literature and MA in applied linguistics degrees from the University of South Florida. Ms. Naor was awarded Cum Laude for her BA and passed her qualifying exams for her PhD with distinction. Ms. Naor has taught Modern Hebrew for the University of South Florida's Department of World Language Education, Biblical Hebrew for the University of South Florida's Department of Religious Studies, ESOL courses for the University of South Florida's English Language Institute, Modern Hebrew for New College of Florida, and introduction to drama and English composition courses for the University of South Florida's Department of English respectively.