DECONSTRUCTION, MUSICOLOGY, HERMENEUTICS: A PREFACE TO DECONSTRUCTIVE MUSICAL HERMENEUTICS

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ABSTRACT

The very mention of the word deconstruction is sometimes enough to throw its opponents into deep depression, its supporters into a state of intellectual overload, and almost everyone into varying degrees of confusion. The concept of deconstruction has not been examined by musicology in great depth. It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that deconstruction can offer important new perspectives to the study of music in general, and to hermeneutics in particular.

The first chapter of my investigation examines what deconstruction is (and is not). This begins with a survey of the origins and history of deconstruction, as well as a description of the major characteristics which help to define deconstruction's goals. The second chapter concerns itself with how deconstruction has been applied to musical scholarship. This includes a brief consideration of various sources which make limited use of deconstruction, and then focuses more intensely on works by Steve Sweeney-Turner, Lawrence Kramer, and Rose Rosengard Subotnik. The final chapter concerns musical hermeneutics and deconstruction. This chapter examines how deconstruction, specifically the concept of *misinterpretation,* affects musical interpretation. In order to provide a framework which can cope with deconstruction, while taking into account postmodern concerns (particularly the body), I use philosopher Mark Johnson's theory of embodied meaning.

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PREFACE

> Musicology's canons are...changing. And as these canons change...we come to welcome and celebrate their plural presence among us...[1]

Deconstruction is one of the most intriguing and complex concepts of postmodernism. Both philosophy and literary criticism have examined this topic extensively, and it is now creating as intense a debate in musicology and music theory as it did in those two fields. Musical scholarship is one of the last disciplines to be infiltrated by this important, and at times frustrating, topic. This is probably due as much to musicology's traditional indifference to concepts outside its normal frame of reference as it is to the complexity of the subject. While it is arguable whether deconstruction is, or will become in the future, one of 'musicology's canons,' it *is* certain that is has, and will continue to have, an impact which is more than marginal:

> The new contexts in which...canons arise suggest further that...deconstructionist theories can contribute considerably more to...music than the hegemony of previous canonic principles admitted.[2]

Adequate proof of this impact can be traced by a quick survey of the articles printed in the Journal of the American Musicological Society in the past twenty years. Over these last two decades an increasing

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[1]Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *Disciplining Music* (Chicago, 1992), p. 209.
[2]Bergeron and Bohlman, p. 208.

amount of scholarly work has appeared which (often tacitly) uses deconstruction. The word itself has moved from footnotes to titles: Rose Rosengard Subotnik's *Deconstructive Variations* is one of the latest examples of the time and effort that musicologists are spending with deconstruction.[3] However, many scholars and writers on music have acquainted themselves too superficially with the techniques that deconstruction uses. Consequently it has, at times, been misused and misunderstood. The problems with which musicology is currently grappling are those that many North American intellectual disciplines have already gone through: What *is* deconstruction? What *is not* deconstruction? How can it be used to provide solutions to the problems with which musical scholarship is concerned?

The first step will be to introduce the concepts and terminology of deconstruction, as well as those scholars who have been crucial in its growth. In the first chapter, I present the people and ideas necessary to make basic sense of deconstruction. In the second chapter there will be a brief survey of how musical scholars have applied the concepts which they, rightly or wrongly, call deconstructive. In this chapter I pay particularly close attention to the works of three individuals: Steve Sweeney-Turner, Lawrence Kramer, and Rose Rosengard Subotnik.

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[3]Rose R. Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations : Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis, 1996).

The texts included in the first portion of the second chapter have been chosen to provide samples of the various musical concerns that deconstruction has been applied to. They include sources which use deconstruction implicitly or marginally (in footnotes, or parenthetically). The three texts which I examine in more detail have been chosen because they are all representative of the current state of deconstruction in musicological circles. All three deal explicitly with how the author conceives of deconstruction, and do so in some detail. In examining them, I am not making any claim for the success, or the validity, of the concerns they apply deconstruction to. I am focusing primarily on the author's conception of deconstruction, and how effectively they use deconstruction in their arguments. All three do this while taking into consideration the reader who is relatively unfamiliar with the topic. Since this is the single object of Sweeney-Turner's article, his is the first text to be examined. The other two sources demonstrate two very different applications of deconstruction to music. The cultural hermeneutics of Lawrence Kramer has been chosen because his text demonstrates how elusive deconstruction can be, even for a scholar of his calibre. As well, Kramer's conception of deconstruction is easily extracted from the larger context within which it is placed, which makes it easier to consider on its own terms. The final selection is the second chapter of Subotnik's *Deconstructive Variations,* "How Could Chopin's A-Major Prelude Be Deconstructed?" Since Subotnik's analysis and her conception of deconstruction are difficult to separate, I have tried to emphasize the latter while considering the former where necessary. These first two chapters present various different views of

deconstruction, and are not meant as either an endorsement of it or a forum for invective against it.

In the third chapter my focus narrows to the more specific issue of deconstruction's relationship with musical hermeneutics. Beginning with the idea that all reading is *mis*reading, that all interpretation is *mis*interpretation, I examine how this problematizes musical hermeneutics; how the concept of deconstructive misinterpretation affects musical (mis)interpretation. My primary aim in this chapter is to provide an epistemological framework within which deconstruction can be used profitably in musical interpretation while not sacrificing the musical text, and letting it become a semantic free-for-all. After introducing the related concepts of misreading and misprision (de Man's and Bloom's respectively), I examine philosopher Mark Johnson's generic concept of embodied meaning in order to establish this framework — first on its own terms, and then in a musical context. The objective of this chapter is to form an idea of the 'deconstructive' musical work which, while allowing for readings to differ (sometimes radically), still maintains an identifiable, coherent structure.

Being primarily introductory, this thesis is largely informational in nature; at the same time, it tries to avoid becoming chronological, listing only dates, names, and titles. The first chapter describes perspectives which are quite often combative, but it is not intended

to be polemical (although to an certain extent one always takes a side). I have tried to express the reasons for the contention between scholars who use deconstruction and those who are opposed to it, rather than make an effort to settle the dispute which would, I am most sure, fail. For my part, I think that deconstruction has a great deal to offer, and if nothing else it makes us aware of the limitations of the system (or any system) that we exist in. I prefer to share in deconstruction's celebration of infinite possibility, rather than become a victim of the depression which sometimes accompanies the knowledge that everything is constantly changing, and that nothing is as simple as we might like it to be. Indeed, the tendency for deconstructive interpretations to resist the traditional seems to be much more a demonstration of what is logically possible than it is indicative of any desire to throw semiology into a state of nihilistic paralysis. The second chapter, particularly the three sources I deal with in detail, is critical in nature but it should be made clear that I am making no case for the validity of the applications or the ramifications of their conclusions. My only concern here is the understanding of deconstruction that the texts display, and how effectively they use it. In the final chapter, out of necessity, I work from a particular perspective. By arguing that deconstructive free play, resulting in sometimes (radically) different interpretations, is *not* irreconcilable with an identifiable, recurring structure I suggest that there is a rational basis for what occurs within a musical system that produces different interpretations of a musical work (between performers) and that well as different interpretations of a single interpretation (between listeners). The problem seems to lie in the

articulation of the structure rather than *question* of its existence; for example we know how, why, what and where to cadence, but we fall short in describing any single (essential) quality that all cadences possess. Deconstruction can ultimately be a very powerful tool in examining this problem.

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> Poetry never takes language as a raw material ready to hand, rather it is a poetry which first makes language possible. Poetry is the primitive language of a historical people. Therefore, in just the reverse manner, the essence of language must be understood through the essence of poetry.
>
> Martin Heidegger

Pure poetry...

Mickey Knox

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DECONSTRUCTION: ORIGINS AND HISTORY

> The appropriate time for crystallizing objections to a critical theory comes after, not before, the effort at such understanding has been made.[1]

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The focus of this first chapter is the materials needed for a basic understanding of deconstruction. With this supple, subtle topic it will probably raise more questions than it answers, but is absolutely necessary. Firstly, I present the general ideas and characteristics of what deconstruction is and is not, its purpose(s), and its origins. Following that, I introduce the scholars who were instrumental in its creation and growth, in France and then the United States. Two figures of particular importance are Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. Also included in this chapter will be the terms which are crucial to deconstruction, focusing on Derrida's lexicon. This will occur, in large part, against the backdrop of Derrida's essay *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.*[2] Other writings by him will be used to elucidate where necessary. With regard to deconstruction in North America, I briefly survey the origins of the *Yale School*, and trace its

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[1]Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations* (Minneapolis, 1996), p. 45.

[2]Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in Writing *and Difference* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 278-293.

development through to the present day; here I pay particular attention to Paul de Man. Also included in this chapter are some examples of the criticism that deconstruction has faced, and the reply that deconstruction's proponents have given to that criticism. The first matter to be dealt with is to identify *what* deconstruction is.

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What is deconstruction?

> Deconstruction, the first time you hear the word, sounds like what happens when your four-year-old has a temper tantrum with his erector set.[3]

In *Signs of the Times*, David Lehman humorously demonstrates the effect that the word deconstruction can have on a first hearing. The time of first hearings for most is long gone, and deconstruction seems to be everywhere: from the sign in a bookstore which informs its clients that "shoplifters will be deconstructed" to the professor forced to switch offices because "Philosophy Hall is in a state of deconstruction."[4] Deconstruction is characterized by an inherent skepticism, particularly of any totalising argument which lays claim to transcendental meaning, identity, or originary structure. As such, it is most certainly aligned with many poststructuralist projects, sharing with them a profound suspicion concerning the traditional modes of understanding (the tendency to think in a linear

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[3]David Lehman, *Signs of the Times* (New York, 1991), p. 7.
[4]Ibid., p. 17.

way, the privileging of presence over absence, speech over writing, and similar other oppositions) that have dominated Western thought for centuries.[5]

For a time, deconstruction was used interchangeably with the term poststructuralism, a problem in terminology which has been solved by now generally considering both terms as working together under the larger project of postmodernism. Deconstruction seeks, above all else, to problematize these traditional modes, and is at its most effective when it does so in a radical fashion. In capable hands it is a rigorous and highly organized form of philosophical inquiry, textual analysis, or (more rarely) both. It focuses on displacing, dismantling, and almost destroying altogether the metaphysical tradition which originated with the first philosophers. To accomplish this task, it focuses on collapsing the binary oppositions upon which metaphysics depends, overturning them in order to put them into a new context. In this sense, deconstruction has a very strong Nietzschean quality to it. Many of the first proponents of deconstruction were steeped in Nietzschean thought, as well as other philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At its most extreme, deconstruction's motions are quite similar to Nietzsche's Zarathustra; its movements become a Dionysian dance celebrating limitless interpretation and an unrestricted semantic play.

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[5]More shall be said about these 'traditional modes' later in this chapter.

Today, deconstruction has "become something of a buzzword among commentators on the postmodern cultural scene," and has been applied to such diverse concerns as feminism, Marxism, law, ethics, politics, architecture, institutional pedagogy, and (finally perhaps) music.[6] From its use in detailed philosophical debate to its application to the great American pastime, the term has become so widely used that some believe it has lost much of its original impact.[7] Hardcore deconstructionists claim it has been effectively diluted by techniques that do not have the tenacity and attention to detail that are the hallmarks of classic deconstructive analyses. Commenting on literary theory's appropriation of the term, the philosopher Rudolph Gasché proposed that much of what passes for deconstruction is not really deconstructive at all.[8] At universities it is found primarily in courses relating to literature and critical theory, although it is now being taken more seriously by North American philosophy.

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Deconstruction on the Continent

The term *deconstruction* was coined in the late 1960's by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. In his hands, it was rooted in philosophy, particularly phenomenology, as well as structuralism and

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[6] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1982), p. 136.
[7] Lehman, p. 18.
[8] See Rudolph Gasché, "Deconstruction as Criticism," in *Glyph* Vol. 6 (1979), pp. 177-216.

psychoanalysis.[9] A concise summary of Derrida would be that he "...is an absolutist without absolutes."[10] Deconstruction for Derrida is not a method, nor is it a goal. It is more of a position — a perspective from which to observe and criticize the silent working of that philosophy which is behind the text, guiding its creation. He is a strategist and a tactician; an intellectual jack-of-all-trades who uses the means that the texts provide. Commenting on this, Gayatri Spivak has put it most succinctly: "...a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory."[11] His writings, due to their complex strategies, consume copious amounts of space. He will often focus on a single element of a text (especially an element which is usually overlooked) and examine many different aspects of it. As a result, his work has been said to inhabit the margins of the text, concentrating on details, especially those whose meaning is assumed. His analyses categorically, and purposefully, resist any attempt at summary. In his writings deconstruction becomes an analytical tool which is at times variously playful and remorseless, self-aware and self-reflexive, philosophical and literary. His work combines structuralism and semiotics with a radical extension of phenomenology's critique of metaphysics. His early studies in France included an intensive study of this critique, involving the works of Husserl, Heidegger, and Hegel.

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[9]Deconstruction, as a method, has been applied to both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Although there are certainly differences, I have chosen to follow the philosophical path.

[10]M.H. Abrams, "How to do Things with Texts," in *Partisan Review,* Vol. 46 (1979), p. 569.

[11]Gayatri Spivak, "In A Word: Interview," in *Differences 1.*, no. 2 (1989), p 127.

Deconstruction made its North American debut in 1966, with a paper *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* given by Derrida as part of a conference on structuralism which took place at the Johns Hopkins University. In this address, as well as one his early texts, *Of Grammatology*, he criticizes the structuralism and semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss.[12] He uses their concepts of sign and structure against their texts, as wedges to force open (but, importantly, not to create) the gap between the text and the rhetorical infrastructure which guides its expression; the difference between "what the text manifestly means to say and what it is constrained to mean."[13] He perceives Saussure's concept of structuralism as the death knell of Western metaphysics, the system which relies on what are illusory first principles such as origin and presence.[14]

To get a closer look at how Derrida's deconstruction works and to introduce terminology, I will use his essay *Structure, Sign, and Play;* at times it will be necessary to incorporate some of Derrida's other writings to clarify the meanings and use of his terminology. In this text Derrida focuses on various metaphysical concepts that he wishes to problematize.

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[12]Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1974).
[13]Norris, *Derrida*, p. 19.
[14]Vincent Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's* (New York, 1988), p. 271.

Metaphysics has its origins in the earliest philosophical thinkers. The term comes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, literally meaning *after* the physics.[15] Metaphysics usually refers to philosophical attempts to establish indisputable first principles as a foundation for all knowledge. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries its subject matter included the possibility of *a priori* knowledge, the nature of memory and abstract thought, and the reality of the external world. In more recent years the work of poststructural philosophers has questioned the assumptions and presuppositions of metaphysical thought.[16] They argue that metaphysics' dependence on continuity, causality, presence, and structure necessarily limit the possibilities of investigation of key issues which are (incorrectly) assumed.

The phenomenological branch of philosophy focuses a great deal of criticism on traditional metaphysics. However, in the final analysis it still seeks not to allow free play, but to "reawaken and restore metaphysics to its most authentic and original purpose: the

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[15]Since then the term meta- has become more commonly used as a prefix, usually meaning about, rather than the prepositional way in which Aristotle used it. He used the title *Metaphysics* because it followed his book *Physics*.

[16]Although I made the point (see p. 2) that postructuralism and deconstruction are not used interchangeably, Derrida's questioning of metaphysical thought is a characteristic that he shares with other poststructuralist thinkers (Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-François Lyotard) who are not deconstructionists.

determination of being as present."[17] Deconstruction continues the critique of metaphysics that had been begun by Nietzsche, and followed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Deconstruction's critique seeks to expose the problematical nature of metaphysics' key concepts, such as truth, presence, and origin. It argues that such concepts are based on illusory first principles, and in its stead proposes a system in which similarity is created first by difference. If deconstruction's aim, at least for Derrida, could be narrowed down to a single purpose, it would undoubtedly be to upset the erroneous presuppositions of metaphysics.

Structure, Sign, and Play itself is a relatively brief article, but in Derrida's longer texts it becomes more challenging to follow his train of thought. The key to this is to read beyond what Derrida seems to be saying to what is infinitely greater in importance — what he means by saying it. This is often made evident by the manner in which Derrida phrases his observations. Consider his opening remark:

> Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event," if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the form of structural — or structuralist thinking to suspect.[18]

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[17]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism* (New York, 1983), p. 40. Husserl founded his entire project upon the "living present" (*lebendige Gegenwart*).
[18]Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 278.

Traditionally, opening statements are more assertive than saying that something has *perhaps* occurred. This something that has (perhaps) occurred is an "event." Derrida puts quotations around this word which, as he immediately explains, is to avoid anyone assuming it to mean what it has traditionally meant. In other places in his writings, beginning with *Of Grammatology,* we often find words crossed out, put *sous rature* (under erasure). This is the practice of crossing out a word with a large black X, a technique found originally in the works of Heidegger. As an example, consider a portion of Derrida's argument on the sign from *Of Grammatology:*

> The "formal essence" of the sign can only be determined in terms of presence. One cannot get around that response, except by challenging the very form of the question and beginning to think that sign *is* that ill-named *thing,* the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: "what is...?"[19]

Since the word does not have *one* meaning (let alone the meaning intended by the author, *if* only one meaning is intended by the author) it is crossed out, but since it is necessary to have *something* there the word remains. Derrida demonstrates not only that the word does not have *one* meaning, but that is has no stable ordering of related meanings. Derrida is calling attention to the absence of meaning, rather than the presence of it. This is one example of how

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[19]Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 18-19. Some word processing programs now have the capability to put a word *sous rature.* Here the asterisks must suffice.

Derrida extends the project of phenomenology. For Heidegger, the meaning of a word he put under erasure was recoverable, but for Derrida it is indicative of *all* the possible meanings of the word, intended or coincidental. Derrida not only extends the phenomenological project, but also breaks with the assumption that the meaning of a word can be recovered.

What is this "event" that Derrida is talking about? He tells us that "Its exterior form would be that of a *rupture* and a redoubling."[20] The concept of *rupture* is one that falls under the general property of poststructuralism. Derrida is concerned about metaphysics' reduction of that structure, which he seeks to problematize:

> Up to the "event" which I wish to mark out and define, structure — or rather then structurality of structure — although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced...[21]

This concept of structure goes back to the beginnings of Western Science and Philosophy. Structure is rooted both in metaphysical ideology, and also in language on which it depends. The 'structurality

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[20]Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 278. The "redoubling" Derrida refers to indicates the historical non-linearity of the "event." Deconstruction shares with other postmodern projects an emphasis on genealogical, rather than linear, history. Derrida does not mention this redoubling again, but rather focuses on the idea of rupture.
[21]Ibid.

of structure' that Derrida refers to is neutralized, or reduced, by various metaphysical processes.[22] For now, he focuses on centering.

For Derrida, the history of Western thought is the history of the different expressions of the 'center,' and of the ideology of a 'presence' which can be found everywhere, lacking in no structure or being:

> The history of metaphysics, like the history of the west, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix... is Being as presence in all senses of this word.[23]

The list of these names is long, and demonstrates a common element within Western thought — it is so long that even here Derrida does not name them all.[24] The center, traditionally, is a point without which the structure cannot function properly:

> By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form.[25]

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[22]Other similar metaphysical processes include *presence* (referring the structure to a point of presence), and *origin* (giving the structure a fixed origin).

[23]Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 279.

[24]Ibid., pp. 279-80. "It could be shown that all names related to the fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence - eidos, arche, telos, energia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth."

[25]Ibid., pp. 278-9.

It is important to note that although Derrida criticizes this concept of structure (as well as similar concepts), with the self-professed intent of uprooting these structures, he is quick to point out that we cannot do without organization. We cannot even *conceive* of doing without such organizing principles, of which the center is only one, and consequently "the notion of a structure without center is unthinkable."[26] This clearly indicates that Derrida is not advocating a system which has no organizational structure. He begins with the suggestion that while the center allows signification to occur, it also closes the system off and, in the end, *prevents* play. The concept of center creates a paradox; it creates the play of the system, yet also shuts it down:

> Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality.[27]

Derrida wants to remove the constraints which the center places on the interaction of the signifying elements. This is the concept which Derrida terms *jeu* (free play); his detractors tend to use less hospitable terms such as intellectual nihilism. So the center that Derrida is keen to problematize has been placed under his microscope. This concept of center is contradictory; "the center is not

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[26]Ibid., p. 279.
[27]Ibid.

the center."[28] This exposes (rather than creates) the paradox of the center — its being both on the inside and on the outside, two places simultaneously. This is an inherent problem in metaphysical attempts to locate an originary center. The center is a supplemental structure, which is always attempting to compensate for an inherent incompleteness. This means that the center *cannot* exist completely in one place, but must constantly supplement itself.[29]

Now we return to the event that Derrida speaks about, which "presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought."[30] Once we have ascertained that metaphysical 'origins', 'centers', and 'presence' are illusory, our thinking must necessarily begin to change:

> Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought 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-substitutions came into play.[31]

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[28]Ibid.

[29]Derrida notes that this decentering, this thinking of the structurality of structure has "always already begun to proclaim itself and begun to work." It is most visible in the texts of Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger. Nietzsche's works carry on a sustained criticism of metaphysics. In his "critique of the concepts of Being and truth," he substitutes "the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without present truth)." This can also be found, in a more radical (and slightly different) form, in Heidegger's *destruction* of metaphysics, the destruction of the determination of Being as presence. Again, it is important to remember that just as we cannot do without structure (even if we could *conceive* of doing without it), we cannot do without metaphysics. Ibid., p. 280

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

Consequently, there *is* no portion of any structure which is exempt from the play of signification. All structures are equally susceptible to this play, and consequently they are all placed on equal footing. For Derrida, this meant that everything became discourse; the distance between writing (in the usual, functional sense) and literature was collapsed.[32] Also, and perhaps more importantly, the distance which philosophy had tried to keep between its ideology and its manner of expression had also been collapsed — philosophy was now another kind of writing.[33] The structure is, however, still necessary to facilitate discourse:

> 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; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.[34]

So Derrida realizes and accepts the fact that he cannot escape that system which he criticizes. What he *can* do though is stir things up a little. The particular word he uses in this regard is *sollicitare* (to make the whole tremble), to shake things up. One example that he uses to shake the metaphysics of presence is the concept of the sign, particularly the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure.

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[32]I use the word *discourse* in the same context as other poststructuralists, referring to any text or verbal (or aural, in music's case) signification.
[33]See Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida," in *New Literary History*. Vol. 10 (1978), pp. 141-60.
[34]Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 280-1.

The purpose of a sign is to unite a form and a concept, a *signifier* and a *signified.* There are three types of signs, which all have differing relationships of signifier to signified.[35] The most important is the symbol, where the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary.[36] The relationship is one that is fluid; it is dictated by difference creating apparent similarity — as opposed to difference being varying, multiple expressions of an underlying (i.e. metaphysical) unity. For signs to function properly in the linguistic system, they must necessarily differ from each other.

Derrida perceived the theories of Saussure as the termination point of traditional metaphysics. He calls this the *logocentric* system — "meant as a critical and unkind epithet." [37] *Logocentrism* described the form of metaphysics that understands writing as merely a representation of speech. For Derrida, the opposition between speech and writing functions like all such metaphysical binary oppositions; speech is seen as an embodying presence, whereas writing is considered secondary (and consequently supplementary). Communication by speech is privileged, because both the speaker and the listener must be present. This *seems* to guarantee

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[35]The other two types of sign are the index, where the relationship is causal (smoke coming from a piano means fire), and the icon, where the relationship is based on resemblance (a bust of Beethoven is designed to look like him).The symbol is different from the other two since the relationship between the signifier and the signified is based neither on causality nor resemblance.
[36]The exception to this is the imitative linguistic phenomenon onomatopoeia.
[37]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism,* (New York, 1983), p. 24.

understanding. Writing on the other hand, does not require the author (writer or speaker) to be present, which leaves the meaning of the message contained in that writing subject to multiple, and radically different interpretations, none of which are necessarily the one (or more) that the author had intended. Derrida asserts that writing is actually the origin of speech, and not the other way around. In short he wishes to destabilize the logocentric system.[38] Derrida seeks to dissolve the opposition between speech and writing. He does not simply wish to place writing over speech, since that would leave him with the same problem — only reversed. Simply to invert any hierarchical structure would leave the same exact problem with the exact same terms. There are two potential reading strategies Derrida suggests which can accomplish the deconstruction of this type of binary opposition, both equally viable: the critic can attempt a reading by repeating the original logocentric problematics and using the system against itself.[39] The other option is to step outside the system, and demonstrate the problematics of the logocentric system in another manner. In *Structure, Sign, and Play* he suggests both, since there is no crucial deciding factor which gave either any clear advantage over the other.[40]

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[38]Again, it is important to remember that there is no implication that it is possible to break out of the logocentric system, or that replacing it with another system would be any more successful in avoiding similar situations.
[39]This is comparable to Heidegger's strategy of destruction. Rudolph Gasché strongly stresses that they are *not* the same. See Gasché's "Deconstruction as Criticism," in *Glyph* Vol. 6, pp. 177-216.
[40]Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 293.

An important tool which Derrida used to help dismantle the logocentric system was called the *supplement*, based on the idea of supplementarity which I have already discussed. The supplement is "a mode of reading destined to distinguish the project of deconstruction."[41] All one has to do is to insert this supplement into any metaphysical binary opposition. The result was to dissolve the opposition into a new non-hiearchical situation where neither term was privileged; "an opposition that is deconstructed is not destroyed or abandoned but reinscribed."[42]

Derrida wishes to replace the logocentric system with what he calls *grammatology*:

> [Derrida's] grammatology displaces semiology. The text supersedes the book. The trace or arche-trace, a formation of writing and difference, takes the place of the sign.[43]

In grammatology, there is not only writing, but also *écriture*. The first is the words themselves, the second the system that produce them:

> ...consequently, we must hereafter distinguish between (1) logocentric writing, which names an instrument, a phonetic-alphabetic script, that conveys the spoken word, and (2) grammatological or poststructuralist writing

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[41]Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 283.
[42]Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (New York, 1982), p. 133.
[43]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism*, p. 26.

> (écriture), which designates the primary processes that produce language.[44]

Semiology's tripartite sign/signifier/signified is now obsolete:

> In place of Saussure's sign, Derrida installs the trace. Mysterious and imperceptible, the trace arises as a force and formation of writing. Like the quark in physics...the [pure] trace itself does not exist.[45]

The trace that Derrida speaks of is what is left of a word that has been put under erasure. The trace resembles a footprint in the snow, or a written word physically erased; It is identifiable only by where it is not — and it is all that remains of the originary metaphysical meaning of a word. Derrida's critique of the logocentric system within which all texts work leaves us with a very different view of presence than metaphysics has:

> We thus come to posit presence...no longer as the absolute matrix form of being but rather as a 'particularization' and 'effect'. A determination and effect within a system which is no longer that of presence but of différance.[46]

Before he launches into his analysis of another leading structuralist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, we finally encounter the word deconstruction.

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[44]Ibid., p. 26-7.
[45]Ibid., p. 28.
[46]Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 95.

> It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself. A problem of *economy* and *strategy*.[47]

To see how Derrida actually deconstructs a discourse, we need only to follow his discussion of the texts of Lévi-Strauss. Here Derrida first attempts to dissolve the binary opposition nature vs. culture.[48]

The duality of nature vs. culture has been discussed frequently by philosophers. The traditional view is that the innocence and peace of the archaic man's existence came to a point where it lacked something vital — a sense of community. This movement towards culture from nature provides the basis for viewing culture as supplementary, and secondary, to nature. Lévi-Strauss collapses this binary opposition by introducing a concept which can properly be called the property of neither nature nor culture: incest prohibition, which necessarily belongs to both nature *and* culture. Albeit it for different reasons, in both primitive and cultured societies incest is regarded as unacceptable.[49] But since it is the exclusive property of neither, the origin of incest prohibition is impossible to determine, since it is has to be in both places at once, but cannot be — there is no

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[47]Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 282.

[48]These binary oppositions (such as presence/absence, subject/object, self/other, etc.) are what ultimately make the metaphysical structures work. To neutralize them is to make the entire system aware of its shortcomings.

[49]"The incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural." Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 283.

original unsupplemented nature. Derrida, in a much larger example in *Of Grammatology,* attempts to collapse another binary opposition, the inherent privileging of speech over writing.

It has become clear that while deconstruction cannot (and does not wish to) break out of the system in which it exists, it can get rid of some of our illusions concerning that system. There are two paths that Derrida suggests we can take with regard to language: the first questions, rigorously and systematically, within the logocentric system; the second treats the existing system as a variety of tools which can still be used. In this second sense Derrida can be seen as a *bricoleur*; he uses whatever tools he finds in the text he is examining. His examples are chosen not because of their subject matter, but because of the way they express it, as well as the philosophical assumptions that their texts tacitly support. So we see Derrida working both to preserve the system (in his own particular way)*and* to criticize it.

But now a problem arises, one of the risks of the deconstructive enterprise. Derrida asks if all discourses are equivalent; if everything is discourse, are all discourses on a subject (or perhaps even on every subject) of equal value? Derrida simply shrugs his shoulders and says that the question can't be answered. Some would say that Derrida is simply avoiding the issue here. Derrida wants to point out the limitations of the system. If we remain ignorant of the flaws in

the system within which we work we can never examine the assumptions on which that system relies: "We condemn ourselves to transforming the alleged transgression of philosophy into an unnoticed fault within the philosophical realm. Empiricism becomes genus, and the faults are the species."[50] Derrida wants to stress that if we are to avoid the problems that the metaphysics of past generations have had it will not be by creating a new philosophy, which will only repeat the errors of those who came before us, but by learning to read philosophers in a certain way.

Derrida, in the second portion of *Structure, Sign, and Play*, arrives at what he terms a double postulation, which is present in all Lévi-Strauss' work. Although his structuralism claims to be a critique of empiricism, there is no text by Lévi-Strauss which is not an empirical essay. As such, they can always be completed, or invalidated, by new information. Any discourse which claims to be definitive is mistaken. Totalization becomes an impossibility, "sometimes defined as useless."[51] What we are left with, then, is a semantic field of non-totalization, which can be determined by means of play. The important difference is not in the infinite nature of the semantic field (which is, metaphysically speaking, theoretically possible, but practically impossible to reach within a lifetime) but *by the nature of that field.* This field is what Derrida calls *différance*,

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[50]Ibid., p. 288.
[51]Ibid., p. 289.

and the movement of this field is the *supplement*, which we have already encountered.

Différance is, arguably, Derrida's most crucial term. Much like the term deconstruction itself, it is not easily defined. Christopher Norris provides a succinct description:

> In short, *différance* is the upshot of a long and meticulous process of argument, such that it cannot (or should not) be wrenched out of context for the purposes of ad hoc definition. [52]

Différance has its origins in the difference of Saussure. Derrida's explanation serves a most appropriate introduction to the concept, and is worth quoting in full:

> The verb "to differ" [différer] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalization* that puts off until "later" what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. Sometimes the different and sometimes the deferred corresponds [in French] to the verb "to differ." This correlation, however, is not simply one between act and object, cause and effect, or primordial and derived.[53]

In some instances then, we see différance as expressing difference (the qualities of identity which make something distinct) and deference (that which delays and postpones). There is also a

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[52]Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 15.
[53]Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* (Evanston, 1973), p. 129.

connection to the word's Latin root *differre* — to scatter or disperse.[54] Although it does bear a similarity to Saussurian difference, it is somewhat extended:

> With its a, *différance* more properly refers to what in classical language would be called the origin or production of differences, the *play* [*jeu*] of differences.[55]

Différance is related to, and is a combination of, many diverse influences. The list includes many of those who have contributed to Derrida's thought, and explains his perception of the difference between his différance and theirs:

> *Différance* is neither a word nor a concept. In it, however, we shall see the juncture — rather than the summation — of what has been most decisively inscribed in the thought of what is conveniently called our "epoch": the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure's principle of semiological difference, differing as the possibility of [neurone] facilitations, 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.[56]

Derrida seems to find any attempt to give différance a concrete definition indicative of the strain of metaphysical thinking which creates the illusion of univocal, or alternately transcendental, meaning:

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[54]Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 49.
[55]Ibid.
[56]Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 130.

> Imprisoned within the closure of metaphysical thinking and locked into the necessity of naming, we reduce différance to a word or a concept; or, perhaps worse, we celebrate difference as a master name, a unique word, a founding concept.[57]

What he *does* give are some parameters: "We provisionally give the name *différance* to this *sameness* which is not *identical.* "[58] This sameness was for metaphysics that origin, center, or presence, which it sought to find.[59] Although for Derrida it is a concept which has multiple varying expressions, for others différance is an allusion to an "undecidable, nonsynthetic alternation between the perspectives of structure and event."[60]

Différance's purpose again is to help in problematizing the underlying foundations of metaphysical presuppositions:

> Because *difference* produced or constituted the sign, the status of linguistic presence, being, and origin were called into question...the relations between entities were not based on unity and continuity; rather, they were composed as differential and decentered formations.[61]

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[57]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism*, p. 43.

[58]Norris, *Derrida*, p. 129-130.

[59]Derrida's conception of this sameness is quite different from other philosophers, such as Edmund Husserl: "Where Husserl envisioned self-presence, Derrida sighted difference and written traces. For Derrida the living present was an effect of differences, of spacing, of writing." See Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 278.

[60]Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 97.

[61]Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 275.

This play of language calls into question notions of unity, coherence, presence, voice, structure, and center. The resulting difference between Saussure's difference and Derrida's différance is, as we have seen, one of *kind* and not of degree:

> ...structuralists take linguistics as a model and attempt to develop 'grammars'...that would account for the form and meaning of literary works; post-structuralists investigate the way in which this project is subverted by the works themselves. Structuralists are convinced that systematic knowledge is possible; post-structuralists claim only to know the impossibility of this knowledge.[62]

By claiming to 'know the impossibility of this knowledge', post-structuralist (i.e. deconstructionist) writing takes on a kind of skeptical self-awareness of its surroundings.

Derrida has now effectively begun to replace the metaphysical vocabulary of semiology with his own deconstructive lexicon:

> The logocentric-phonocentric tradition..privileges the spoken self-present word without seemingly questioning voice, presence, or sign. Derrida counters with writing [écriture], différance and trace.[63]

Near the end of *Structure, Sign, and Play*, he espouses a positive attitude, an attitude of *affirmation*:

> There are two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher,

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[62]Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 22.
[63]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism*, p. 44.

> dreams of deciphering a truth or origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries 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.[64]

Before concluding our look at Derrida's most crucial terms, we need to examine a group of words he terms *undecidables*. The meanings of these terms are at times contradictory, and they depend to a great degree on context for their meaning to be made clear.[65] Take, for example, the word *hymen*. Hymen, as a figure for marriage, represents both the accomplishment of the union as well as the physical membrane which keeps that union from taking place. What is intended can only be ascertained from the context in which it is used. Another term which has many different meanings is *pharmakon*, which comes from a family of terms meaning variously cure, remedy, and poison. Both these terms are found in Derrida's text *La Dissémination*, which is another undecidable term, and arguably the most important of this group.[66]

La Dissémination, published in 1972, is a text dealing with the condition of meaning. *Dissemination* is the word Derrida uses to

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[64]Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 272.
[65] It is worth noting that deconstructionists, in trying to prove their point, will resist choosing the meaning which best suits the context.
[66]Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Chicago, 1981).

describe the tendency of meaning to be unpredictable. Meanings created from différance are malleable ones, and their particular, contextualized meanings are described quite well by saying that they are scattered about, distributed in a somewhat random fashion. Although particular meanings can be argued for, there will never be an originary meaning or a situation where one interpretation has more value than another. The result is either the end of meaning, or a Dionysiac celebration of the infinite play of meanings:

> The effect of such semantic *dissemination* ... was to deracinate [uproot, rip out] the text, revealing inexhaustible possibilities for interpretation and the futility of logical orderings or totalizations.[67]

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Deconstruction in North America

> When he delivered his notorious critique of structuralism at the Johns Hopkins University Conference in the fall of 1966...Derrida opened the era of contemporary deconstruction for an American audience...[68]

While in France deconstruction was primarily a philosophical enterprise, deconstruction's most immediate application in North America was in literary criticism. For many in that field, deconstruction was less philosophical inquiry than it was a mode of

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[67]Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 286.
[68]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism*, p. 32.

intense textual analysis.[69] In the 1970's it was a topic which attracted an especially large amount of attention, creating a great deal of intense debate and a copious secondary literature. By the middle of the eighties there were "more books, articles, reviews, and conferences dedicated to explaining, assessing, applying and/or criticizing deconstructive criticism than any school or movement had received" since the 1930's.[70] Vincent Leitch has described four distinct stages in deconstruction's early growth in North America. The late 1960's-72 were the formative years, 1973-77 were years of debate and review, 1978-82 saw the dissemination (in its usual sense) and institutionalization of the school, and the fourth phase, from 1982, saw it spread to other areas: theology, literary pedagogy, politics, and music.[71]

When deconstruction came to North America in the late sixties, and began its rapid, infectious, spread across the continent, the center of the critical activity was what came to be called the Yale School. The list of scholars in this 'school' included: Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller. Two others who were not directly involved in the school but were highly influential were Eugene Donato and Joseph Riddel. North American

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[69] This is not to suggest that the two were mutually exclusive, but the direction that deconstruction took in North America was not what Derrida had expected.
[70] Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 302.
[71] Ibid., p. 269.

deconstruction concentrated on literature and interpreting literature, rather than extending phenomenology's critique of metaphysics:

> As a mode of textual analysis, contemporary deconstruction subverts almost everything in the tradition, putting in question received ideas of the sign and language, the text, the context, the author, the reader, the role of history, the work of interpretation, and the forms of critical writing.[72]

However it does share with philosophy, specifically its hermeneutic branch, a keen interest in the interpretation of written texts. This helped the school to earn its nickname of 'the hermeneutic mafia.' Today the school no longer exists. Paul de Man died in 1984, but his influence continues to be strong. Bloom and Hartman, were, in Hartman's words, even at the beginning "barely de-constructors," compared to de Man and Derrida who were the "Boa-deconstructors."[73] J. Hillis Miller has remained involved with deconstruction, working at the University of California at Irvine, which is also Derrida's primary American institutional affiliation. In any case, with deconstruction being spread so far around the continent in so many diverse disciplines, even if the school did still exist, maintaining any sense of control would be next to impossible.

In this context the work of the Yale school, with its interests residing for the most part in the field of literary criticism, caused

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[72]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism*, p. ix.
[73]Harold Bloom, et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York, 1979), p. ix.

deconstruction to become the heir apparent to what had been the dominating force in literary criticism for decades, the New Criticism:

> The only noteworthy differences between New Criticism and native deconstruction were the change from spatial to serial concepts of poetic structure, the shift from unity to heterogeneity as the dominant model of literary form, and the reluctance of the deconstructive school to produce textbooks, anthologies and pedagogical guides.[74]

While it is certainly beyond the purpose here to provide a detailed examination of the entire Yale School, a brief look at its different members will be productive in demonstrating the differences in personal perspective of deconstruction. By demonstrating the manifest approaches even at the outset of deconstruction's spread across North America, one can begin to appreciate how it could spread so far so fast, and become so different in its applications, not only from discipline to discipline, but also from scholar to scholar. Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman, being, self-confessedly, 'barely deconstructors,' will be left out except to say that Bloom "...shared with Miller and de Man the insight that tropes were the source of misreading,"[75] and that their deconstructive analyses work at the "giddy limits" of logical possibility.[76]

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[74]Leitch *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 306.
[75]Ibid., p. 296.
[76]For more on Bloom and Hartmann, see Norris, "Deconstruction 'On the Wildside'," in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1982), pp. 92-98.

J. Hillis Miller expressed his view of deconstruction most concisely in his conception of a *mise en abyme,* an abyss structure which suggests the possibility of infinite play of language. Miller's criticism merges the différance of Derrida and the criticism of de Man. For Miller, deconstruction is not so much something that someone does in a certain manner of analysis or interpretation of a text, but something that the text has already done for itself. His particular brand of deconstructive criticism focuses on canonical texts, where he uncovers the deconstructive element in a text by intensely close examination. He also came up with a succinct definition of difference (Derrida's différance) which is worth quoting in full:

> Each leaf, wave, stone, flower or bird is different from all others. Their similarity to one another arises against the ground of this basic dissimilarity. In a similar way, language is related to what it names across the gap of its incorrigible difference from its referent [from nature and the linguistic moment]. [77]

Paul de Man was born in Antwerp, Belgium. His teaching career involved three institutions: Cornell, Johns Hopkins, and Yale. The most dominant words in his lexicon are "rhetoric" and "language." In his first major text on the subject, *Blindness and Insight,* "literature" appears as a kind of language which is privileged because it is language not blind to its own statement. In addition, he asserts that

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[77]J. Hillis Miller, "Nature and the Linguistic Moment," in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination,* p. 450.

misinterpretation, or misreading, is the very condition of all discourse. His work often focuses on a single trope (symbol, allegory, metaphor, etc.). Deconstruction for de Man necessitates the careful drawing out of those moments when what a text says seems at odds with the rhetoric in which it says it — such moments are examples of what de Man calls 'undecidability' or 'unreadability.' This, for some:

> relieved [the critic] of the responsibility to be right, replacing it with the responsibility to be interesting.[78]

But de Man was as rigorous and intelligent a critic as any scholar has ever been. His meticulous analyses "...puts the critic in the position not of skeptical detachment but of unwarrantable involvement, asserting the indispensability of causation while denying it any rigorous justification."[79]

In his early texts he does not practice deconstructive criticism, but rather he focuses on "literary language in general."[80] In later texts, especially *Allegories of Reading*, he focuses on the literary or rhetorical as the impossibility of deciding on sheerly linguistic grounds alone between a literal and a figurative meaning of a text, because all literature was figurative, and reading of it was *a priori* misreading. A brief example which is indicative of de Man's style is

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[78]Loesberg, *Aestheticism and Deconstruction : Pater, Derrida, and De Man* (Princeton, 1991), p. 5
[79]Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 88.
[80]Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, p. 273.

his analysis of Yeats' *Among School Children.*[81] In it he uses only a single phrase to interrogate the meanings that traditionally have been ascribed to this work.

In his analysis de Man focuses in on the last line: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" Traditionally this line has been interpreted as being "the potential unity between form and experience, between creator and creation."[82] De Man admits that there are many elements which strengthen that traditional reading, such as "the organic beauty of the tree, stated in the parallel syntax of a similar rhetorical question, or the convergence, in the dance, of erotic desire with musical form."[83] Where de Man begins to diverge from the traditional readings is in his interpreting this last line not as a rhetorical question, but as a literal one:

> It is equally possible, however, to read the last line literally rather than figuratively, as asking with some urgency the question we asked earlier within the context of contemporary criticism: not that sign and referent are so exquisitely fitted to each other that all difference between them is at times blotted out but, rather, since the two essentially different elements, sign and meaning, are so intricately intertwined in the imagined "presence" that the poem addresses, how can we possibly make the distinctions that would shelter us from the error of identifying what cannot be identified?[84]

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[81]Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, 1979), pp. 11-13.
[82]Ibid., p. 11
[83]Ibid.
[84]Ibid.

What de Man accomplishes by deliberately resisting the traditional reading is to demonstrate the instability of the poem's meaning; that two (or more) readings cannot exist simultaneously:

> Neither can we say, as was already the case on the first example, that the poem simply has two meanings that exist side by side. The two readings have to engage in direct confrontation, for the one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it. Nor can we in any way make a valid decision as to which of the readings can be given priority over the other; none can exist in the other's absence. There can be no dance without a dancer, no sign without a referent. On the other hand, the authority of meaning engendered by the grammatical structure is fully obscured by the duplicity of a figure that cries out for the differentiation that it conceals.[85]

De Man succeeds in problematizing any attempt to get a firm grip on what Yeats' poem means. For critics this problematizing is more than slightly irritating; David Lehman vents some of his 'deconstructive' frustration on de Man:

> Ultimate unity gives way to ultimate meaninglessness...Thanks to the duplicity of rhetoric, the ground can be cut out from underneath any statement. Never shall the figurative and literal meanings coincide; never can the dancer and the dance be one. The remarkable thing about this deconstructive exercise is not that it contradicts our experience of the poem but that it displays the critic's monumental conceit; it depicts Yeats as no more than an unwitting mouthpiece for the theories of Paul de Man.[86]

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[85]Ibid., p. 12.
[86]Lehman, *Signs of the Times*, p. 131.

Whether or not one believes deconstructive reading to be 'good close reading' or giving way to 'ultimate meaninglessness', the concept of every reading/interpretation being mis-reading/mis-interpretation brings us to an interesting point. The idea of having one meaning for a text has certainly been damaged beyond repair. Also, as de Man said, the possibility of having a plurality of meanings (two or more meanings existing in a stable fashion at one time) is not viable. The value of an interpretation becomes not its 'correctness' but its validity (ascertained by the rigor and logic of the interpreter) and its productiveness. De Man distinguished between valid and invalid, and good and bad misreadings. A bad misreading resembles a sort of interpretive dead end, while a good misreading "produces another text which itself can be shown to be an interesting misreading, a text which engenders additional texts."[87] His work resembles Derrida's in its quest to search out and neutralize the hierarchical oppositions within texts and to reveal the linguistic and philosophic grounds upon which those hierarchies are built. He, like Derrida, problematized and undermined the rhetorical (logocentric) system and yet also preserved it. They are different thinkers, with different objects, but they nonetheless have common interests:

> ...while Derrida brings philosophy to bear on literary language and de Man approaches philosophic issues from the problem of literary language, ultimately their work does participate in a coherent intellectual project,

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[87]Paul de Man, "Nietzsche's Theory of Rhetoric," in *Symposium* 28 (1974), p. 51.

> distinguishable from theories that have transformed it into a mere method of reading.[88]

The charge of irrational criticism, if it applies to any of the American deconstructors, certainly does not apply to de Man:

> These critics are not tragic or Dionysian in the sense that there work is wildly orgiastic or irrational. No critic could be more Apollonian than Paul de Man.[89]

The above scholars were influential not only in bringing deconstruction to attention, but also for teaching a whole new generation of North American scholars. These include, among others; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Shosana Feldman, Jeffrey Melman, Marjorie Levinson, Andrew Parker, and Barbara Johnson. This second generation of scholars demonstrates the varying directions that post-seventies deconstruction has taken. Johnson, a student of de Man, is one of the strongest representatives from this group. Her lines of inquiry are indicative of some of the directions that deconstruction has taken in the 1980's, relating it to political concerns, feminist literature, African-American writing, and polemics and patriarchy. Spivak, the translator of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, has also worked extensively in feminist and cultural studies, including colonialism and phallocentrism.

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[88]Loesberg, *Aestheticism and Deconstruction : Pater, Derrida, and De Man*, pp. 7-8

[89]Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 23.

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Criticism of Deconstruction

In North America, the major objection to deconstruction was in response to how it divorced the human element from the interpretation of the literary work:

> After the mid-70's complaints began to mount against deconstruction's apparent anti-mimetic and antiexpressive textuality, which cut off the literary work from the world and the author and inhibited valuable ethical and emotional responses from readers.[90]

As a result their criticism was likened to "... an ultimate mode of interior decoration."[91]

The objections to deconstruction all seem to share common ground:

> ...this prospect of never achieving anything final, of always being at the mercy of posterity's deconstruction reinterpretations, is repugnant to the normal philosophical mind.[92]

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[90]Leitch, *Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's, p.* 302.
[91]Loesberg, *Aestheticism and Deconstruction : Pater, Derrida, and De Man*, pp. 4-5 .
[92] Richard Rorty, "Derrida on Language, Being, and Abnormal Philosophy," in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 74 (1977), p. 681.

> [Derrida] has no interest in bringing "his philosophy" into accord with common sense. He is not writing a philosophy. He is not giving an account of anything; he is not offering a comprehensive view of anything.[93]

Deconstruction has come under attack from both the political right and left for its tendency to call any kind of value system into question. American scholars such as Richard Rorty and M. H. Abrams are only two of many who were quick to criticize deconstruction for the intensity of its skepticism. The reason why this criticism seems to be so strong is that it strikes at such a fundamental level; it is viewed by many as an active intellectual nihilism, seeking out and destroying any kind of foundation on which meaningful structures can be built. Rorty claims that it is simply irrational, it merely plays with words in order to confuse and confound:

> Why does it help to rub our noses in the shapes of the letters on the page, our ears with the way words sound when mispronounced...[94]

The criticism against Derrida, like that against deconstruction in general, has been directed more at the consequences of his ideology than at his intellectual capability. Even his staunchest of opponents recognize the rigor and intellectual dexterity with which Derrida weaves his arguments. One of the most common observations (even if it is superficial) about his style of writing is that, while virtuosic, it

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[93]Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida," in *New Literary History*. Vol. 10 (1978), p. 147.
[94]Rorty, "Derrida on Language, Being, and Abnormal Philosophy," p. 680.

may dazzle but fails to have a point. In one of his well known critical essays, Abrams accuses Derrida's deconstruction of being

> ...a bootstrap operation, a deliberate exercise in ultimate futility, in a genre of writing he has almost single-handedly invented — the serious philosophy of the absurd.[95]

John Searle's comment on Derrida's philosophy is somewhat less subtle, asserting that he is "the sort of philosopher who gives bullshit a bad name."[96] Rorty agrees that Derrida treats philosophy in a detrimental fashion, blurring all the distinctions between philosophy and literature:

> One can see Derrida as a philosopher of language whose work parallels the later Wittgenstein's, or as a disciple of Heidegger striving to outdo his master, or as a writer who is helping us to see philosophy as a kind of writing rather than a domain of quasi-scientific inquiry.[97]

The most common concern, and by far the more important one, concerns the central ideological thrust of deconstruction: if language, metaphysics, and consciousness really are structured by difference, then there can be no solid foundation, no fixed point of reference, no authority or certainty, either ontological or interpretive. *Everything is to be put into question.* Consequently, for many people deconstruction came to represent a powerful antihumanist force,

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[95]Abrams, "How to Do Things With Texts," in *Partisan Review,* Vol. 46 (1979), pp. 573-4.
[96]John Searle, quoted in *Deconstructive Variations* (Minneapolis, 1996), p. 51.
[97]Rorty, "Derrida on Language, Being, and Abnormal Philosophy," in *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 74 (1977), p. 673.

because of its skeptical attitude towards entrenched theological theories of truth, reference, and/or meaning.[98]

The advocates of deconstruction counter the charge of intellectual nihilism by stressing that deconstruction wants only to rid the texts of any illusory first principles, to be aware of its position within the system which governs it, at best to cut the umbilical cord between the philosophical system which had created it and governed it, but which is no longer necessary in order for the grammatological system to work. It has been argued in various places that deconstruction:

> ...does not undo all constraints of logic and reason in favour of a nihilist free play, but rather identifies a necessary contradiction within philosophy's ambition to offer foundational rules governing all knowledge... It entails recognizing the conflicting necessities both to ground thought and knowledge and to include within that grounding its own negation.[99]

Against the charge of irrationalism, the objection is answered by the claim that deconstruction seeks to problematize the system within which it works:

> It is not a question of rejecting the rational in favor of the irrational...or the signifier to the exclusion of the signified but of attempting to develop critical modes in which the concepts

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[98]These more serious objections have been addressed especially effectively by Rudolph Gasché, see especially his most recent text *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, 1994).

[99]Loesberg, *Aestheticism and Deconstruction Pater, Derrida, and De Man*, p. 7.

> which are the products of ... authority are inscribed within a larger textual system.[100]

At the end of the day the gap appears to be unbridgeable; the proponents of deconstruction stand on one side of an ideological gulf:

> As prophet, Derrida presents to us deconstructive man - who accepts in joy and affirmation the play of the world and the innocence of becoming, who affirms the world of signs and the activity of interpretation, who neither pesters the work for truth nor indulges the dream of origins, who traces around the center the free play of signifiers and the tendential productions of structure, who writes off man and humanism, who denounces the old logocentric wizardry and passes joyously beyond. Cold and remorseless, deconstructive man assaults the old sensibility and subverts traditional foundations. Semiology, a recent formation of the logocentric era, is savaged: deconstruction offers us an affront of joy and affirmation.[101]

The opponents gaze across from the other side:

> ... as everyone knows who has kept in touch with the latest Paris fashions, [the deconstructive man] is not the man he used to be. He is a wraith of his old self, stripped of everything human, as part of a systematic dehumanizing of all aspects of the traditional view about how a work of literature comes into being, what it is, and what it means.[102]

The nineties seem to have become the age of "deconstruction and x," with x being topic of choice, and where the meaning of the term has

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[100]Culler, *On Deconstruction,* p. 61.
[101]Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism,* p. 38.
[102]Abrams, "How to Do Things With Texts," p. 566.

become so widespread that it often appears quite dissimilar from its original conceptions — due at times to the specific requirements of the particular discipline, and all too often to the misconceptions of those who use the term. This brings me to the issue of how musicology has treated deconstruction.

DECONSTRUCTION AND MUSICOLOGY

> In it's heyday, positivistic musicology — a handmaiden of exclusionary abstract reason — would not make any place for dialectic or deconstruction. If...these alternative modes of reasoning do not by definition exclude the abstract mode, then the new musicology has no need to repay the old musicology in kind.[1]

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In this second chapter I examine how deconstruction has been treated in musical circles, beginning with a general survey, and dealing later with three sources in particular: Steve Sweeney-Turner's introduction to deconstruction, *Speaking Without Tongues;* Lawrence Kramer's application of deconstruction as found in his texts *Music as Cultural Practice* and *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*; and Rose Rosengard Subotnik's *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society.*[2] The first of these sources is an article in which Steve Sweeney-Turner demonstrates the difficulties in presenting the tenets of deconstruction briefly. Lawrence Kramer's concept of deconstruction is still evident in the more recent of the two works, however his *Music as Cultural Practice: 1800-1900* is more explicit in its presentation of deconstruction. A consideration of

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[1]Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations* (Minneapolis, 1996), p. xxvii.

[2]Steve Sweeney-Turner, "Speaking Without Tongues," in *Musical Times*, Vol. 86, April 1995, pp. 183-186. Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley, 1995) and *Music as Cultural Practice : 1800-1900* (Berkeley, 1993). Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations* (Minneapolis, 1996).

the second chapter of Subotnik's recent *Deconstructive Variations,* "How Could Chopin's A-Major Prelude be Deconstructed?" completes this chapter. My discussion of this essay will demonstrate how an informed use of deconstruction can be a powerful tool for musical analysis.

Deconstruction has been used in an increasing number of articles, conference papers, and books on music. Even with this rapidly growing number of sources that make use of it, the references to theoretical models for the most part are in passing, parenthetical or embedded in footnotes. Examples of this are the collections of essays *Disciplining Music*, *Developing Variations*, and most recently *Deconstructive Variations.*[3] Carolyn Abbate, in *Unsung Voices*, mentions deconstruction, but only insofar as she wishes to separate herself from it.[4] Ruth Solie's references to deconstruction are not surprising, being contained in a preface entitled "On Difference," in a text called *Musicology and Difference.* Her focal point is identity politics, particularly gender and sexuality.

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[3]Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *Disciplining Music* (Chicago, 1992), Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations* (Minneapolis, 1991) and *Deconstructive Variations* (Minneapolis, 1996).

[4]"Speaking for voice means speaking against certain poststructuralist critiques of language, and may well serve to define the ways in which arguments by analogy from literature or language to music, or from literary criticism to music criticism, are undermined by fundamental differences between music and (literary, written) text." Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton, 1991), p. 29.

References to feminism are frequent, particularly "écriture féminine."[5]

Disciplining Music also makes cursory references to deconstruction, particularly in connection with the binary opposition of high and popular culture. The liberation from this particular opposition "comes only with the unmasking of the supporting oppositions — the reversal of their polarities, their deconstruction."[6] But even these cursory remarks can be misleading. With regard to binary oppositions, we know that the purpose of deconstruction is to *temporarily* displace and reinscribe the terms in a new framework, not simply to 'reverse the polarities,' since that leaves us in the same metaphysical bind — only facing in a different direction. There are however, many insights to be had in this volume. Consider this astute remark:

> Of course it is possible, as some music theorists and critics are beginning to do, to subject the language of common-practice tonality to a "deconstructionist" analysis in an effort to show here that the "grammatical rules" are purely conventional in nature and thus must ultimately be considered arbitrary and illusory. Even if accomplished, however, this would in no way affect how the contemporary composers themselves, and their

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[5]Although 'écriture' has obvious connections with Derrida, the concept of *écriture féminine* was developed by the French feminist Hélène Cixous. See Ruth Solie, ed., *Musicology and Difference* (Berkeley, 1993), p. 4.

[6]Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *Disciplining Music* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 19-20.

> listeners, conceived of musical language during the common practice period.[7]

In his epilogue, Bohlman is probably right in saying that more than a few people do not want deconstruction, and its consequent plurality, within musical scholarship at all:

> ...there may even be a few who long for the hegemony of the German *die Musik*, the definite article staving off all onslaughts against the authority of the singular. But musics are among us. They have been for quite a while and they are here to stay.[8]

One would hope, however, that the number of scholars who would wish for anything resembling *die Musik* would be decreasing. Deconstruction certainly seeks no hegemony, for if it did it would be guilty of hypocrisy of the worst kind. If it opens up new meanings for new audiences, who are we to deny them? For, as Bohlman says:

> Musicology maintains "music" as its object, but the different disciplines of musicology come to understand what music is in different ways. Accordingly, the object, "music," cannot be a single phenonmenon; it cannot have universally sanctioned meanings.[9]

Music and the Politics of Culture, a collection of essays edited by Christopher Norris, has, in addition to passing references to deconstruction of a similar nature to the other texts mentioned so

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[7]Ibid., p. 63.
[8]Ibid., p. 197.
[9]Ibid., p. 201.

far, two items of interest. Alastair Williams' "Music as Immanent Critique" uses Derrida's deconstructive thought in connection with Adorno's *Negative Dialectic* "as a means of expanding Adorno's frame of reference, and as a particularly fluid methodology or praxis, which is germane to...musical concerns."[10] This combination of Adorno's thought with that of Derrida is not new,[11] but for those not familiar with one or the other there is a general similarity between the two thinkers: "The crux of Derrida's argument is that metaphysics imposes the necessity of its own critique; this is precisely the position that Adorno takes with respect to art."[12] The excellent material that this essay covers is lucid and concise.

In another essay in this collection, Christopher Norris' "Utopian Deconstruction: Bloch, de Man and the Politics of Music," we find reference again to Adorno, but this time in connection with de Man rather than Derrida. The work here reflects what can only be called a superior grasp of the subject of deconstruction.[13] The following quote describing Adorno's work could just as easily be attributed to many of de Man's deconstructive readings:

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[10]Christopher Norris, ed., *Music And The Politics of Culture* (New York, 1989), pp. 187-225.
[11]See Rose Rosengard Subotnik's 'The Historical Structure: Adorno's "French" model for Music Criticism of Nineteenth Century Music," in *19th Century Music*, Vo. 2, No. 1, pp. 36-60 and "The Cultural Message of Musical Semiology," in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 4, pp. 741-768.
[12]Norris, p. 192
[13]Ibid., pp. 305-348.

> ...Adorno's 'negative dialectics', a relentlessly self-critical habit of thought which interrogates its own procedures at every stage, resisting any kind of residual attachment to method or system.[14]

This, however, is to be expected. Norris is best known to musicology as the author of a work on Shostakovitch; but he also (literally and figuratively) wrote the book on de Man, as well as on Derrida.[15]

Paul Attinello has suggested an interesting use of deconstruction which works retroactively. In *Rebellion in Darmstadt: The Anti-Serial Reaction, 1958-68*, he focuses on the deconstructive element "with compositions such as Schnebel's *dt 31,6* in 1958 and Berio's *Sinfonia* in 1968."[16] In compositions from this decade he finds frequent examples of "the deconstruction of language and gesture."[17] He perceives the work of composers such as Schnebel, where "the major deconstruction of the piece is right in the foreground,"[18] as a reaction to the "high modernism" of the serial compositions of Boulez and Stockhausen some years earlier.[19]

This type of "retroactive deconstruction" demonstrates deconstruction's similarity to the general traits of postmodernism in

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[14]Ibid., p. 332

[15]See Christopher Norris *Derrida* (Cambridge, 1987) and *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (New York, 1988).

[16]This paper was given at the national conference of the American Musicological Society, in New York City, November 1995. The author would like to express his appreciation to Paul Attinello for providing a copy.

[17]Attinello, p. 3.

[18]Ibid., p. 3.

[19]Ibid., p. 2.

musical works: compositions consisting of fractured pieces and raw juxtapositions of musical elements rather than attempts at unifying the form. These musical deconstructions work against the rhetorical system that controls the musical text, in this case the serialism of the preceding generation of composers. The problem is that with the works Attinello discusses following so immediately, it might be more appropriate to say that these composers are reacting to something which they *perceive* to be controlling the text; something that is at best trying to exert its influence, rather than a tradition as embedded and longstanding (for centuries rather than years). The fact that these works are composed with the intention of being heard as "deconstructive" certainly goes against the grain of Miller's idea that texts deconstruct themselves, and also breathes new life into the composer (read: author) who has been (at least in literature) 'dead' for decades:

> He [the composer] is...constantly required to undermine the comprehensibility of his own texts, speaking paragraphs where all the vowels are altered, or where the words are in a reverse order. The entire text is overladen with musical instructions, where the speaker is required to vary volume, pitch level and tempo in ways that do not emphasize the text, but dismantle it and scatter the fragments.[20]

Attinello intends this view of the work of Schnebel to be one that is liberating, closer to Derrida's joyous Nietzschean dance than to a more morose, nihilistic view of deconstruction:

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[20]Ibid., pp. 4-5 .

> We might recall that the proponents of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction have generally understood their larger cultural project in terms of liberation. I suggest that ...Schnebel's dismantling of his own compositions are intended to be liberating.[21]

Speaking Without Tongues: Steve Sweeney-Turner

Deconstruction is still, over two decades after being introduced to North America, unfamiliar territory for musicians. *The Musical Times* sought to remedy this with a short article introducing this topic to their readers by way of Steve Sweeney-Turner's four page essay, *Speaking Without Tongues.*[22] My examination of this article will demonstrate that presenting an introduction to deconstruction, particularly where that introduction must be very concise, is quite a difficult task to undertake. I begin by surveying the material that Sweeney-Turner presents, and then suggest an alternative way to present the basic materials of deconstruction when presented with a similar situation.

The first, and greatest, difficulty with which Sweeney-Turner has to contend is his limited space. He has only a few pages to work with, which is hardly enough to include everything of crucial importance. Limited space is certainly not an issue which only Sweeney-Turner has had to face when writing for a professional

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[21]Ibid., p. 6.

[22]Steve Sweeney-Turner, "Speaking Without Tongues," in *Musical Times*, Vol. 86, April 1995, pp. 183-186.

publication, but still one quickly gets the feeling that this has been detrimental to journalism's general use of the word deconstruction, which has not been limited to musical journals:

> Often the press on deconstruction pushes its points without benefit of preliminary readings or familiarity with fundamentals.[23]

Sweeney-Turner opens by citing a common objection not only to deconstruction, but academia in general, which often does little to make itself understood by the non-academic community:

> The implication being that what could not be ground down for busy people into bite sized pellets must in some sense be bogus or at least 'merely academic.'[24]

He is not the first to observe how commonly the term deconstruction has come to be criticized in contemporary academe: "...slam some Derrida in the microwave and Presto — *Fast Food Theory*, no bother no fuss, no effort..."[25] David Lehman has elsewhere suggested that this drive-through version of deconstruction also applies to contemporary culture in general.[26] But although Sweeney-Turner realizes the limitations that his constricted space imposes, he does make a helpful suggestion:

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[23]Vincent Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism* (New York, 1983), p. xi.
[24]Marian Hobson "Dead and Read," in *the Times Higher Education Supplement* (September 2, 1994) quoted in Sweeney-Turner, p. 183.
[25]Sweeney-Turner, p. 183.
[26]David Lehman, *Signs of the Times* (New York, 1991), pp. 15-64.

> ...there might be a certain amount of value in attempting to serve up deconstruction Macdonalds-style, so long as we realize that our MacTheoryburger will not be anywhere near as meaty as a plate of unreprocessed Derrida - T-bones and all. [27]

Sweeney-Turner then introduces Derrida and mentions three of his central texts: *Of Grammatology, Writing and Difference,* and *Différance.* After introducing Derrida, Sweeney-Turner promptly suggests:

> ... a short detour into traditional philosophical concepts will be required in order to finally arrive at the links between music and deconstruction.[28]

Here he talks briefly about the generalities of metaphysics, and then embarks on a discussion of the philosophers Hegel and Pythagoras. His tour of 'traditional philosophy' being finished, Sweeney-Turner moves on to musical sources. He cites Susan McClary, who "identifies a dialectical relationship within sonata forms."[29] To engage in a debate of deconstructive dialectics is most certainly *not* introductory material.

What follows this is the material that the person new to deconstruction truly needs. Sweeney-Turner deconstructs the simple oppositional phrase "All Wogs start at Calais," in order to

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[27]Sweeney-Turner, p. 183.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid., p. 184

demonstrate an actual, if simple, example of deconstruction.[30] While the phrase itself is not subtle, Sweeney-Turner uses it to get the point across very effectively:

> The opposition upon which this phrase is based is...'Brits' vs 'wogs.' In other words, 'Brits' are 'not-wogs' and 'wogs' are 'not-Brits.' 'Brits' are...'good', whereas 'wogs' are...'bad,' and never the twain shall meet. But who are the 'wogs?' They...include *all* non-Brits...and any other derogatorily labelled group we care to throw in. In other words, the term 'wog' is not a singularity, but contains a vast multiplicity....In this way, oppositional thought chooses one element from a vastly multiple reality and reductively categorizes all other elements under the heading of a dirty little negative: '*all* wogs start at Calais.[31]

Having gone through this practical example, we come to his "recipe for deconstruction."[32] He identifies three distinct stages:

> 1. Engagement: locate within a text... the oppositional structures on which it is based
>
> 2. Reversal: provisionally maintain the structure of the opposition, but reverse the polarity of its hierarchy, thus destabilizing it from within its own structure
>
> 3. Displacement: use the instability created in step two in order to fully collapse the hierarchy between the two poles of the opposition, thus setting them both 'free' from the structure of the opposition...We thus exchange a positive and a negative for a whole field of *affirmative* terms.[33]

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[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Ibid., p. 183.
[33]Ibid., p. 184.

This 'recipe,' as well as his practical example 'All Wogs start at Calais,' is concise and easy to understand. To argue with specific points of it would be to argue relatively minor points about what deconstruction is, a line of inquiry which would go further than an introduction should pursue.

The observations Sweeney-Turner provides on deconstruction's aims are mostly correct, but are slightly misleading:

> Deconstruction aims to adopt such stereotypes from a cultural heritage in order to interrogate them. In engaging with a binary opposition, one accepts its structure merely as a provisional stage which will eventually (hopefully) lead to the dissolution of that structure. Deconstruction is a form of theoretical intervention.[34]

The "dissolution of that structure" is somewhat misleading by implying that deconstruction makes it possible to 'break free' of the system that it works within is something that is simply not possible.

We now move back to Derrida again, and Sweeney-Turner makes an astute point about the dissolving of binary oppositions:

> "In other words. Derrida reverses the polarity of Rousseau's opposition, but without breaking its structure as such — it is destabilised from within."[35]

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[34]Ibid., p. 183.
[35]Ibid., p. 185.

To invoke and explain Derrida's concept of the supplement, as mysterious as it may be, would make sense at this point. One might think that Sweeney-Turner's discussion of Hegel would have more value placed here, after the practical example of deconstruction. Sweeney-Turner makes the reference to the supplement all the more tantalizing, but only to a reader who already knows what he is talking about:

> Hence, if an origin is shown to be a supplement, and so on *ad infinitum*, then there are no 'true' or 'natural' origins at all - one can never trace anything back to its absolute source, since one will eternally be sliding along an infinity of regressing concepts. In other words, the beginning has been fully *displaced*. At this stage of displacement Rousseau's opposition has not only been turned on its head, but is now thoroughly disintegrated...[36]

To say that there are no absolute sources is quite correct, in the sense that any metaphysical origin, or any kind of univocal absolute is a concept that deconstruction wishes to do away with. Derrida's critique of metaphysics displays first and foremost a recognition of the complex differential network of meaning in which we exist, which has no origin, no center, no presence. Also, the implication of 'an infinity of regressing concepts' does not quite catch the complexity of the situation. 'An infinity of regressing concepts' implies, if it does not state, a certain historical linearity which runs

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[36]Ibid.

contrary to the postmodern emphasis on genealogical history, which focuses on ruptures rather than continuities.

Sweeney-Turner now turns his attention to the application of deconstruction to music. It would seem logical to go directly to those passages of Derrida's which use music as an example in order to begin to apply deconstruction. Sweeney-Turner here chooses the sections of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* which deal with Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages.* Here Sweeney-Turner, in discussing deconstruction's "direct bearing on musical aesthetics," seems to miss the mark entirely.[37] Sweeney-Turner's discussion may have a 'direct bearing' on musical aesthetics when you consider Rousseau's argument, but it has little, if anything, to do with Derridean deconstruction's application to music. His summary of Rousseau is neat and concise, but he fails to make the reader aware of Derrida's *purpose* in using Rousseau:

> Derrida never fully gets to grips with harmonic theory as such... His view of harmony is conditioned almost entirely by Rousseau...Derrida's idea of Rameau is actually Derrida's idea of Rousseau's idea of Rameau.[38]

If one were indulging in a study of musical aesthetics, particularly of Derrida's interpretation of harmonic theory, this third-hand, quite diluted view of harmonic theory would certainly be of concern.

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[37]Ibid., p. 184.
[38]Ibid., p. 185.

However, Derrida is simply not *interested* in harmonic theory *qua* harmonic theory, by Rousseau, Rameau, or anyone else. Derrida is using this as an example for the same reason as de Man did, "precisely because the claims for meaning are so grandiose..."[39] Sweeney-Turner has apparently misunderstood *why* Derrida chose Rousseau. Derrida certainly did *not* do it in order to deal with harmonic theory, and he admits that he tries to keep some distance from music in general:

> ... music is the object of my strongest desire, and yet at the same time remains completely forbidden. I don't have the competence, I don't have any truly presentable musical culture. Thus my desire remains completely paralyzed. I am even more afraid of speaking nonsense in this area than in any other.[40]

Whether the reader is convinced by Sweeney-Turner's arguments, or agrees with the manner in which he presents his material, the point is fairly clear that there is merit in further consideration of deconstruction in connection to music:

> What Derrida has to offer musicology is a powerful technique of critique, so long as we handle a deconstructive approach to music with the same care as he handles philosophy and literature with his own writing. The fact that Derrida himself is not 'competent' to write on musical matters does not disqualify those who are competent in both deconstruction and musicology from making the connection, and of using his

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[39]Abbate, *Unsung Voices,* p. 16.
[40]Jacques Derrida, quoted in Sweeney-Turner, p. 185.

techniques to provide alternative perspectives on musical thought.[41]

To present an introduction to deconstruction is a complex task, and to do so in four pages takes a considerable amount of bravery. The practical example, as well as the 'recipe' which he provides, are both quite good. Other than the three texts of Derrida's he mentions, he provides no additional mention of primary source material from Derrida, or any of the major American deconstructionists. What he *does* do, is to refer to his own Ph. D. thesis.[42] As a result, central sources are excluded which provide insightful summaries and enough references to keep even the most voracious reader busy for quite some time.[43] Considering the complexity of the subject which Sweeney-Turner is forced to oversimplify, the additional references would help give some direction for the reader who wished to further investigate.[44] In addition, the reader might be tempted to assume that there is nothing worthwhile going on in North America as far as deconstruction is concerned, which is definitely not the case.

Some of the material which Sweeney-Turner does provide could easily leave those uninitiated readers hanging. To those not

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[41]Ibid., p. 185.

[42]Ibid., p. 186.

[43]Many of these sources have been mentioned in Chapter 1. Christopher Norris' *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1982) and Vincent Leitch's *Deconstructive Criticism* (New York, 1982) are two whose addition to this article would have been helpful.

[44]Sweeney-Turner admits as much himself. "...the reader is warned of certain simplifications due to strictures of space." Sweeney-Turner, p. 186.

already versed in the origins of deconstruction, or in phenomenology, this discussion Sweeney-Turner embarks on prior to his practical example of deconstruction may leave them wondering exactly what the connection is. While Derrida's reading of Hegel's *Origin of Geometry* is one of his earliest texts (and one of his most intense readings of the phenomenological group of philosophers with whom Derrida dealt), there is no mention of Heidegger, Husserl, Plato, or Kierkegaard, all of whom (especially the first two) are probably more important to an introduction to Derrida's work. The implication to novices, the target audience for this article, is that Hegel has some special significance for Derrida, which in fact he does not. The implication for those familiar with phenomenology is clearer: Sweeney-Turner's rather lucid summary of Hegel's dialectical thought (his "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" concept) verges on Derrida's concept of supplementarity. But after only a brief introduction to Derrida, we are swept into traditional philosophy via Pythagoras and Hegel, and the connection is never made explicit. So with a quarter of his space taken up, there has been a brief paragraph containing biographical material on Derrida, a passing reference to binary oppositions and metaphysics which is vastly understated, and a mini-tour of philosophy which could have been better spent discussing Derrida's concepts and terminology rather than Hegel and Pythgoras.

What can realistically be expected in the amount of space Sweeney-Turner had to work with is minimal, so to stick to the basics while trying not to do to much damage by oversimplifying is vitally important. The names of the major figures and a select and varied list of primary and secondary sources (especially musical ones) can easily be provided. An overview of the aims and purposes of deconstruction, and a brief practical example followed by general theoretical principles is most necessary.

Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge: Lawrence Kramer

One of the most recent texts on the complex relationship of postmodern thought to musicology is Lawrence Kramer's *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge.* In it he discusses many postmodern trends and how they have affected musicology — strategies which are, like deconstruction, "localized, heterogeneous, contestatory, and contested,"[45] but which are also "new and badly needed means" of dealing with current issues in musical thought.[46] He cursorily mentions (in the broader context of postmodernism) concepts such as the decentered subject, metaphysics of presence, binary oppositions and dissemination. To repeat what he says about many of these would be superfluous. There is however, one reference worth mentioning which is located in the epilogue.[47] Here

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[45]Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley, 1995), p. 5.
[46]Ibid., p. 6.
[47]Ibid., p. 231.

he uses Derrida's text *Cinders* to demonstrate the status of the autonomous artwork, a being which "persistent sightings notwithstanding...is dead as Elvis":[48]

> Suffice it here to oversimplify by ignoring (as Derrida does not) the phonetic and rhetorical polyvalence of this essentially untranslatable phrase —untranslatable, you might say, even into French. Think only of cinders as metaphor, the figure of which "remains without remaining," that which, "however slightly one touches it, it falls, it does not turn into cinders, it gets lost down to the cinder of its cinders." Cinders burn but are not on fire; cinders are solid but have no substance; cinders are something but nothing, there but not there, a *trace* of what the fire has consumed and the *trace* that can be consumed by no fire.[49]

The first sentence in the above quotation shows both an understanding of and respect for the complexity of Derrida's work. Kramer is also quite careful to avoid the more negative aspects of deconstruction; he stands firm, warning that musicology must remember that music is as much something to be enjoyed as it is to be studied:

> This is not to say, emphatically not, that immediacy, musical or otherwise, is something spurious and pernicious that must be deconstructed on sight. The last thing a postmodernist musicology wants to be is a neo-Puritanism that offers to show its love for music by ceasing to enjoy it. But it is to say that what we call musical experience needs to be systematically rethought, that the horizons of our musical pleasure need to be

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[48]Ibid., p. 227.
[49]Ibid., p. 231.

> redrawn more broadly, and that the embeddedness of music in networks of nonmusical forces is something to be welcomed rather than regretted.[50]

The territory that Kramer works with in this text is not unfamiliar to him. In his *Music as Cultural Practice*, Kramer explores his conception of deconstruction in a more explicit fashion than in his more recent text.[51] Here he concentrates on those same works as in *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*: Schumann's *Carnaval* and Beethoven's String Quartet in F major, op. 135. Of particular concern here is his application of deconstruction as he uses it within his chapter dealing with music, narrative and deconstruction. Taken in the context of his overall argument it might seem, at first blush, that I am dealing only with details. In a sense this is true enough; I am dealing with minutiae of his chapter, and particularly with his idea of "other-voiced" tropes. However, I am doing so in order to focus closely on his conception of deconstruction. Kramer's "other-voiced" tropes are not greatly affected one way or another by his conception of deconstruction. However, since my concern here is Kramer's concept of deconstruction, and *not* the argument which it is presented in, to go into matters in some detail is necessary.

In the portion of *Music as Cultural Practice* which deals with Kramer's "other-voicedness" we encounter Derrida's différance again,

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[50]Ibid., p. 17.
[51]Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice: 1800-1900* (Berkeley, 1993).

as well as something we have not seen so far — the speech act theory of J.L. Austin. The most important aspect of speech act theory which Kramer makes use of is Austin's concept of *misfire*.

We would do well to begin with Kramer himself, and how he comes to relate these two seemingly similar concepts. He sees deconstruction as an affirming, positive force:

> ...practical deconstruction exemplified in other-voicedness, keeps discourse circulating and thaws frozen positions. It is a sign of life.[52]

His primary concern here is that other-voicedness is a "sign of life," that it is affirming, in a Nietzschean sense. What is this 'other-voicedness that Kramer speaks of? One example he provides of other-voicedness is Nietzsche's "style," and it is here that we also encounter Austin's *misfire*:

> As to the technique, it is like style in Nietzsche: if there is going to be one, there can only be more than one. This diversity notwithstanding, all techniques of other-voicedness depend on the use of Austinian 'misfire' as a constructive principle. 'Misfire'... is Austin's term for a kind of illocutionary pratfall - or transformation: the slippage of illocutionary force beyond the ostensible or foreseeable purpose of a speech act...[53]

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[52]Ibid., p. 213.
[53]Ibid., p. 180.

Before we can proceed further into our investigation of Kramer, we must first go back to Austin's concepts at their source. In his series of William James lectures at Harvard, which were later published as *How to Do Things With Words*, we come upon the concept of *Misfire* very early.[54] It stems from Austin's observation that context (more specifically ritual) is what makes a sentence or statement, what he calls a *performative utterance,* successful. These performative utterances are, in Austin's words, "cases...in which to *say* something is to *do* something... [They are] *not* utterances which can be 'true' or 'false'."[55] This particular characteristic of performative utterances is shared by musical phenomena. Here Kramer's observations are striking in their similarity to Austin's: "Music, among other things, is a form of activity....It [is] less an attempt to *say* something than to *do* something."[56] Here it should be noted that while speech utterances say something first and only contain the *possibility* of doing something, musical utterances *begin* by doing something. What they *say* is infinitely trickier to articulate than it is with language.

Performative utterances, Austin tells us, can at times "go wrong and then...[they are] therefore at least to some extent a failure."[57] He classifies these types of failures, these mistakes, as *infelicities.*

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[54]John Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, 1975).
[55]Ibid., p. 12.
[56]Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice : 1800-1900,* p. xii.
[57]Austin, p. 14.

Further, there are two distinct types of infelicities, *misfires* and *abuses*:

> ...we shall call in general those infelicities...which are such that the act for the performing of which, the verbal formula in question is designed, is not achieved, by the name *misfires*: and on the other hand we may christen those infelicities where the act *is* achieved abuses.[58]

That musical utterances, because they are performative in nature, can be infelicitous is not in question, but by applying the specific type of infelicity Austin calls *misfire*, one cannot help but begin to feel a bit uneasy. *Misfire* is only one type of infelicity, and illocutionary slippage (as Kramer puts it), can occur with *any* type of infelicity. By claiming that *misfire* is that type of infelicity which causes other-voiced texts to exhibit their tendency towards inherent illocutionary slippage, he implies that there is a specific, exclusive quality that misfire possesses that is necessary for texts to display this other-voicedness.

Any type of performative utterance can be deconstructed, whether it is infelicitous or not. The trait that allows any type of utterance to be deconstructed is différance, the undecidable, or perpetually deferred nature of any type of utterance. Kramer certainly understands that the illocutionary slippages called *misfires* are based, in large part, on the inability of language to cope with the

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[58]Ibid., p. 16. See also p. 66, note 63.

infinite number of possible contexts.[59] He is incorrect however, in asserting that *misfire* is the only type of illocutionary slippage that contributes to other-voicedness. His concept of other-voicedness seems to depend only on Austin's general concept of infelicity, not on either of the two types. Kramer does seem to recognize this at times, and why he insists specifically on *misfire* is unclear:

> ...*misfire* is an infelicitous term, since, as Derrida shows, what it describes is not a departure from the norm of illocution but the illocutionary norm itself. [60]

The problem now begins to come clear, that his perspective is simply too narrow. *Misfires* are infelicities, and as such they do have the capacity to create other-voicedness. However, *abuses* are also capable of doing exactly the same thing. The difference between the two types has no bearing on other-voicedness:

> When the utterance is a *misfire*, the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed....We speak of our act as a purported act, or perhaps as an attempt...On the other hand, in the [case of *abuses*], we speak of our infelicitous act as 'professed' or 'hollow' rather than 'purported' or 'empty,' and as not implemented...rather than as void or without effect.[61]

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[59]See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago, 1982).
[60]Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice : 1800-1900*, p. 180.
[61]Austin, p. 16

This particular problem is minor in comparison to the major issue that has now cropped up. Kramer's observation that the illocutionary norm has a tendency towards infelicity is not new. As well as that, it simply is of relatively little concern to deconstruction which is, as we noted above, what Kramer's other-voicedness purportedly exemplifies:

> Other-voiced texts are those that accentuate the always-latent prospect of a *misfire*, that openly invite a reinterpretation, a revoicing of prominent expressive acts. Such texts...mark their illocutions for deconstruction.[62]

Kramer would be better off here to say 'the always-latent prospect of *infelicity*' as opposed to *misfire*, but that still would do little or nothing to solve the major fault of his application. While other-voicedness may be created by any infelicity, infelicity is not a necessary condition, which is what Kramer clearly implies by using both the concept, and even a more specific type of infelicity (i.e. *misfire*), something which deconstruction does not require in order to function.

Given the widespread differences (Derrida applauds) in the interpretation of deconstruction, it would be wise to remember that definitions of deconstruction can vary from application to application and situation to situation. If Kramer wishes to assert that other-voiced texts have an inherently more deconstructive (i.e.

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[62]Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice : 1800-1900*, p. 180.

undecidable) nature than other texts, he certainly does need the concept of infelicity in order to do so. Kramer (*correctly*) sees the inclination towards self-deconstruction of the other-voiced discourse as its primary characteristic, which allows deconstruction to easily resist choosing the meaning that agrees with the context. This general idea is not lost on Kramer:

> For any given interpretation an alternative always exists; as we have seen from Derrida's critique of Austin, the availability of alternatives is the very condition that makes interpretation possible.[63]

The 'availability of alternatives' that Kramer is searching for is provided by the *inherently* undecidable nature of an utterance, which is what accounts for its différance. A closer look at undecidability will make this clear. Undecidability, at its root, is a concept which relates to binary oppositions, particularly metaphysical ones:

> ...it [deconstruction] involves the dismantling of all those binary distinctions that organize...text, to the point where opposition itself— the very ground of dialectic reasoning — gives way to a process where opposites merge into a constant *undecidable* exchange of attributes. [64]

> What Derrida is asking us to conceive is the radical instability, the strictly *undecidable* character, of any such metaphysical opposition.[65]

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[63]Ibid., p. 15.
[64]Norris, *Derrida*, p. 35.
[65]Ibid., p. 133.

This means that, in interpreting a particular utterance, any 'transcendental objectivist' or ideal 'univocal' meaning cannot ever exist, let alone be found. Undecidability then "...is not ambiguity, but a structure of logical irresolvability."[66]

Undecidability is a characteristic of deconstruction which can certainly be applied to performative utterances, but to say that *misfire* is *the* guiding principle is to submit that undecidability is motivated by characteristics unique to that particular infelicity. The deconstructive attitude presupposes no identifiable mistake on the part of the speaker, or of the listener. If other-voiced texts are to be seen as "those that accentuate the always latent possibility of *misfire*," while it follows that *misfire* could be a possible cause of it, it is certainly not a necessary condition for it. A misfire is a specific, identifiable, anomalous feature of a performative utterance, at least to an extent, a failure. More important to the deconstructionist attitude is the inability to choose between interpretations of a specific performative utterance, *be they infelicitous or not.*

Misfire clearly does possess the capability to cause "Other-voicedness." Kramer has simply overlooked a fundamental fact about deconstruction: that différance is not necessarily an anomalous feature of discourse, it is not a mistake or failure that can be

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[66]Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*, (New York, 1982), p. 202.

classified. Différance is, very possibly, the very condition of signification.[67] Anything can be deconstructed by finding an opposition that resides within the discourse and using any means possible to dismantle it. By not recognizing this fact, Kramer's use of *misfire* weakens his vehicle of deconstruction called other-voicedness. In a sense, it is a vehicle which does not *misfire*, but rather backfires.

Deconstructive Variations: Rose Rosengard Subotnik

In *Developing Variations*, Rose Rosengard Subotnik's references to deconstruction are considerably varied, and are generally limited to parentheses and passing references.[68] Where she does refer to deconstruction more explicitly, she demonstrates an excellent grasp of the subject (especially considering the time some of these essays were written). Take, for example, the following comparison between a literary text and a musical text:

> ..one can begin to form an idea of the piece similar to a deconstructionist's image of a text: a total musical configuration consisting in an indeterminate number of relatively discrete, though potentially analogous, layers of structural significance that are not grounded in an implicit and unifying tonal premise.[69]

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[67]The author wishes to thank Dr. Joseph Adamson for his insights on this particular aspect of Derridean thought.
[68]For various examples see Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations* (Minneapolis, 1991), pp. 52, 114, 159, and 213.
[69]Ibid., p. 136.

Subotnik's *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* is necessary reading for any musical scholar (or, for that matter, any scholar at all) who has an interest in deconstruction.[70] This compilation of essays is the sequel to *Developing Variations,* and one of the most recent musicological texts to use deconstruction. Of the four chapters, two use deconstruction explicitly: the third, "Toward a Deconstruction of Structural listening," deals with deconstruction on a philosophical level, critiquing three 20th-century composers; the second, "How Could Chopin's A-Major Prelude be Deconstructed?" uses deconstruction as a tool for musical analysis.[71] I have chosen to focus on the latter, which presents Subotnik's conception of deconstruction and uses it in an analysis of a musical text.

"How Could Chopin's A-Major Prelude be Deconstructed" is an intricate deconstructive contemplation of Chopin's Prelude, op. 28, no. 7, spanning just over one hundred pages. In what follows I shall concentrate on Subotnik's conception of deconstruction, and how effectively she uses it. I am concerned neither with validating her use of deconstruction, nor evaluating the ramifications of her analysis; I am more interested in the *means* than the *ends* of her argument. Her conception of deconstruction and her practical application of it are contained, approximately, in the first and second

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[70]Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations* (Minneapolis, 1996)
[71]Ibid., pp. 148-176 and pp. 39-147.

half of the essay respectively: the opening section contains a general introduction and a brief tour of the general tenets and terms of deconstruction; the latter half consists of two polarized readings of Chopin's Prelude in A major, op. 28, no. 7.

This essay had its genesis as a graduate seminar given in 1986 at CUNY on music and deconstruction. Given the date, it would point out Subotnik as one of the earliest scholars in the musical field to teach, let alone use, deconstruction. The essay was expanded and presented in 1987 at the American Musicological Society convention in New Orleans after which it was again edited into the form it takes in this volume. Subotnik, in her general introduction, seems slightly unsure of how profitable this essay will be for those interested in deconstructive thought:

> I am sufficiently skeptical about the degree to which American musicology has assimilated deconstruction to believe my essay will benefit those genuinely interested in working out the arguments of that movement.[72]

The skepticism Subotnik expresses could well be due to her perception of the relative impact deconstruction has had on the literary and musical fields:

> Even now, well into the 1990's, whatever effect deconstruction has had on American musicology has been far less sweeping and direct than the enormous impact this

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[72]Ibid., p. xxxv.

> school has had on American literary study during the past two decades or so.[73]

Before examining any of the particulars of the essay, it should be pointed out that Subotnik does not claim to deal explicitly, or comprehensively, with any particular deconstructionist or the deconstructionist movement in general:

> "Besides renouncing any attempt at a systematic exposition of deconstruction, this essay will refrain from applying any systematic evaluations to this movement."[74]

Subotnik's purpose is to provide "both musicologists and scholars in other disciplines a concrete demonstration of how a musical deconstruction might work," and not to provide a systematic introduction of, or evaluation of, deconstruction.[75] Information is therefore given out on a "...need-to-know basis" only.[76] The fact that her essay is not intended to be comprehensive notwithstanding, it does include a large quantity of relevant information. Topics discussed include Saussure and semiology, and most of the terms vital to deconstruction are explained in a concise fashion: différance. being, meaning, trace, undecidability, supplement, marginal, and

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[73]Ibid., p. 40.
[74]Ibid., p. 43.
[75]Ibid., p. 41.
[76]Ibid., p. 41.

decentering.[77] Her essay is also typical of many deconstructive analyses in that she makes

> ...no effort to relate the prelude either to Chopin's personal experience or to the specific events of his career. Although my musical analysis presupposes a historical familiarity with the Classical and Romantic style...the kinds of questions I pursue here...tend more toward the generality of philosophy than toward the specificity of biography.[78]

In the first half of this essay, Subotnik deals with those general characteristics of deconstruction which she feels the reader needs to know most. She begins with a description of how deconstruction works:

> Deconstruction, as will be shown in the following sections, characteristically works by defining and analyzing dialectical contradictions in a text.[79]

This is a point which she reinforces in various places, with a typical deconstructive emphasis on metaphysical assumptions:

> Deconstruction alleges that any text can be shown to maintain simultaneous contradictory positions about metaphysical reality, essentially by limitations in the way we use language to think and speak.[80]

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[77]Understandably, the term which receives the most attention is *différance.* See ibid., pp. 52-57.
[78]Ibid., p. 58.
[79]Ibid., p. 46.
[80]Ibid., p. 62.

Subotnik also provides a description of what deconstructive analyses usually involve, stressing the role of hierarchical binary oppositions. It is quite similar to Sweeny-Turner's recipe:

> In a characteristic deconstruction of a text, the critic will set up a binary opposition, identifying the term that seems to claim priority. The critic's analysis will then try to show (1) that the inequity thus indicated should not be accepted uncritically as valid since the priority of these terms can be logically reversed, through reference to the text itself; and (2) that since the conception of each term inextricably involves reference to the other, the significance of the difference between the two terms can be undercut.[81]

There are three general factors which greatly influence Subotnik's ideas about deconstruction: history, social issues, and moral responsibility. Firstly, she conceives of deconstruction as having inherently historical concerns. This is discussed in connection with Adorno's dialectic. The following quotation is lengthy, but serves to demonstrate Subotnik's deep understanding as well as her historical interest:

> First, [deconstruction] clearly shares his horror of hypostatiszation, an aversion that cannot be disentangled from fundamentally historical concerns. For both schools, though in different ways, texts are conceivable only in terms of context, which are continually redefined by the flow of history. It is true that Adorno insists more emphatically on the irreversibility of that flow, whereas deconstruction calls more attention to a variety of temporal relations that can be perceived through an act of interpretation. These include the

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[81]Ibid., p. 62.

> kinds of reverse chains of meaning that are established as later events alter the understanding of earlier ones, and also relations of static simultaneity that emerge when we contemplate different levels of meaning at the same time. On the other hand, the dialectical character and constant reversals of direction in Adorno's methods also entail, in effect, a temporally varied relation between the critic and history. Where both schools agree is in their common recognition of the listener, whose activities start after the speaker's, as an integral contributor to the process of signification.[82]

Subotnik also perceives the union (or perhaps collision) of the more abstract, philosophical ideas of deconstruction and the postmodern emphasis on the individual (both as part of a particular community and a unique entity) as as an integral part of her analysis:

> What is involved here is a conflict between abstractionist principles for ensuring human equality and a viewpoint that insists on attention to the concrete particularities of human experience as a requisite for establishing such equality. This is a conflict of obvious social importance.[83]

Finally, Subotnik asserts that deconstructive analyses must be morally aware. She attempts to put some of the trust, which critics of deconstruction feel is so lacking, back into the relationship between the reader and the critic:

> Deconstruction allows us to measure the degree to which the differences between which an initial reading, both as

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[82]Ibid., p. 54.
[83]Ibid., p. 75.

> documented and hypothesized, and a contemporary reading can be persuasively explained by a good-faith effort on the critic's part to accommodate changes in historical perspective that have developed since a text first appeared.[84]

She clearly believes in the responsibility of the critic/reader's interpretation:

> ...deconstruction need not disintegrate into a process of radical relativizing whereby respect for the discipline provided by a physically extant text gives way to irresponsible, arbitrary, and solipsistic free association by the reader.[85]

This brings me to Subotnik's actual deconstruction of a musical work. When she met Derrida, and mentioned to him that she was interested in applying deconstruction to a Chopin prelude:

> ...he expressed surprise at the idea of applying deconstruction directly to music, and said he would be interested to see what resulted.[86]

Subotnik's analysis is modeled on two literary essays. The first is de Man's "Semiology and Rhetoric," which includes analyses of poems by Yeats and Proust. The second, "The Realist Floor-Plan," by Frederic Jameson, is included to "attempt to integrate deconstruction with

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[84]Ibid., p. 55.
[85]Ibid., p. 67.
[86]Ibid., p. 39. Although it would certainly be interesting to see what Derrida thinks of the results of such an application, Subotnik does not tell us whether or not Derrida has actually *seen* what has resulted.

explicitly historical concerns."[87] Subotnik uses these two essays to guide her discussion of the Chopin Prelude.

Subotnik has her reasons for presenting *two* readings:

> My immediate strategy here is to account in some measure for two conflicting interpretations, or readings, of this piece, one that of an educated layman and one my own.[88]

The first reading, that of the layman, "...hears the A-Major Prelude as 'happy' — as an affirmation of the possibility of establishing...'beauty and meaning in the world.'"[89] The second, her own, is quite the opposite: "poignantly sad or resigned....convey[ing] a wistful sense that something once thought to be securely in its possession...can no longer be counted on."[90] Subotnik visualizes these two readings in terms of metaphorical and figurative devices:

> I see them as positioned on a horizontal axis, which represents two possible ways of relating human consciousness to reality. At the center of the axis lies what could be called the field of human subjectivity, as it has been defined in a good deal of Western thought since the Enlightenment. This is the field where human consciousness, operating within the constraints of its own experience and intelligence, goes about imposing rational meaning on

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[87]Ibid., p. 82.
[88]Ibid., pp. 84-5.
[89]Ibid., p. 85.
[90]Ibid.

> objective reality, by forging connections into a coherent pattern of unity.[91]

These two readings are taken as representative of the end-points of the axis she refers to.

Subotnik begins the first reading with a standard deconstructive gesture, focusing in on a marginal moment — an applied dominant on the first beat of measure twelve. This moment is considered 'essential' only by virtue of its 'secondary' nature. Consequently Subotnik's readings both deal with its supplemental nature. Although her analysis considers the piece in its entirety, Subotnik uses that chord, and its sonority in particular, as the focal point around which both of her readings revolve. She perceives the sonority as a key to understanding the piece as a whole, as "...the symbol of a subjectivity that unifies the entire piece, and thereby insures its intelligibility."[92] She focuses her readings on the "relational force of the climactic sonority," considering the literal and figurative aspects in the first and second readings respectively.[93]

The principal point Subotnik wishes to make with the first reading is how the climax's importance is overshadowed by other elements of the musical text; "...the subsumption of the climax, rendered unmistakable by the very force of the concentrated

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[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid., p. 98.
[93]Ibid., p. 94.

contrasts it defines..."[94] The force she refers to is a metaphorical one, placed within a traditional mode of thought:

> ...through this first reading, Chopin's prelude can be heard as a powerful metaphor for the individual life, at least as the modern Westerner would like to understand the latter.[95]

Her conclusions concerning the first reading are similar to many deconstructive analyses:

> Now it may well be that all this first reading does is to demonstrate the inescapable dependance of human (or at least, modern Western) ideas about reality on figurative modes of thinking. At bottom, that is, this reading may simply reconfirm a modern Western inability to understand 'being' except insofar as it 'means.'[96]

In beginning her second reading we realize that she is going to use deconstructive tactics in both perspectives, irrespective of the fact that they are so opposed:

> There is...another way of interpreting the formula 'essential because it is secondary' that leads to quite a different reading of Chopin's prelude. One can interpret the phrase to mean that the essential elements of the prelude are precisely those that we characterize as secondary. To put it another way, what is essential to the prelude are the qualitative properties of secondary, marginal, ornamental, or supplementary characteristics (as epitomized by the climax) *in themselves.*[97]

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[94]Ibid., p. 100.
[95]Ibid., p. 108.
[96]Ibid., p. 112.
[97]Ibid., p. 113.

Her emphasis in the second reading differs from that of the first; it considers the sonority of the chord as a rhetorical figure, a la de Man, rather than as a literal one:

> In a way, my entire second reading is based on the premise that the primary source of power in this prelude is rhetorical emphasis, grounded on the physical concreteness of musical signs. This second reading argues at bottom that through rhetorical emphasis, the prelude attempts to project meaning onto its own physical aspect, and thus to persuade us that physical existence is meaningful. But in doing so, the prelude exposes the arbitrariness of its own rhetorical strategies as well as the tenuousness of the connections it can suggest between physical existence and any sort of meaning at all. To avoid conceding the absence of any implicit necessity in its claims to meaningfulness, and thereby collapsing into a condition of brute physical existence, the prelude tries to establish the significance of its configuration through the seductive illusions of rhetorical emphasis.[98]

Subotnik is well aware of the consequences of her second reading 'reversing' her first. She is not interested in simply turning the first reading on its head, but rather undermining the distinction — deconstructing — between essential and secondary:

> In undertaking an attempt at such a reversal, one might eventually undercut the very polarity between notions of the 'essential' and the 'secondary'[99]

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[98]Ibid., p. 140.
[99]Ibid., p. 113.

The second reading, in deconstructing the duality of essential and secondary, nearly destroys the first reading; "...all the assumptions, priorities, and conclusions of our first reading begin to unravel."[100]

In summarizing the disparity between the two readings, Subotnik makes explicit just how polarized they are:

> ....tremendous differences should be apparent between my two readings. Virtually every argument, conclusion and image suggested by my first reading has a conflicting or incompatible counterpart in the second.[101]

At the root of the difference, there lies a question of meaning:

> ...evidence for the argument that the precise communication of meaning is not only possible but at bottom guaranteed by the essentially universal rationality of linguistic structures.[102]

Even though the second reading is one which is quite at odds with the first, there is *no* suggestion that the prelude is not meaningful:

> It should be noted...that this second reading does not characterize the prelude as meaningless. Rather, just as the fist reading designates the precise signifying powers of unified structures as the theme of the prelude, so, too, the second reading designates the meaning (or theme) of the prelude to be the contingency of meaning."[103]

Subotnik's conclusion is that the prelude has chosen its own terms in which it wishes to be understood:

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[100]Ibid., p. 113.
[101]Ibid., p. 141.
[102]Ibid., pp. 141-2.
[103]Ibid., p. 142.

> What my musical analysis does...is to argue the terms on which Chopin's prelude presents itself consists at bottom in the very urgency and privilege this work attaches to self-chosen terms as a basis for interpretation....The prelude seems ultimately to argue that its very meaning is this: that it should be understood wholly and only on its own specified terms.[104]

With respect to deconstruction, Subotnik's argument demonstrates several different things. The most apparent is that she *knows* what she is talking about — a fact which is never in doubt. Even though it is made clear that she is not attempting to be comprehensive, there is a considerable amount of important and relevant information included. By disregarding issues of Chopin's intent, and the events of his career, Subotnik shares common ground with many deconstructionists[105] Also, it displays Subotnik's awareness of the futility of trying to identify the intention of an author (although that is a more general postmodern concern). Interestingly, she does not exclude the possibility of involving such considerations in a reading:

> Not only is the reconstruction of an author's original reading never wholly possible; in addition, neither the efforts to reconstruct such a reading nor the ideals served by such efforts are necessary, or even desirable, for all our own

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[104]Ibid., p. 44.

[105]"The uninterest of deconstruction in particulars of individual biography may be a bit easier to summarize in ways that are understandable from a traditional American perspective. Deconstruction, like structuralism as well as poststructuralism more generally, is in some respects more concerned with the systematic than with the historical dynamics of signification." Ibid., p. 49.

> readings — though for some readings those efforts and ideals are crucial.[106]

Subotnik provides an interesting comment on where deconstruction might be at its most effective:

> More impressive is the value deconstruction claims when it is applied more extensively, in situations far more ambiguous and subtle than the one I have just described.[107]

This is not to suggest that her analysis is not, in itself, a complex situation, or that Subotnik is not aware of that:

> On a fairly simple and straightforward level I have suggested a constant equation between 'primary' and ...characteristics *in themselves* and values associated with 'stability,' and a corresponding equation between 'secondary' and 'unstable' (or contingent) characteristics. Yet at the same time I have also suggested that the relation between the two groups of terms *as indicators of relative weight or structural importance* can be complex and even volatile.[108]

By presenting two different readings which engage in a dialogue she makes the essay both self-reflexive and self-aware. They both 'undermine' the stability of the duality of essential and secondary. The second uses this same general formula, but does so with the intention of exposing the metaphysical assumptions of the first. What is most fascinating about Subotnik's two readings is that

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[106]Ibid., p. 75.
[107]Ibid., p. 63.
[108]Ibid., p. 91.

she has used deconstruction in *both* to argue two very separate positions:

> In a way, each reading finally undercuts the significance of the differences between right and wrong choices, but each does so differently. My first reading does this...in the sense that it accords a higher level of being to (cognitive) reason, the underlying principle of 'right,' than to the contingent level of physical existence at which right and wrong choices are made. My second reading does this because it can find no epistemologically secure ground for distinguishing between the two kinds of choices.[109]

Consequently:

> ...whereas the first reading upholds both necessity and freedom, the second undercuts the distinction between the two poles of traditional (Western) rationality, and thereby holds out the possibility that rationality itself has no status in reality.[110]

Subotnik's analysis is also a very self-conscious one. This self-awareness is typically deconstructive, and is reinforced by her modeling her argument on texts by Jameson, and more particularly de Man:

> I would...suggest that the analysis of Chopin's prelude ...presents us finally with the same sort of unresolvable ambiguity that de Man discerns in his analyses of the texts by Yeats and Proust. De Man's analyses leave us with the sense of an infinite reversibility, and hence an underlying indistinguishability between the domains of the cognitive

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[109]Ibid., pp. 142-3.
[110]Ibid., p. 143.

> and the rhetorical (or aesthetic), as modes of defining reality. [111]

As could be expected with an analysis based on the work of de Man, the word rhetoric appears often:

> ...in large measure, my second reading takes the prelude at its word, for even my second reading treats the prelude as a significant structure rather than as a brute physical object. Nevertheless, in subjecting its rhetorical strategies to the pressure of 'such sizeable stakes,' the prelude, in this reading, exposes the real limitations of the *rhetorical* domain. [My emphasis][112]

The similarity of her own analysis to other American deconstruction is readily apparent, especially with its tendency to be "...defined as virtually synonymous with close reading."[113]

Subotnik also provides insightful comments on a philosophical level which is indicative of the more continental influence of Derrida. As an example, consider her comments on the trace in relation to time:

> What we begin now to acknowledge is that the force of a trace, or absent presence, is not restricted by ordinary conceptions of time as a unidirectional , forward-moving process. That is because this force is set in motion not by any metaphysical condition of being in 'the music itself' but by, and in relation to, a reader. Readers superimpose numerous absent presences on concrete signs in the act of

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[111]Ibid., p. 144.
[112]Ibid., p. 140.
[113]Ibid., p. 67.

> interpretation, and thereby allow signs to have meanings on a number of temporally different levels. In relation to another reader, one can speak plausibly of 'traces' in a sign or structure that refer to events occurring after the fact as well as before it. For that matter, a trace can also point a reader toward a simultaneously occurring effect, and toward configurations that seem to define themselves out of time.[114]

Ultimately, Subotnik has used deconstruction in a masterful fashion. The major ideas and terms of deconstructive thought are presented in an informed manner. She demonstrates a familiarity with, and uses to her advantage, both American and European conceptions of deconstruction. The dialogue she creates between the two different readings provides an interesting commentary on deconstruction's ability to be used for concerns which are very different, as well as indicating where deconstruction is most effective. Her analysis proves, and does so more than adequately, that deconstruction can indeed be used as a powerful tool for musical analysis.

This brings me to the end of my general survey of deconstruction and its application to musical scholarship. What I want to explore now are some possible ways to describe (generally) how musical meaning is affected in a deconstructive system. I am not concerned with hermeneutics in the sense that Kramer is. I seek to explore the 'background' level of deconstruction, as opposed to

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[114]Ibid., p. 125.

Attinello's 'foreground,' an *écriture qua écriture*. This is not to imply that applications of deconstruction to Marxism, Adorno, or identity politics are any less valuable, but to suggest that there are other aspects of musicology which can use deconstruction to their advantage.

DECONSTRUCTION AND MUSICAL HERMENEUTICS

> No one can control completely the play of floating signifiers and other differential forces across a writing: no final authority over dissemination. Always truth statements miss a part. Vice or Versa.[1]

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We have now examined deconstruction and some examples of how musical scholarship has used it. Presently, I would like to pursue some issues which are of concern to musical hermeneutics. As we have seen, deconstruction works on a deep level, focusing as intensely on the philosophy which guides the creation of texts as it does on the texts themselves. It does so in order to allow the signifying elements of any text more interaction than they previously had under the metaphysical (i.e. logocentric) system; to allow *jeu* (free play) to facilitate the *dissemination* of the text. Before we can examine how this affects musical interpretation, we must first consider how deconstructive thought deals with hermeneutics in general. Bearing this in mind, I will introduce two closely related concepts; Paul de Man's concept of *misinterpretation* and Harold Bloom's theory of *misprision.* This provides an introduction to the major portion of the chapter, which deals with how musical interpretation is affected by deconstruction. Left facing the problem of how to deal with a semiological system which is non-originary,

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[1]Vincent Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism* (New York, 1983), p. 59.

decentered and resists any attempt to stabilize it, what is required is an epistemological framework which can allow the free play of signifying elements while acknowledging that there is a recognizable, underlying structure to every musical (or literary, for that matter) text around which that play takes place. One particular theory of meaning exists which can be used profitably in this regard. This is Mark Johnson's theory of embodied meaning, as he proposes it in *The Body in the Mind.* After introducing the principles of Johnson's theory, I systematically apply Johnson's general framework to the musical case. I conclude by suggesting how this framework helps hermeneutics not only to cope with deconstruction, but to use it productively while taking into account the postmodern emphasis on the individual.

What deconstruction accomplishes, ultimately, is to destabilize, especially any attempt to give a structure a center or an origin in order to allow signifying elements of a text to interact. Deconstruction does this by problematizing not only the effectiveness, but also the very nature of the system which produces these structures. This takes place at the very roots of that system, and these deconstructive interpretations strongly emphasize how the texts actually undermine themselves. Another opposition has now been deconstructed; the question is no longer how to "interpret," but how to "misinterpret." Both Paul de Man and Harold Bloom have similar theories of *misinterpretation.*

Misintepretation and Misprision

De Man inverted the traditional binary pairs of reading/misreading. Reading was no longer the privileged, under which misreading threatened to emerge — quite the opposite; "misreading is not an incorrect reading, but the errancy or deviation of every reading."[2] For de Man, a text was only literary to the degree that it allowed, and encouraged, 'misreading.' De Man also inverted the literal/figurative pair. By deconstructing this opposition, the literal became subsumed under the figurative. Consequently objectivity was simply no longer possible; literal meanings were not only undesirable, but categorically unattainable. This is a fundamental reason why figurative language, and rhetoric in particular, is such a central theme in de Man's analyses:

> "...the determining characteristic of literary language is indeed figurality... [but] far from constituting an objective basis for literary study, rhetoric implies the persistent threat of misreading."[3]

You simply could not achieve a 'proper' or 'correct' reading. All was *misreading*, more or less interesting, good or bad, extreme or conservative. For de Man the most profitable misreading of a text

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[2]Joseph Riddel, "Re-doubling the Commentary," in Contemporary *Literature*, 20 (Spring 1979), p. 242.
[3]Paul de Man "Literature and Language: A Commentary," in New *Literary History*, 4 (Autumn 1972), p. 188.

was one which produced "another text which can itself be shown to be an interesting misreading, a text which engenders additional texts."[4]

Harold Bloom was another deconstructor to examine the idea of misreading. Especially in his works of the early 1970's, Bloom proposed the concept of *misprision.* Misprision describes the mechanics of poetic influence, emphasizing the relationship between different texts very strongly. It outlines the poet's struggle to break free from his or her predecessors, to be liberated from what Bloom calls the *anxiety of influence.* [5] Here misreading can be seen to have two different, yet overlapping, sources: The reader (either critic or another writer) misreads a text, and/or one text can be (in certain instances) seen to be a misreading of another text. Misprision was a necessary concept for deconstructive misreading which stressed the malleability of meaning in general as well as in the meaning of any specific text. Misprision occurred "because, essentially, exact repetition or identification was impossible and because, quintessentially, identity was slavery and death; difference was freedom and vitality."[6] In this sense, we see a strong link between the Continental and North American "deconstructors," with meaning

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[4]Paul de Man " Nietzsche's Theory of Rhetoric," in *Symposium*, Vol. 28 (Spring 1974), p. 51.
[5]See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York, 1973).
[6]Vincent Leitch *American Literary Criticism From the 30's to the 80's,* p. 288

being produced by a network of differences: differences between texts and between readings of texts.

The ideas of misreading and misprision effectively demonstrate how problematic trying to interpret a text is. For many, it means that interpretation is an exercise in futility, where meaning gives way to meaninglessness. For deconstructionists, the idea of misreading opens up a field of unlimited semantic play where, in any given context, a valid (mis)reading of a text can differ significantly from other readings of that same text. Deconstruction, when placed in a musical situation, acts in a very similar way. The conception of the completely autonomous artwork, as self-contained and transcendent, cannot withstand the deconstructive onslaught. Even a concept such as relative autonomy, with its attempts to exclude the artwork from social and historical concerns, buckles under the strain of deconstruction (to which those concerns are, for many, so intrinsic and important). In considering music from this standpoint, we need to account for how a musical work can simultaneously maintain an identifiable structure common to all performances (which is simply common sense; I *know,* unquestionably, when I am listening to Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata), while acknowledging that each of the differing contexts in which these performances take place create a new, unique and living work of art. The philosophy of Mark Johnson provides a framework which can suggest a solution to this situation.

Johnson and Embodied Meaning

Johnson's theory of meaning necessarily begins at a fundamental level, with the general way in which we understand. He proposes that understanding is not simply a reflective process, but primary and immediate:

> ... understanding is not only a matter of reflection ... rather, understanding is the way we "have a world" the way we experience our world as a comprehensible reality.[7]

A necessary element of our mind's ability to comprehend is the existence of recognizable forms and patterns.[8] A simple example of such a form or pattern would be sentences, propositional utterances, which attempt to convey meaning. While such forms may be propositional in their expression, they are not propositional in nature. Their "propositional content is possible only by virtue of a complex web of nonpropositional schematic structures."[9] These are what Johnson terms *force gestalt structures*, and any explanation of them must include (however briefly) the concept of force.[10]

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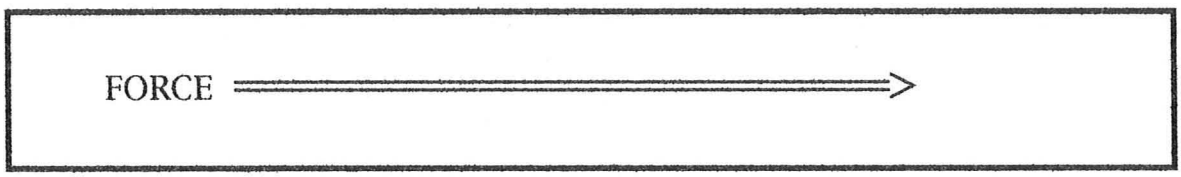
[7]Johnson, p. 102.
[8]Ibid., p. 75.
[9]Johnson, p. 5.
[10]Nietzsche and Derrida are among those who have dealt with the concept of force. See Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London, 1983) and Derrida's "Force and Signification" in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago, 1978).

A visual representation of force is figure 1:

Figure 1: Force.



The most basic way that we experience force is through physical interaction with the world around us. Johnson's forces however, are not to be understood physically, but perceptually; they are metaphorical forces.[11] Johnson's use of the word metaphor is special, in that he perceives it as a basic tool that we use to organize more abstract concepts.[12] These metaphorical forces work at a deep level:

> [it is] a concept of force, which we can explicate in propositional terms, but its meaning — the meaning it identifies — goes deeper than our conceptual and propositional understanding. [13]

The metaphorical meaning, then, is transmitted through a force which is not physical, but psychological or perceptual. It is dynamic in nature, and consequently very similar to the musical work, since it is "less an attempt to *say* something than as an attempt to *do* something."[14] What these structures do, they do metaphorically.

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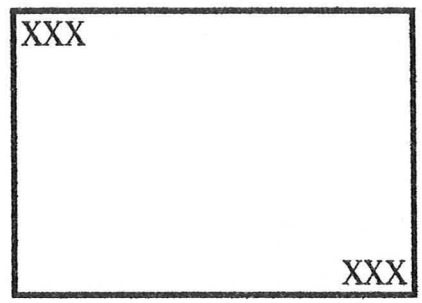
[11]See Johnson's move involved description of these six features on pp. 43-4, and p. 79.
[12]Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.
[13]Ibid., p. 13.
[14]Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley, 1990), p. xii.

Much of the power of these forces comes from the fact that they are rooted in common physical experiences. Take for example, Johnson's visual representation of balance, figure 2:

Figure 2: A metaphorical representation of balance.



The balance of this simple picture is an abstract representation of a physical phenomena. We understand that this picture has 'balance' because we know what 'balance' means, in physical, or bodily, terms. Consequently, Johnson refers to these meanings which are transmitted metaphorically as *embodied* meanings, which emerge through *embodied schematic* structures.

Johnson use of the term schema is also a particular one, and he does not use it in the same sense as many contemporary cognitive scientists do (i.e. as structures of general knowledge).[15] Johnson derives his use of the term from the work of Emmanuel Kant, who understood schematic structures as structures of the imagination which were nonpropositional in nature. These structures emerge from our basic physical interactions with the world, and are then

[15]Ibid., p. xx, and pp. 19-21.

figuratively extended to organize our more abstract cognitive operations. To clarify this, think again of Johnson's representation of balance: We understand balance in the physical sense, in a basic way common to all of us as beings who are able to maneuver around without constantly falling over. As a figurative extension of this, think of a term commonly used to describe someone with a mental illness; we say that they are mentally 'unbalanced.' This conception of embodied structures has important ramifications for postmodern concerns, both of culture in general and the individual (in terms of mind and body).

The most evident cultural reason is that, if one accepts basic patterns of understanding as figurative extensions of bodily experience, they expose a fundamental structure of cognition and understanding which cuts through all cultural boundaries. Those boundaries emerge not from a difference of experience, but from *different expressions of the same experience.* In terms of the body, it destroys any notion of meaning which is 'transcendent' of the body, (i.e. univocal or originatory, in the metaphysical sense; what Johnson refers to as the 'objectivist tradition') and effectively puts "the body back in the mind."[16] The body is thus recognized as having central important in the way we understand the world and, consequently, how we *interpret* the events that take place in that world.

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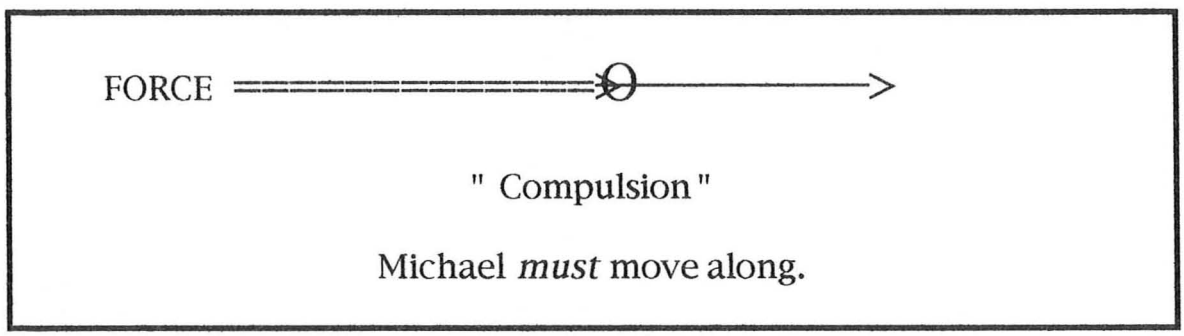
[16] See pp. xiv, xv, xix-xxi, xxxvi-xxxviii.

These metaphorically transmitted forces are represented by what Johnson calls *force gestalt structures.* Here abstract forces begin to be shaped into general principles of form and structure. Johnson uses the term "gestalt structure" to mean an organized, unified whole within our experience and understanding that manifests a repeatable pattern or structure."[17] There are six features Johnson describes which are common to our experiences of force: we always experience force through some kind of *interaction.* Force usually involves the movement of an object and therefore has a directional, or *vector,* quality. Since there is direction, there is also a identifiable *path of motion.* Most obviously the force will have to have a *source,* and can be intentionally directed to a *target.* They also have a measurable *degree or power of intensity.* Finally, these forces have a *structure or sequence of causality.*

A simple example of one of these structures is Figure 3:

Figure 3: Image-Schematic representation of the 'compulsion' force gestalt.



[17]Ibid., 44.

Here we see the characteristics of force gestalt structures exhibited in a common experience, that of compulsion. The experience of being moved by external forces such as wind or gravity is one that we have all felt. At times these forces can be resisted, and at other times they cannot. Compulsion is present in a car being forced along a highway, in my understanding of the force of undertow in the water, or in my perceived sense of being forced by peer pressure to do something which I otherwise would not. Some other common force gestalt structures include blockage, diversion, and attraction.[18] These gestalt structures are the basic patterns which operate almost constantly in both our bodies and, metaphorically, in our minds.

The more specific expressions of these structures are what Johnson terms *image schematic structures*, which is where we begin to see a coherent, identifiable structure which also possesses characteristics unique to itself:

> A schema consists of a small number of parts and relations, by virtue of which it can structure indefinitely many perceptions, images, and events. In sum, image schemata operate at a level of organization that falls between abstract propositional structures, on the one side, and particular concrete images on the other.[19]

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[18]Ibid., pp. 45-48.
[19]Ibid., p. 29

To demonstrate these structures, Johnson uses the words *must, can, may, could, and might.* [20] These modal verbs pertain to our experiences of actuality, possibility, and necessity. The primary sense of the word 'must' denotes a force which propels a subject toward an act. For example, "you *must* move your foot, or else the car will run over it." To place this in metaphorical terms, again see Figure 3, "Michael *must* move along, or else the reader will lose interest." Thusly understood, the image schematic representation of "must" is identical to that, is indeed one specific expression of, the more general 'compulsion' force gestalt. Abstract force has taken on an identifiable structure (a force gestalt structure), which is given a particular, individual structure in the form of an image schematic structure. The word *must* indicates the presence of a force which 'compels' someone (or something) into action.

Image schematic structures, while less abstract than force gestalt structures, are still one step away from the images we form in our minds. These "rich images" are the particular, individual manifestations of image schematic structures. Image schemata and rich images maintain a strong relation to one another, bound together by a common, underlying structure. This inherently constrains what an image schematic structure can infer.[21] While they do maintain

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[20] See Johnson's "Force Gestalts in the Root Senses of Modal Verbs." Ibid, pp. 48-57.

[21] Johnson examines how image schematic structures constrain meaning in detail which is well beyond the scope of the present investigation. See Ibid, pp. 112-138.

this strong relationship, there are important differences between the two. Here Johnson draws on Kant's distinction between a schematic structure and an image. As illustration he uses the concept of a triangle versus any particular triangle:

> No image could ever be adequate to the concept of triangle in general. It would never attain that universality of the concept which renders it valid of all triangles, whether right-angled, obtuse-angled, or acute-angled; it would always be limited to a part only of that sphere. The schema of the triangle can exist nowhere but in thought.[22]

The upshot of the argument is that the image will be of a specific thing, which may not share all its detailed features with the image schematic structure it represents. It has also been suggested that image schematic structures constitute a distinct level of cognitive operations from these mental pictures, one which is "different from both concrete rich images ... on the one side, and abstract, finitary propositions on the other."[23] One particular example of the compulsion force gestalt structure is figure 4:

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[22]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, quoted in Ibid, p. 24.
[23]Ibid., p. 27. For more detail on the differences between Rich Images and Image schematic structure see pp. 24-28.

Figure 4: A Rich Image of the 'compulsion' gestalt.

I am right now being *forced* to move along.

This will be any particular mental image, however my mind conceives it, of the image schematic structure.

Johnson and Music

Johnson's gestalt structures are rooted in the idea of force, in an abstract sense. In a musical context, force is sound without form, or intentional context. At this level there is no distinguishing between noise and music.

Musical force gestalt structures are where general structures become evident, and the organizing principles of a particular type of composition first emerge. For example, consider the general idea of sonata form and the features which identify that form as sonata: exposition, development, recapitulation, coda, etc. These structures, while relatively abstract, *do* have an identifiable structure. Attempts at reduction of these structures is damaging:

> [They] are not unanalyzable givens or atomistic structures. They can be 'analyzed' since they have parts and dimensions. But, any such attempted reduction will destroy the unity (the meaningful organization) that makes the structure significant in the first place.[24]

Consequently, there is a recognition of a continuous local/global dialectic; the fact that what is presently happening affects what *has* happened and will affect what *will* happen after that moment has passed.[25] Seen within this framework, the musical work is not organic in the sense of self-contained autonomy. Instead, it suggests that if the relationship between the small and large scale factors is not taken into account, the analysis will suffer.

One of the easiest places to locate the 'parts and dimensions' Johnson refers to is in a score.[26] It is here that we find the formal structure which the composer uses to express his or her intentions. Although the score is an integral portion of this image schematic structure the performer is as well, since image schematic structures are cognitive processes — something which a composer who is not present, can obviously not provide. The image schematic structure is a combination of both these elements; "...it is a pattern of action as

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[24]Johnson, p. 62.

[25]This relationship of part to whole/whole to part is the central idea of 'hermeneutic circle,' which has been examined extensively in both 19th and 20th century philosophy.

[26]This can certainly also be applied to music which is not notated, but that particular application is one that is, again, beyond the scope of the present study.

well as a pattern for action."[27] Generally, neither the score nor the performer are privileged; both are equally necessary components. The contributions of either may differ significantly depending on the particular music and the particular performer, but they are both indispensable in creating the image schematic structure.

Performance, necessarily involving both these factors, can be seen to exhibit the characteristics of these image schematic structures in two important respects. First, image schematic structures possess elements which help us organize our understanding of the relative importance of formal relations. Even with gestures which are the same in intent, the relative effect of each is produced by the context in which it is placed. To return to Subotnik's analysis for a moment, consider the effect the deconstruction of the piece has on something as simple as a cadence:

> "Surely *this* isn't how you cadence," the climactic sonority asks. "Is there *any* way I can cadence securely?" And the answer provided by the final cadence...is, "Right. That's not how you cadence. What you're doing isn't cadencing at all. "Right," that is, not because one sort of cadence is really correct, or even makes more sense than another, but because...in reality it makes no difference *what* form a cadence takes. There is no indisputably right way to cadence.[28]

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[27]Johnson, p. 21.
[28]Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations* (Minneapolis, 1996), p. 141.

The ultimate answer to the question "Is there *any* way I can cadence securely?" is an unequivocally negative one. But we *can* know that it is a cadence, and we *do* know that it is a cadence when it happens; all this even if we do not know exactly what it *means.* Johnson's image schematic structures understand this by their recognition of the continuous dialogue between the immediate sonority (or localized gesture), and the larger context that it is placed in. The overall 'meaning,' as far as we can articulate it, in terms of cadences, originates from the cadence's relation to other cadences; within the piece in question and within more general compositional and stylistic considerations. It is out of the total network of all these relationships, the sum total of interacting signifying elements, that the meaning of a work emerges. The total is greater than the sum of all its parts, and this total emerges from the constant interaction of the local and global elements of a musical work.

The second point about these structures is that although they are repeatable, these repetitions will never be identical. They are structures which are necessarily flexible, and can be "modified to fit many similar situations that manifest a recurring, underlying structure."[29] This does *not* mean, though, that we have a semiotic free-for-all; while there is no 'univocal' or 'transcendental meaning,' and the text is allowed to disseminate itself, what can be inferred from a musical work is constrained (at least somewhat) by the

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[29]Ibid., p. 30.

degree of structure of its image schematic pattern. This has an important consequence for any deconstruction of a musical text. There will always be a recognizable structure which underlies the differing expressions of the dialectic system of signifying elements — a properly deconstructed structure, but a structure nonetheless.

We have been dealing with the source of musical meaning and how it is transmitted without much mention of the listener, and the particular image. The rich image is determined largely by the experience of the listener, which obviously differs from person to person.[30] This rich image is the product of the mind's interaction with the music; it may remind you of a picture, a person, an emotional state of being, or any number of things. These images are our own version of the pieces underlying structure, *Erfüllung;*—our own impressions of the same image schematic structure. Consequently, Johnson's theory can account for (radically) different (mis)interpretations, by different listeners and performers, while recognizing that there is an (appropriately decentered, non-originary) underlying structure.

To summarize, then: Meaning is transmitted by a force understood to be metaphorical in nature, which is rooted in our bodily experience. This suggests that the actual physical soundwaves

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[30]Ibid., p. 62. "What constitutes an experientially basic level will depend on background knowledge, motivations, interests, values and previous experiences...experiential basicness is a relative matter."

carry no inherent meaning, but are simply the medium by which the product of interaction between the score and the performer, the image schematic structure, is conveyed. The listener then transforms this structure into a rich image. How a particular person will arrive at a specific rich image will depend upon what the listener brings to the performance in terms of experience, which will necessarily differ from person to person. The sometimes radical difference that the same text, and even the same interpretation of that text, can have is still contained within an underlying structure.

The art of interpreting a text is, even in an optimal situation, a formidable task. When faced with deconstruction, which problematizes matters ceaselessly, and forces us to constantly rethink even our most basic assumptions, the challenges only become greater. For those opposed to deconstruction it leaves the musical text in a shambles, where not only the traditional meanings of musical works, but any meaning they may have, are threatened into near extinction. For others, who are more sympathetic towards deconstruction, the situation is quite the opposite. Deconstruction is seen as an affirmation, a celebration of the limitless boundaries of the interpretation and reinterpretation of the same texts in new contexts. The two positions can be summarized in their response to the question which Subotnik's climactic sonority asks:

"Is there any way I can cadence securely?"

For those opposed the answer is simply "No." Any attempt is doomed to failure; to 'cadence' is simply not possible. For those more sympathetic to deconstruction, the answer is still no — but with an important qualification:

"Is there any way I can cadence securely?"

The answer revels in the infinite task it faces:

"No, but I will try!"

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