

The Force *of* Deconstruction

As will become increasingly clear, the topics of force and violence in Jacques Derrida's writings are so intimately interconnected with the problematic of deconstruction that neither thematic can be separated from one another. Furthermore, if I emphasize the *of* in "The Force of Deconstruction," the title of this first chapter devoted to Derrida's essay "Force and Signification," it is in order to highlight by way of the double genitive both that 'force' is the object of deconstruction and that deconstruction itself has a force that is particular to it.¹ Deconstruction is about a specific concept of force, but it also has a momentum, an *élan*, a force of its own.² I refer to deconstruction and force as a double thematics, since force is certainly one of the themes of deconstruction, but the fact that deconstruction has a force of its own in dealing with force should, perhaps, also make us hesitate from the start to speak of it as a theme.

"Force and Signification"—written in 1963, that is, the year after the publication of *The Origin of Geometry*—is a critical response to Jean Rousset's work, *Forme et signification: Essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel*, published the year before. Although this early text does not mention the

term deconstruction, it contains a paragraph in which Derrida, reflecting on his approach to Rousset's work, sketches out a way of proceeding, a "strategic operation" (28), that anticipates what will later be called 'deconstruction.' The paragraph is of particular interest for the following reason: if, after the publication of *Of Grammatology* in 1967, deconstruction has been commonly understood as a critique of logocentrism in the name of a revalorized notion of writing, that is, a critique of Western thought's intrinsic valorization of living speech and, in the same breath, of the values of full presence, proximity, and so forth, the 'early' formulation of deconstruction in "Force and Signification" is perhaps, as I intend to argue, in a way more fundamental, more sweeping, and explains why Derrida could speak of deconstruction in a variety of contexts in his later works.³ Is it just a mere coincidence that this more fundamental formulation of deconstruction is linked to the problematic of force, which, as the title of the essay seems to suggest, Derrida opposes to Rousset's notion of form? Is it by chance, furthermore, that this valorization of force in the essay is part and parcel of a conception of deconstruction that, because of its peculiar force, is in a way more fundamental than deconstruction understood as the 'mere' (if one can say so) dismantling of logocentrism?

Even though "Force and Signification" acknowledges structuralism's fecundity, Derrida characterizes its methodological efficiency as "the kind of infallibility . . . ascribed to sleepwalkers" (4). The essay, on the whole, is a critical debate with what Derrida calls structuralism's "immense region of somnambulism" (4), which results from its irreflection and lack of transparency. In structuralism, Derrida remarks, this somnambulism makes up "the *almost-everything*," which is the privileged concern of the social science of the history of ideas, as opposed to "the *almost-nothing*" of an implicit question that the phenomenon of structuralism and its

concern with language raise, and that Derrida associates with “the pure waking state, the sterile and silent acidity of the question itself” (4). Needless to say, it is this “almost-nothing” of the silent question that the emergence of structuralism poses that interests Derrida as a philosopher, above all. But what is this question? In the prelude of the essay,⁴ Derrida argues that, because structuralism is “an adventure of vision, a conversion of the way of putting questions to any object posed before us” (3), it is not of the order of a merely seasonal fashion that, once it is over, could then become the object for a historian of ideas. The emergence of structuralism, Derrida continues, is linked to an “anxiety about language—which can only be an anxiety of language, within language itself”—that concerns “universal thought,” that is, philosophy, “in all its domains, by all its pathways and despite all differences” (3). This anxiety about, of, and within language, about universal thought’s unquestioned evidence regarding the signifying nature of language, Derrida submits, is indicative of the fact that the phenomenon of structuralism is, rather than one historical phenomenon among others, nothing less than the “symptom” of the experience of an “astonishment [*étonnement*]” (3–4). He explains:

The structuralist stance [*attitude*], as well as our own attitudes assumed before or within language [. . .] are an astonishment . . . by language as the origin of history. By historicity itself. And also, when confronted by the possibility of speech and always already within it, the finally acknowledged repetition of a surprise finally extended to the dimensions of world culture—a surprise incomparable to any other, a surprise responsible for shaking up [*s’ébranla*] what is called Western thought, the thought whose destiny is to extend its domains while the boundaries of the West are drawn back. (4; trans. mod.)

This astonishment or surprise, along with the question silently raised by it that explains structuralism's emergence, is one about, of, and within language, by which language awakens to a disquieting awareness of the limits of its signifying nature, which is "uncertain, partial, or inessential" (4). Structuralism as a phenomenon is rooted in language's astonishment about its own temporality or, as we will see, about the force that "is the other of language without which language would not be what it is" (27). Now, the astonishment or surprise that characterizes structuralism and that makes it "an adventure of vision" unlike any other is an astonishment or surprise comparable to, but also, because it concerns Western philosophical thought itself, a more radical form of, the experience of the *thaumazein* that according to Plato and Aristotle is the origin of philosophizing. Within structuralism this astonishment is also the "*almost-nothing*" of a question that arises from this astonishment regarding language, which becomes an issue for the whole of Western thought. But this anxiety about, of, and in language is not, as I already intimated, just another experience inaugurating the philosophical. If the astonishment that constitutes structuralist and linguistic sensibility is unlike any other, it is because, in the face of the possibility of speech "and *always already* within it," it is "the finally acknowledged repetition of a surprise [. . .] incomparable to any other" (4; emphasis mine), in other words, of something within Western thought that has *always already* worried it but now can no longer be ignored. The mode of thought that originates with the astonishment in question is one that shakes every certainty within the whole of Western philosophical thought. Compared with the somnambulism of structuralism, this thought about Western universal thought as a whole raised by structuralism's emergence as a phenomenon is one of pure wakefulness or radical vigilance. This new mode of thinking that arises with the almost-nothing of the silent question within structuralism is at

work in full force in “Force and Signification.” It is not yet called deconstruction, but the wakefulness and vigilance associated with this new mode of thinking, due to the anxiety of language, are certainly a first indication of how to understand what deconstruction is ultimately about.

Derrida’s critique of the somnambulism of structuralism should interest us, because it is in this critique, which takes as its point of departure the *almost-nothing* that comes to light with structuralism itself, that the lineaments of his own approach are outlined. Before taking on structuralism’s somnambulism, however, Derrida highlights Rousset’s innovative position within structuralist literary criticism. It is important to emphasize the main points of the “*deliberate* difference” (6) with which Rousset sets himself apart from other structuralist critics, especially because, as Derrida argues, these points are abandoned by not only the other structuralists but also in particular by what, later in the essay, Derrida characterizes as Rousset’s “ultrastructuralism” (15). For reasons of space, I must restrict myself to a highly schematic account of some of the original features of Rousset’s criticism. Unique and original in Rousset’s attempt to do justice to the modern “literary fact” (7) is, first, his refusal to distinguish between form and content. For Rousset, indeed, modern art is not the expression of a meaning preceding the work but, rather, creation. Second, Rousset’s approach rests on what Derrida terms, undoubtedly with Edmund Husserl in mind, an “experience of conversion,” “a breaking-off with the world” within the world, through which both the writer’s and the critic’s gazes become focused on “the essential nothing” (8), that is, on the invisible site within a work in which the creation of new worlds or universes, which are in excess of all there is, takes place. The third distinctively original feature of Rousset’s structuralist approach to the literary fact would require a much more detailed development than I can afford here.

It consists in the attempt to free modern literary writing radically from the theological model of creation and to valorize it as a *first* sailing toward meaning that, furthermore, has always already been read by an other (by, in the first place, the other within the writer himself). Finally, writing is understood by Rousset as inaugural of a temporality and historicity inherent in works of art that, freed from the slumber of the sign, brings into being a pure language that says the always already-there, in short, Being.⁵

So far, my account has addressed some of the original features that, according to Rousset, characterize the literary fact and that Derrida associates with the power (*pouvoir, puissance*) of “true literary language as poetry” (12). Although the term is not used here, this power might also constitute writing’s ‘force.’ Having listed some of Rousset’s innovative contributions to understanding the literary fact, I can now proceed to the second part of “Force and Signification” where Derrida shows that—withstanding his novel insights into the literary work in the programmatic introduction to his book, insights made possible by his structuralist approach—Rousset not only ends up Platonizing structuralism in the readings of works from Corneille to Claudel that make up the bulk of his book but even practices an ultrastructuralism that, by objectifying the structures of literary works, blinds itself to the temporality and historicity inherent in literary works, in short, thwarts the “internal geneticism, in which value and meaning are reconstituted and reawakened in their proper historicity and temporality,” promised in the introduction to his study (14).⁶

In spite of Rousset’s claim that in a literary work form and intention, structure and meaning, are inseparable, the concrete analyses of literary works that he offers in his study focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the formal, or structural, aspects of the works in question. If structure was only a means in previous forms of literary criticism, it now “becomes the object itself, the

literary thing itself,” and “the exclusive *term*,” that is, also the end in itself of literary criticism (15). For this reason already, Derrida characterizes Rousset’s approach as one of “ultrastructuralism.” Furthermore, “structure as the literary thing is this time taken, or at least practiced, *literally*” (15). Indeed, as Derrida observes, “[s]tructure is first the structure of an organic or artificial work, the internal unity of an assemblage, a *construction*; a work is governed by a unifying principle, the *architecture* that is built and made visible in a location” (15). In other words, in Rousset’s ultrastructuralism, structure is taken in its proper sense, that is, as referring “only to space, geometric or morphological space” (15).⁷ In what follows, Derrida engages in a discussion of the relation of the proper and the figurative meanings of structure that will prove to be crucial for his further criticism of Rousset. He will be interested in the history of metaphorization of the notion of structure. If, *sensu stricto*, structure refers only to space and spatial constellations, Aristotle was the first to displace the “*topographical* literality” of structure in the direction of its “*topical* signification (the theory of commonplaces in language and the manipulation of motifs or arguments)” (16). As a result of this metaphorical displacement of the spatial and architectural meaning of ‘structure’ to linguistic phenomena, including language itself, one already speaks in the seventeenth century, as the examples Derrida provides demonstrate, of the structure and harmony or the bad structure of a literary or discursive composition. By metaphorically displacing the strict sense of structure, however, a transposition of spatial categories to language and all its elements takes place. Hence, Derrida asks: “How is this history of metaphor possible? Does the fact that language can determine things only by spatializing them suffice to explain that, in return, language must spatialize itself as soon as it designates and reflects upon itself? This question can be asked in general about all

language and all metaphors. But here it takes on a particular urgency” (16). The urgency in question derives from the fact that in Rousset’s ultrastructuralism, literary structure is taken literally again, and as a result language is understood exclusively in spatial terms. In other words, by transposing a notion of structure understood primarily in a spatial and architectonic sense to literary works, it is the literal sense of structure itself that acquires a metaphorical value. The literal sense thus becomes indistinguishable here from its metaphorical sense.

Derrida writes:

Hence, for as long as the metaphorical sense of the notion of structure is not acknowledged *as such*, that is to say interrogated and even destroyed as concerns its figurative quality so that the nonspatiality or original spatiality designated by it may be revived, one runs the risk, through a kind of sliding as unnoticed as it is *efficacious*, of confusing meaning with its geometric, morphological, or, in the best cases, cinematic model. One risks being interested in the figure itself to the detriment of the play going on within it metaphorically. (16)

Let me try to figure out what is at stake in this passage. To acknowledge the metaphorical sense of structure *as such* is to acknowledge not only that this sense implies a displacement from a primarily spatial literal sense of the term but also that this displacement, or the metaphoricity in general involved in it, is an intrinsic feature of language itself.⁸ To inquire into the term’s metaphorical sense is to inquire into it as a term of language and to conceptualize it in light of the metaphorical activity constitutive of language itself. Such acknowledgment of the metaphorical sense of structure as such consists in interrogating the spatial and geometric model in

the notion of structure and destroying it, thus radicalizing the displacement involved in metaphorization to such a degree that the meaning of the term is entirely freed from its literal sense. In short, to acknowledge the metaphorical sense as such of structure is to bring to light within it, to reawaken (*réveillé*) in the term structure, another sense, namely, “the nonspatiality or original spatiality” that it designates as a result of “the play going on within it metaphorically,” that is, the play of displacement that characterizes language in depth. In sum, to acknowledge the metaphorical sense of structure as such implies a bracketing not only of its literal spatial and geometric sense but also of its figurative Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian quality, so that a sense of structure can be revived beyond both that designates the movement of spatialization itself that constitutes the movement of structure insofar as it is a metaphor, that is, a displacement of a meaning from one word to another. By acknowledging the metaphorical sense of the notion of structure as such, a “nonspatiality or original spatiality,” along with, as will become increasingly clear, an original or, better yet, originary temporality, within it (*en lui*) comes into view. Rousset, Derrida remarks, “grants an absolute privilege to spatial models, mathematical functions, lines, and forms . . . Doubtless, he acknowledges the interdependency of space and time. [. . .] But, in fact, time itself is always reduced. To a *dimension* in the best of cases” (16). Yet, if the metaphorical sense of structure *as such* is that of an originary spacing, then the metaphoricity of structure is, at the same time, also an originary temporalization. Understood in its metaphorical sense as such, that is, in advance of its literal and figurative sense, ‘structure’ opens at once both space and time and, hence, does not justify any ultimate privileging of one over the other, unlike the sense of structure in most of structuralism. As we will see, it is in the name of structure thus understood that Derrida hereafter determines his own thought, its ways, and its

intervention in the classical system of oppositions, that is, in short, the thought of deconstruction.

However, before I turn to the passage in “Force and Signification” in which Derrida reflects on his approach to an ultra-structuralism such as Rousset’s, we must first speak of ‘force.’ At this juncture, a brief digression might, perhaps, be warranted on “Force of Law,” where Derrida remarks that “in the many texts said to be ‘deconstructive,’ and particularly in some of those that I have published myself, recourse to the word ‘force’ is both very frequent and, in strategic places, I would even say decisive, but at the same time always or almost always accompanied by an explicit reserve, a warning. [. . .] I have often called for vigilance, I have recalled myself to it, to the risks spread by this word, whether it be the risk of an obscure, substantialist, occulto-mystic concept or the risk of giving authorization to violent, unjust, arbitrary force.”⁹ Yet, as Derrida construes the term in “Force and Signification,” “force is not darkness, and it is not hidden under a form for which it would serve as substance, matter, or crypt. Force cannot be conceived on the basis of an oppositional couple” (28). After noting that a first precaution against these risks is to “recall the differential character of force,” Derrida adds in “Force of Law” that he has “always been uncomfortable with the word *force* even though [he has] often judged it indispensable.”¹⁰ We should not lose sight of these warnings as we now proceed to look more specifically into how, in “Force and Signification,” the word is given critical leverage against Rousset’s emphasis on form and structure.

Derrida writes: “The geometric or morphological elements of *Forme et Signification* are corrected only by a kind of mechanism, never by energetics. Mutatis mutandis, one might be tempted to make the same reproach to Rousset, and through him to the best literary formalism, as Leibniz made to Descartes: that of having explained everything in nature with figures and movements, and

of ignoring force by confusing it with the quantity of movement” (16). By qualifying the gesture that consists in opposing a concept of force to Rousset’s pan-formalism and pan-geometrism as a temptation, it is made clear from the start that such a strategy remains entirely within the constraints of the classical discourse of philosophy. Furthermore, the concept of force required to counter and to correct Rousset’s formalism is one that is picked from the arsenal of classical philosophical oppositions. Obviously, force here does not imply coercion and is thus different from the notion of force that we will encounter in the next chapter devoted to “Force of Law.” Nor is force simply the efficient cause of the changes in nature and of the movement of natural bodies as developed by Aristotle in his theory of *dynamis*, a concept of force that, all differences considered, prevails until Newton. Because of the negative reference to *energetics*, one must assume that Derrida is referring to a different concept of force, one that is not identical to a quantity of motion. Indeed, the concept of force with which he contrasts Rousset’s prioritization of form—Leibniz’s concept of force—is an explicitly metaphysical principle.

Derrida contraposes form to force, in particular, through several references to Leibniz’s *Discourse on Metaphysics*. But at least one other text by Leibniz, *The Essays on Theodicy*, is also mentioned at crucial argumentative junctures. Therefore, I authorize myself to draw on such texts by Leibniz as “On the Reform of Metaphysics and on the Notion of Substance” and the “New System, and Explanation of the New System,” with which I believe Derrida to have been familiar at the time. In “On the Reform of Metaphysics,” Leibniz gives a first sketch of his metaphysical concept of force, which he develops here in the context of his rehabilitation of the scholastic concept of substance. He writes: “To give a foretaste [of the concept of substance], it is sufficient for me to say that the concept of *forces* [*virium*] or of power (*virtus*, called by the

Germans *Kraft*, and by the French *la force*), and for the explanation of which I have designed a special science of *dynamics*, adds much to the understanding of the true *notion of substance*.” Force in the sense of *vis activa* is an “active force,” not mere possibility (*potentia nuda*), which needs a foreign impulse in order to become actual; in other words, it is a force that, as Leibniz explains, “contains within itself a certain *entelecheia* [actuality], which is midway between the faculty of acting and the action itself. It is thus a force that contains within itself a striving [*conatum*], and thus of itself passes into operation. As a result, this force is put into activity by itself [in distinction from mere possibility] and it does not need aid other than the removal of impediments.” As Leibniz submits, “the final reason of motion in matter is the force impressed upon each singular body at the creation.” Now, it is important to note that this force, which God as the ultimate substance has imprinted on all “individual substances,” whether bodily things or souls, and continuously recreates by way of the force that ceaselessly emanates from Him, is within substances the power to act and, hence, to generate other actions. Because of the nature of this force, “corporeal substance, no less than spiritual, never ceases to act.”¹¹ As Leibniz points out, this is something that has not been sufficiently acknowledged by all those who, like the Cartesians, define the essence of bodily substance exclusively in terms of extension. Leibniz makes the same point in somewhat greater detail in *Discourse on Metaphysics*, on which Derrida explicitly draws in “Force and Signification.”

A first reason why Derrida, in his debate with Rousset’s ultra-structuralism, turns precisely to Leibniz’s concept of force—and later, in the concluding pages of the essay, to Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling’s and Friedrich Nietzsche’s understanding of force as Dionysian read, most likely, from a Schellingean perspective—becomes tangible when he writes, while quoting Leibniz, that “in

the sphere of language and writing, which, more than the body, ‘corresponds to the soul,’ ‘the ideas of size, figure and motion are not so distinctive as is imagined, and [. . .] stand for something imaginary relative to our perceptions’” (16–17). Undoubtedly, in distinction from God as the creator of all things and the human cogito that perceives them, a physical thing itself is a *res extensa*. It is thus characterized by “‘size, figure and motion.’” But, as a thing *created* by the most perfect of all beings that, as a result, can have created only the best of all worlds, corporeal bodies, must, as Leibniz argues, be more than just geometrical entities even though they have no soul. He writes that, “if bodies are substances, it is not possible that their nature should consist solely in size, figure and movement, but that something else is needed.”¹² As expressions of a *vis activa* (*energeia*) that secures their (relative) completion and individuality, which in a way mirrors their creator, they must have force. They must at least have what Leibniz calls “ordinary forms or *brute souls*.”¹³ This must be even more so in the case of the created souls, which, as individual substances, are in their own singular way completed wholes that, thanks to God’s uninterrupted support, continue to benefit from the force that ceaselessly radiates from Him. Now, as Derrida intimates, since language and writing can be said to be related to the order of the soul more than to the body, geometrical form and spatial movement are inappropriate concepts to deal with them; they must be conceived in terms of an energetics. Leibniz also allows Derrida to suggest—within the framework of the still classical argument in which he is involved—that geometrical form and quantifiable motion are of the order of the imaginary in the domain of language and writing (in contrast to what he hails as Rousset’s acknowledgment of the crucial role that imagination plays in the creation of art). But, as I already said, Derrida’s recourse to Leibniz’s notion of force is only a temptation invited by metaphysics’ binary mode of thinking.

This, then, is also the juncture at which Derrida turns back upon the way he has so far been arguing. It is a long passage that I must in a slightly modified translation quote in its entirety:

Our intention here is not, through the simple motions of balancing, equilibration or overturning, to oppose duration to space, quality to quantity, force to form, the depth of meaning or value to the surface of figures. Quite to the contrary. To counter this simple alternative, to counter the simple choice of one of the terms or one of the series against the other, we maintain that it is necessary to seek new concepts and new models, an *economy* escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions. This economy would not be an energetics of pure, shapeless force. The differences examined *at the same time* [*à la fois*] would be differences of site and differences of force. If we appear to oppose one series to the other, it is because from within the classical system we wish to make apparent the non-critical privilege naively granted to the other series by a certain structuralism. Our discourse irreducibly belongs to the system of metaphysical oppositions. The break with this structure of belonging can be announced only through a *certain* organization, a certain *strategic* arrangement that, within the field of metaphysical opposition, uses the strengths of the field to turn its own *stratagems* [italics!] against it, producing a *force of dislocation* [italics!] that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly *delimiting* it. (19–20; trans. mod.)

Undoubtedly, for any reader of Derrida this paragraph sounds like numerous later statements regarding deconstruction, for

example, the section entitled “Questions of Method” in *Of Grammatology*. The paragraph certainly anticipates later formulations of deconstruction. Similar to his later reflections on his own way of proceeding, the passage just quoted is not a reflection on method in the Cartesian sense, that is, in the sense of an instrument of objectification. Rather, it concerns, in the Greek’s sense of *methodos*, the whole of the questions and problems raised by Derrida’s discussion of Rousset’s structuralism.¹⁴ Now, even though the paragraph in question resembles later, so-called methodological reflections by Derrida, it is also, in my view, somewhat different and, therefore, deserves close scrutiny, not least of all because the notion of deconstruction is not yet mentioned on this occasion. Even though Derrida seems to counter the privilege accorded to structure, space, form, and figure in Rousset’s structuralism with the notion of force and, by extension, the notions of time, quality, meaning, and value, this countering is described as a temptation, if not a trap fostered by the classical system of philosophical thought. For Derrida, it is not simply a question of making a case for what is neglected by Rousset’s ultrastructuralism and arguing against his approach in the name of a more balanced view of what is at stake in a work of art.¹⁵ Nor does he wish simply to invert the order of priority in view of another, complementary but equally one-sided determination of the work of art, one that this time would be based on force and everything else that accompanies this concept. Rather than replacing one series of concepts by another, that is, inevitably, the opposite series that the classical system of thought always already holds at the critic’s disposal, Derrida aims at something else. By merely exchanging one series for another, one remains within the system in question, within its oppositions and the hierarchical order that constitutes them. In order to escape the preprogrammed choices that the classical system of thought holds ready for the critic, and which, consequently, keep

him solidly within the system's constraints and, therefore, are not choices at all strictly speaking, it is necessary, Derrida holds, "to seek new concepts and new models."¹⁶ Derrida's investigation into the "metaphorical sense of the notion of structure [. . .] *as such*," in the process of which a "non-spatiality or originary spatiality" that at the same time represented the opening for temporalization emerged from within the concept of structure, was a first attempt of finding a new concept. As I have already pointed out, Derrida does not simply counter Rousset's ultrastructuralism with the concept of force to be found in the register of traditional conceptual oppositions. But let us ask one more time why, precisely, he calls upon the Leibnizean concept of force when he argues that one could be tempted to counter Rousset's ultrastructuralism in this way. Indeed, one of the specific distinctions of the Leibnizean concept of force is that, from a spatial point of view, it extends into the region in which it is effective and that, from a temporal point of view, it reaches from the present now into the future of its effects, thus expanding beyond itself to that upon which it has an effect, bringing itself into a unity with the things that it affects. Of course, if Derrida calls for new concepts in his debate with Rousset, the concept of force with which Leibniz counters Descartes's prioritization of the spatial cannot be the new concept of force for which he is looking. Yet, Leibniz's concept of force might, perhaps, lend itself better than previous, especially mechanical, conceptions of force to yielding a novel concept.

Since Derrida's retracement of his steps in the quoted passage touches upon the specific movements that make up his analysis of Rousset's claims and upon the end in view of which the analysis in question takes place, it is a first formulation of the problematic of deconstruction. The novel concept of force that he seeks to develop, which is no longer to be simply opposed to Rousset's prioritization of structure and form, is what I call the force of

deconstruction, the genitive being understood objectively. Concerning this force, for the moment Derrida only says that it is not “pure, shapeless force [*pure et informe*]” and, hence, not the binary opposite of pure form. In order to understand how to conceive such a force that would not be formless or shapeless and that, therefore, would no longer stand in a clear-cut distinction opposite to form, we must consider Derrida’s claim that, in order to escape the alternatives and the models at our disposition, “an *economy* escaping th[e] system of metaphysical oppositions” must be found. “This economy would no longer be an energetics of pure, shapeless form. The differences examined *at the same time* [*à la fois*] would be differences of site [*lieux*] and differences of force.” This economy is the new model sought in the search for new concepts needed to counter the metaphysical conceptual alternatives. Derrida does not elaborate here on how “economy” is to be understood. But an economy is a law, the *nomos* of the home or household, the *oikos*. For the time being, let me say only that “economy” seems to refer to the law according to which the new concepts, in advance of or beyond the metaphysical oppositions, relate to one another and are organized into some sort of whole. Indeed, the notion of economy that Derrida employs here is intimately linked to Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of linguistic elements as values, according to which such elements have no identity independently of their relationship within the whole of a language. In other words, the elements of language are differential in nature. But, by claiming that this economy would no longer be an energetics of pure, shapeless force, it is also suggested that it is an ‘economy of forces,’ an expression that in later works Derrida makes his own. By looking more carefully at what is meant by a force that is no longer formless, then, we might also be able to gain a better understanding of the economy in question. Since this economy is no longer an energetics of pure and shapeless force in

distinction from, and in a relation of opposition to, structure and spatiality, it is an economy of differences, of differences of force. These differences would be neither differences of sites, that is, of spaces, locations, or figures, of anything spatial, such as structures, nor differences of force as such but, rather, differences that are “*at the same time* differences of sites and differences of force.” A certain temporality is thus also part and parcel of this new economy in which sites are no longer simply sites but have a force-component, and force is no longer undifferentiated but has a site-component and is, therefore, not only spatialized but also plural.¹⁷ Now, let us remind ourselves that Leibniz’s metaphysical concept of force already no longer remains locked in the limits of either a site or a temporal moment but extends into the site or thing in which it is effective. In addition to the fact that Leibniz uses this notion of force to take issue with the Cartesian emphasis on spatial extension and geometry, it is not difficult to see why Derrida resorted to precisely this concept of force in his debate with Rousset or, rather, in an argument that he says one could be tempted to make. However, Leibniz’s metaphysical and theological concept of force is not Derrida’s response to Rousset’s ultrastructuralism, but it is clearly the starting point for the reflection on a new concept of force, a differential concept of force. If the economy that Derrida proposes in order to avoid the classical operation of opposition to, reversal of, or balancing out of one-sided positions is at the same time an economy of differences of sites and differences of force, then the differences are differences of force that are marked by sites and differences of sites that are sites into which forces extend. Such a differential concept of force is a deconstructive transformation of the Leibnizean concept of all-embracing and unifying force in that differentiability as a structural feature of difference presupposes a system of differences. This differential concept of force is the force of deconstruction (*genitivus objectivus*).

From the long passage quoted a moment ago, it is clear that, while opposing a concept of force to structure in the debate with Rousset would definitely be a temptation that metaphysical thought offers to the critic, the impression of falling prey to the temptation of making a case for force in opposition to form has nonetheless a crucial function to play. More precisely, there is a strategic reason for seeming to fall prey to this temptation, since it serves to highlight the noncritical privilege that structuralism naively grants to the spatial series of concepts. Although opposing force to structure is a gesture that “irreducibly belongs to the system of metaphysical oppositions,” by helping to bring out structuralism’s naiveté, its critical somnolence, it is also a moment within a larger operation that seeks to break with this system. I quote again: “The break with this structure of belonging can be announced only through a *certain* organization, a certain *strategic* arrangement [*aménagement*] which, within the field of metaphysical opposition, uses the strengths [*pouvoirs*] of the field to turn its own *stratagems* against it, producing a *force of dislocation* that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly *delimiting* it.” The belief that one can cut all ties with the system of metaphysics, especially from a position outside the system, is an illusion fostered by metaphysics itself (to reabsorb the critic better, as it were). The intra-metaphysical distinction between an inside and an outside is the conceptual and formal template of such an illusion. A ‘radical’ rupture with it can, therefore, only be announced within it and while (seemingly) playing by the rules of that system. Such a rupture is thus not a clean-cut separation. I recall that this break with the system of metaphysical opposition takes the shape of an economy. What Derrida advances here about the organization and the strategic arrangement (*aménagement*) that uses the powers of the stratagems of the system to turn them against it, thus preparing it for a new

ménage—the term ‘ménage’ referring to that which concerns the house, the *mansio* according to popular Latin—suggests an additional and perhaps crucial meaning of the term ‘economy’ in this context.¹⁸ The system of metaphysical opposition is a system to which *we*, that is, we Westerners, belong. It is our house, the *oikos*, in which we are inscribed as far as thinking and speaking are concerned. But the new economy that reorganizes and rearranges the powers or forces within that home produces “a *force of dislocation* that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly *delimiting* it.” In short, the new economy displaces and dislocates from within the economy of the abode to which we, as Westerners, belong. Rather than merely a mechanical force that pushes it here and there and always only from the outside, the force of dislocation in question is a force that from within the household of Western thought *spreads* throughout it, fissuring it, and undoes the boundaries of its location, emplacement, and enclosure, thus delimiting it. I am now speaking of the force of deconstruction in a subjective sense. Its force is one that from within metaphysics confronts the law of its household with an economy of dislocation. The force of deconstruction does not consist in overthrowing metaphysics, through which metaphysics would be replaced by something else, its other, for example, non-Western thought. The force of deconstruction delimits the system of metaphysics from within. Therefore, in order to understand what precisely this force achieves, we have to delve a bit further into what comprises this internal dislocation of the system of metaphysics from its proper place, its home, its household (and the family structure that, according to *Glas*, it implies). We have to try to get a better grasp on what an action of dislocation from within the system can possibly accomplish.

By spreading throughout the system and fissuring it, the rupture from within that the force of deconstruction brings about