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Deconstructive vs Pragmatic: A Critique of the Derrida–Searle Debate

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a critical account of the debate between Derrida and Searle in which I defend Austin's and Searle's pragmatic analysis of speech against Derrida's complex deconstructionist approach. I first formalize Derrida's argument, reducing it to its main tenets that can be positively identified and critically reviewed. On the basis of this formalization I argue that the apparent incompatibility between Derrida's and Searle's approach to language becomes clear once we formalize, according to their type and content, the three concepts of "intention" that are confusedly referred to under one and the same label in the debate. This formalization reduces and clarifies the obscurity associated with the Derrida–Searle debate, and helps demonstrating the shortcomings of Derrida's position.

KEYWORDS

Derrida; Austin; Searle; Deconstruction; Pragmatism; Speech-Act theory; Intention

Introduction

The debate between Derrida and Searle has received much critical attention, with the commentary often being Derrida-friendly. Even when commentators detect weaknesses in Derrida's argument, they approach them with caution, for given the complexity of his discourse, they know he is likely to make statements to the opposite effect elsewhere, or perhaps is only being "playful." The present account ignores this immunization-strategy whether intended or not in the deconstructive discourse. First, it formalizes Derrida's argument, reducing it to its main tenets that can be positively identified and critically reviewed. Second, it quite patently takes the side of Austin and Searle's pragmatic analysis of speech against Derrida's more complex and sometimes convoluted deconstructionist analysis.

In his recent authoritative account of the debate, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language*, Raoul Moati notes the "insurmountable incompatibility of [Derrida's and Searle's] respective philosophical approaches" as if the exchange only took place "to increase the distance between them."[1] Moati is right: There is both "incompatibility" and "distance" between the two projects on the question of "intention." Although the nature of this gap is often obscured in the debate, its structure seems to be detectable if we specify the tacitly changing contexts of how they apply the concept of *intention*. Once

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we formalize their different uses of intention and deliberately ignore the label that appears to unify them as self-identical, the label splits into "intention x" in one context and "intention y" in another and so forth, each of which needs to be elucidated. This formalization unlocks the famous obscurity of the debate and demonstrates the shortcomings of Derrida's position with greater clarity.

When Searle refers to the possibility of intention and Derrida retorts by insisting on its impossibility, we need to realize that Searle means 'x' while Derrida means 'y,' when referring to the sign 'intention.' Searle and Derrida are talking about several different things under the same label. In brief, I will demonstrate why I find Searle's 'x' more convincing that Derrida's 'y,' and why I find Derrida's attempt to mix up Searle's 'x' with a metaphysical 'z' problematic.

Speech-Acts

Derrida's discussion of intentions in speech took as its point of departure Austin's introduction of "successful" or "felicitous" speech-acts in *How to do Things with Words*. Here, Austin determined a successful speech-act as speech *seriously* performed in conventionally *appropriate* circumstances; for example, as making a promise and meaning it "seriously"—meaning that one was making a pledge to an interlocutor to whom something was actually owed, without intending the speech-act to be ironic, a joke, or a play-act. Austin conceded that "failure" was always a *possibility* in speech-acts, insofar as a number of things might go wrong, thus making it impossible to keep promises.

Derrida took this up in "Signature Event Context," where he objected to Austin's description of communicative failure as a *possibility*, as well as objecting to his frequent resort to the *serious* and *appropriate* as criteria for successful speech-acts.[2] Austin had conceded that speech-acts could *possibly* fail as they could deteriorate from being used to being abused, which would seem to be a harmless contention. From experience, we know that not every promise is kept, as well as that not every command is obeyed, or every assertion comes true as a fact—whether or not the illocutionary force of the utterance is intentionally or unintentionally ignored. We start to analyze a speaker's discourse if failures occur frequently and systematically, and begin then to look for other motives than those expressed in the patent speech-act. In cases of repeatedly broken promises, we conclude that the speaker is forfeiting the trust we initially placed in him or her. In that case, it probably dawns on us that the speaker is no longer facing us straightforwardly but is acting with secret agendas.[3]

This is a well-known form of social behavior that seems minimally to imply that we expect the successful speech-act to be operative, not always a failing one, since we would hardly continue to expect success had we known only cases of failure. Austin therefore seems to have good reasons to focus on speech-acts that succeed, because his criterion corresponds to the pragmatics of communicative action in its most common manifestation. Success is then the initial condition from which statements deteriorate (if so they do), and in his overarching analysis of the pragmatics of speech, failures are therefore determined simply as possibilities.

To Derrida's mind, however, this was too weak a formulation because it assumes that successful speech is the initial condition. Allegedly, Austin was unaware that failure is inherent to all of his examples as more than just possibilities and thus failed to notice

that any possibility is "structural" and therefore "necessary." Derrida insists that failure is a general feature of speech that one cannot choose to exclude or marginalize in a research strategy that regards success as original. Failures of speech-acts are not the exceptions, but the law; the marginal is not the periphery, but the center; Derrida consequently corrects Austin's explanation that failures conceptually have to be seen as so-called "necessary possibilities": Austin does not interrogate infelicity,

> as an *essential* predicate or as a *law*. Austin does not ponder the consequences issuing from the fact that a possibility—a possible risk—is *always* possible, and is in some sense a *necessary possibility*. Nor whether—once such a *necessary possibility* of infelicity is recognized—infelicity still constitutes an accident. What is a success when the possibility of infelicity continues to constitute its structure?[4]

There is no doubt that Derrida is right in emphasizing that failures often permeate and threaten our speech-acts, both from the sender's point of view (as speakers, we often do not read or understand our intentions very precisely), and from the recipient's point of view (our interlocutors are often equally ignorant about intentions, or may deliberately flout them). Even so, how does this correct insight make failures so-called "necessary possibilities"?

When we read Derrida, we understand of course his subtext. We understand that he corrects Austin because here as elsewhere in his work he presupposes the overriding irrationality of discourse. If speech necessarily fails, it does so because Derrida assumes that nonconscious, subconscious, or unconscious motives *always* operate in the background of discourse, as such imposing their own unruly and chaotic intentionality despite of and contrary to the 'rational' intentions we try to uphold when we speak "seriously."[5] We will return to this assumption, but we will first take a closer look at Derrida's conceptual construction: failures are not only possible, but necessarily possible. What then do these statements mean?

Necessary possibility is a difficult concept to wrap one's head around, since the construction is oxymoronic. On the one hand, a possibility is not a necessity, and on the other, a necessity is not a possibility. Each term in isolation is easy to understand, but the combination becomes abstruse. If I say, "It is necessary for me to go shopping,"[6] the hearer has no trouble understanding me; nor is there a problem in, "It is possible that I will go shopping"; but what about, "It is a necessary possibility for me to go shopping"—what have I said? Nobody can guess whether I am going shopping or only airing a thought.[7] As a speech-act, the utterance has little value. At best, the sentence seems to refer to a metaphysical problem, and to indicate that it is part of my fundamental *freedom* that I can go shopping whenever I want, and, as such, it refers to a transcendental-existential condition such as human freedom.

We will assume that if failures in speech-acts are necessary possibilities, Derrida means to say that they are always potentially present without always being realized. They describe the possibility of a potentiality to be actualized, expressed in terms of a certain *probability* of its realization. If, for example, it is possible for a particle to decay into an anti-particle, and if this possibility is expressed by a certain probability, this probability is always there as the same, or as what we might call a standing possibility, and in this sense we can describe it as necessary, in the precise sense that it is necessarily *there*. However, this still does not make the actualization of the probability

necessary. If the probability is very small, the likelihood of its actualization is also very small; indeed, any actualization that depends on probability is never necessary. Ironically, the actualization of a necessary possibility is never necessary, but only probable. Applied to our discussion, the failures of speech-acts are never necessary.

However, it is clear that this exposition of Derrida's conceptual construction is not his self- interpretation. He assumes that his rhetorical question ending the passage above, "what is a success when the possibility of infelicity continues to constitute its structure," has an answer along the line, "such a success is never a success, but *always* a failure." Thus, in what follows I argue that Derrida's understanding of his own conceptual construction is flawed and his conclusion is a logical slip. If failure in speech-acts is a possibility, it does not follow that speech-acts never succeed or that failure is a necessity. The answer to Derrida's leading question is then far more straightforward: if failure is a possibility, success is one of the cases where failure never occurred: for, if it is a *necessary possibility* for me to go shopping, it is granted that I *necessarily have the choice* to go shopping, but not that I *necessarily will* go shopping. In other words, a necessary possibility is not more necessary than a plain possibility—which is what Austin claimed from the start, namely, that speech-acts *possibly* fail (the "always possible" is still only possible).

Derrida returns to the concept of necessary possibility in several passages in his work, reiterating the same logical slip, as, for example, in *Limited Inc*. where he discusses the possibility of the functioning of writing in the absence of a sender, a receiver, or even a context:

> If one admits that writing (and the mark in general) *must be able* to function in the absence of the sender, the receiver, the context of production, etc., that implies that this power, this *being able*, this *possibility* is *always* inscribed, hence *necessarily* inscribed *as possibility* in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark. Once the mark is *able* to function, once it is possible for it to function, once it is possible for it to function in case of an absence, etc., it follows that this possibility is a *necessary part* of its structure.[8]

The claim of the passage is innocuous. Since writing or the written mark is necessarily conventional, it does not need the attendance of any particular sender, receiver, or context in order to be understood by members of a linguistic community. The possible absence of the physical-corporeal presence of the sender is in this sense (necessarily) inscribed in all languages. Derrida points out (correctly) that as readers we do not need the presence of the sender (the author) in order to read a text; the opposite is also correct, the author does not need the presence of a reader in order to write; finally, Derrida is right in inferring that we consequently do not need to know the original context for writing to function. When furthermore Derrida cautiously stipulates that absence is a necessary part of writing's structure, he seems to imply that it might have another part, which would then be presence. He is thus saying that writing functions now in absence and now in presence, depending on our perspective. In this, he is of course right, because he has said preciously little.

Although this may be what he says on the patent level of his discourse, the rhetorical performance weaved into his discourse negates such simple observations. He always comes back to absence as the universal and transcendental condition of writing. His conclusion is that if writing does not need the presence of a sender, a receiver, or

a context, it must function entirely in absence. Derrida wants to argue that absence and failure are transcendental conditions permeating all stages of the production and reception of writing. He seems to reach this conclusion thanks to the metonymic gliding from "able" to function in absence, to "always able," sliding into "always," whereupon the final version is "necessarily" granted. However, if an event is able and even 'always able' to happen, it is still only potentially, not actually, happening. Again, as in the case of the necessary possibility of communicative failures, I suggest that there is a more convincing, less dramatic, conclusion to be drawn from Derrida's observations.

True, the sender does not need a receiver in order to write, and the receiver does not need a sender in order to read, but in the respective times of production and reception taken separately, the author is as necessary in one situation as the reader is necessary in the other. These positions are merely different stages in the trajectories of a manuscript. At each of these different stages, the sender, within his context, then the receiver, within her context, necessarily need to be present. The proper conclusion is thus the opposite of Derrida's: in order for writing to function, it needs a context and a reader. If a manuscript lies dormant, buried in ruins or on forgotten shelves, and in this sense exists, in what precise sense does it function? On the forgotten shelf, it lives an isolated life separated from the original author, any possible reader, or any possible context. Precisely in this alienated and isolated existence, it does not function. However, when somebody takes it down from the shelf, dusts it off, begins to assimilate and appropriate its content, and thereupon disseminates this content, as for example by communicating it in a journal article, then the manuscript starts functioning. The researcher has given it a set of new readers, and the researcher and readers in unison recontextualize it anew.

I agree with Derrida that on its itinerary from being written to being read, the text is decontextualized from its original moment of production and context, and that the references we think we can establish to these moments are vague and hazy and may be purely hypothetical. Nonetheless, the text needs to be recontextualized in order to function.[9] Without interpretation or reinterpretation it has a purely passive existence, that is, no existence for us. On a pragmatic analysis—which I here oppose to Derrida's transcendental analysis—the text has no functionality before it is recontextualized thanks to some receiver/reader giving it new value and importance.[10]

The Cartesian Theater Everywhere

These preliminary reflections go to the heart of Derrida's discussion of Austin and Searle. When Austin analyzes the happy, the successful, and the felicitous utterance, he assumes on Derrida's reading, that speaker-intentions, in the precise sense of a fully controlled psychological background for utterances, are instrumental for the failure or success of speech. For Derrida Austin's idea of a *serious* speaker speaking *appropriately* is a regress to the traditional Cartesian notion of a rational, self-present subject in command of all its meaning-giving acts.

It is true that Austin sees speech-acts as promoting *a kind of* intentionality (which I label *speech-act intentionality*). However, since Derrida does not distinguish between different kinds of intention, his speech-act intentionality espouses the belief in the metaphysical notion of intention (which I will label *speaker-intentionality*), which he

regards as "another kind." As he writes in "Signature Event Context," he finds in Austin the values

> of an exhaustively definable context of a free consciousness present to the totality of the operation, and of absolutely meaningful speech [*vouloir-dire*] master of itself: the teleological jurisdiction of an entire field whose organizing center remains *intention*.
>
> Does not Austin, who nevertheless claims to describe the facts and events of ordinary language, pass off as ordinary an ethical and teleological determination … the presence to self of a total context, the transparency of intentions, the presence of meaning [*vouloir-dire*] to the absolutely singular uniqueness of a speech-act, etc.?[11]

I agree with Derrida's criticism of the notion of intention when defined as some empty inner mental constitution of meaning, which I, no less than Derrida, regard as absurd, because it refers ultimately to the notion of a rational soul, and implies that meaning is constituted before the linguistic expression. However, this spiritualization of meaning was rejected two centuries ago, so it is hard to find any sponsors of it in nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinking. Speech-act philosophers especially discarded the metaphysical notion of intention when they proposed the analysis of "speech-act intentions" as determined by the context of conventional procedures.[12]

Thus Derrida sees in Austin's supposed promotion of speaker-intentions in the metaphysical sense a regression to the Cartesian ego transparent to itself in its meaning-giving acts. He appears here to conflate speech-act-intention and speaker-intention and takes for granted that communicative success in speech-act theory is defined as the ability to express private intentions without any leftovers of something *not* understood by the speaker. He therefore contends that Austin and Searle promote a false phonologocentric theory where the speaker is understood as the "master of," "present to," and "transparent to" his speech.

If a successful speech-act for Austin implies that something has been said and understood in a conventional context, Derrida's far stricter criterion requires that in order to succeed the sentence should be *truly meant*. This strict criterion implies that there must be an unbroken continuity and absolute correspondence between the innermost spiritual speaker-intentions and their expression.[13] However, since we can never probe the depth of what was "truly meant," no utterance succeeds. Again, it is a wrong conclusion on a sober observation, because Derrida presupposes an artificially strict criterion for felicity, setting the bar so high that failure is unavoidable. If failure is a necessary possibility, then success is a necessary impossibility, and the false conclusion follows because per definition we cannot help but fail.

According to speech-act theory's pragmatic approach, in contrast, we do not need to consider whether statements are meant or intended in Derrida's strict sense; we only need to observe whether intentions have been expressed. As such, intentions *appear* in language-acts and may therefore be classified like animals in the animal kingdom. Intentions, on this pragmatic view, are thus appearances that have manifestations "for-us"; they are emphatically not things-in-themselves or intentions-in-themselves as Derrida presupposes.[14]

The most obvious problem with Derrida's analysis is that it ignores speech-act theory's explicit rejection of inward intentions as constitutive of speech.[15] In *How to do Things with Words*, Austin first distances himself from viewing speech-acts as "inward and spiritual acts":

> We are apt to have the feeling that [promises] being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign … of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe that … the outward utterance is a description, true or false, of the occurrence in the inward performance.[16]

Stanley Cavell has later objected that Derrida's metaphysical "voice" (the self-reflective subject speaking to and hearing itself speaking) is not the same as the voice discussed in ordinary language philosophy: "Derrida's deconstructive objective is the metaphysical voice … whereas the voice Austin and Wittgenstein call on in asking their interlocutors to say what they say, they call the voice of the everyday or the ordinary. They call it this … precisely to *contrast* their appeal with the appeal to metaphysics." [17] Moati too has argued that Derrida is "Husserlizing all forms of Intentionality," and that his debate with Austin and Searle "quickly transforms into a reiteration of the debate with phenomenology," now applied to Austin's and Searle's theses. Thereupon the Husserlian criticism is universalized when "deconstruction generalizes the primacy of voice as a manifestation of intentional presence in all the theories of signification it deconstructs."[18] These observations seem correct in view of the fact that Derrida's deconstructive insights from his early work on Husserl are consistently reiterated in his subsequent work.

Yet we may take Moati's observation a step further and argue that Derrida's reading of Husserl is already biased by his radical anti-Cartesianism.[19] The *root sin*, which Derrida discovers in virtually all Western thinking, is its supposed commitment to a "metaphysical voice" that recalls the self-reflective self in Descartes's *Meditations* that withdraws from the exterior world, closes its eyes and ears to all impressions, and focuses entirely on its innermost self-reflections. This inner "voice of reason," which Descartes conjures up, is supposed to aid him in his search for metaphysical certitude.[20] In this celebrated passage from the *Third Meditation*, Descartes outlines the arch-scene of philosophical self-reflection and sketches the method by which to hear ourselves "clearly and distinctly." This staging of philosophical self-reflection appears to fuel and energize Derrida's criticism, which he then applies to Husserl, Saussure, Austin and Searle, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, and to the numerous other targets of deconstruction. Derrida appears to take Cartesian rationalism as the universal subconscious of Western Thinking.

Against this Cartesian strain of Western thought, Derrida invariably emphasizes a gap or a hiatus between the self-conscious speaker's *intention as* an *impossible ideal* and its *expression* as actualized speech. This gap is unbridgeable and constitutes an *original difference* between the ideal and its actualization, between success as ideal and failure in actualization.

Searle's Objections and Derrida's Responses

At the core of the original debate between Derrida and Searle was the question of Austin's alleged belief in speaker-intentions.[21] Searle found Derrida's interpretation of Austin "unrecognizable" and set out to explain what speech-act theory meant by a "meaningful sentence":

> *A meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech-act*. … Derrida's implicit illusion [is] that somehow illocutionary intentions if they really

> existed or mattered would have to be something that lay behind the utterances, some inner pictures animating the visible signs. But of course in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions: there need be no gulf at all between the illocutionary intention and its expression. The sentences are, so to speak, fungible intentions. … To the extent that the author says what he means the text is the expression of his intentions.[22]

Here, Searle's "illocutionary intention" is identical to what I have labeled "speech-act-intentionality," according to which speech-acts are in themselves "realizations of intentions" or "fungible intentions." Searle thus counters Derrida's understanding of speech-act intentions as tacit re-introductions of speaker-intentions. For him language in action *is* intentional and thus eliminates the assumed "gulf between the illocutionary intention and expression" (i.e., Derrida's gulf between inner and outer, intention and expression).

In his response to Searle, Derrida was apparently perturbed by the accusation that he should assume that intentions were "something that lay behind the utterances" and that he had failed to realize that "there need be no gulf at all between the illocutionary intention and its expression." This was emphatically not what deconstruction was all about. If Searle declared Derrida's Austin unrecognizable, Derrida retaliated by declaring Searle's Derrida unrecognizable.

> Someone named Derrida supposedly believes in "something behind the utterances, some inner pictures animating the visible signs," this illusion belongs … to the repertoire of a psychology of language … more exactly to a pre-critical psychologism; one can only wonder by means of what perverse or baroque regression "Signature Event Context" might have succumbed to such psychologism.[23]

But is this riposte entirely ingenuous if Searle is arguing against *Derrida's Austin*? His point must be that *Derrida believes that Austin believes* in "something behind the utterances" and as such presupposes intentions to be in this position. Searle *rejects* Derrida's understanding of speech-act intentions (*SAI*) as identical to speaker-intentions (*SI*) in Austin, since Austin was not promoting *SI* "behind the utterances" or as "inner pictures" animating speech. Searle thus objects that Derrida's reading of Austin confounds *SAI* and *SI*, and that Derrida's reading consequently produces the unwarranted equation, $SAI \equiv SI$.

When Derrida chooses to believe (or make-himself-believe or make-his-readers-believe) that Searle refers to *Derrida* rather than to *Derrida's Austin*, he surreptitiously displaces the subject from Austin to himself, arguing he had been poorly read and maliciously misunderstood by Searle and company, which he derisively dubs *Sarl*.[24] Deconstruction has accordingly been misunderstood by the philosophical establishment, but it has paradoxically also been reaffirmed as a radical and emancipative thinking that is dangerous to that establishment, which therefore seeks to suppress it.[25]

Different Kinds of Intentionality

Essentially, Derrida misreads Austin and Searle by dismissing their pragmatic speech-act intentionality as merely another variation of speaker-intention. He links them to the classical metaphysical notion of speaker-intentionality, and demonstrates their purported limitations by excluding unconscious intentionality from their research-

Table 1. Kinds of Intentions: Speaker Intentions (*SI*), Unconscious Intentions (*UI*), and Speech-Act Intentions (*SAI*)

Paradigm	Intentional Mode	Postulate
The Metaphysical proposal	Intentions are at work 'behind' or 'before' speech as regulatory	Speaker intentions (*SI*) ensure the success of speech-acts
The Deconstructive proposal	Intentions are at work 'within' speech as destabilizing	Unconscious intentions (*UI*) ensure the failure of speech-acts
The Pragmatic Proposal	Intentions are expressed 'in' and 'as' speech	Intentions appear in/as speech-acts (*SAI*), and may succeed or fail

program. As noted earlier, this last form of intentionality is seen as destabilizing any resort to rational subjectivity, because it inscribes failure and absence as the transcendental conditions of speech-acts. As speakers we are always subjected to the other of this unconscious intentionality, which implies that intentions are neither motivated nor rational: they do not derive from a purposeful and self-controlled subject, and in this sense they lack direction and purpose. In discourse, we find unconscious motivations which are involuntary rather than purposeful. As unconscious, their existence never surfaces as conscious, they appear on the textual surface but escape rational self-reflection and as such are not meaning-giving or meaningfull; rather, they distort the meaning-full act thus deconstructing the supposed meaning communicated by the subject in its own conscious self-understanding. This so-called unconscious intentionality (*UI*) designates Derrida's alternative to the two forms of intentions we have introduced above as *SAI* and *SI*.[26] Since Derrida applies these three forms of intentionality in his debate with Searle, as well as in other work, they can be classified according to their intentional mode and fundamental postulate (Table 1). This classification enables us to identify them and to formalize Derrida's argument as pursued throughout his work. That various readers of the Derrida-Searle debate found it "obscure," "complex," or "impenetrable,"[27] may be partly because no attempt was made to distinguish among the three kinds of intentionality Derrida applies, to identify which one of them he is referring to at different points in the debate, and thus to understand their several changing positions in his works.

Formalizing Derrida's Argument

It is one of the essential tactics of Deconstruction to replace speaker intentions with unconscious intentions, i.e., *SI* → *UI* ('→' = 'replace with'), and with this to eliminate the classical rationalist belief in *SI*. Now, Searle too rejects *SI*, but for different reasons, namely because in the apparent world of speech-acts we do not need the assumption. If intentions are inscribed in speech as illocutionary, they are apparent in the speech-acts themselves (*SI* → *SAI*). In both Derrida and Searle, *SI* is replaced with something else, with either *UI* or *SAI*; in whichever case, neither of them defends the classical metaphysical concept of intention.

Derrida's misreading of Austen and Searle comes about because he insists on conflating psychological speaker-intentions and pragmatic speech-act intentions according

to the above formula *SAI* ≡ *SI*.[28] His strategy for defeating Searle (or rather *Sarl*) has accordingly the following components:

(a) Austin and Searle may think they promote speech-acts intentionality, but since *SAI* ≡ *SI*, they believe in metaphysical speaker-intentions (*SI*), despite their denials.
(b) Derrida is therefore correct in deconstructing or crossing out the entire equation, ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~.
(c) Since Austin and Searle promote *SAI* ≡ *SI*, they simultaneously suppress/repress *UI*, and consequently defend a *phono-logocentric* speech without unconsciousness, a *SI* without *UI*, in contrast to Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysical *SAI* ≡ *SI*. Derrida replaces that distinction with his alternative UI, according to his deconstructive formula, ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~ → *UI*.

When we condense these critical polemic moments, (a), (b), and (c), into one, we arrive at a brief formulaic expression of Derrida's entire argument, (a) *SAI* ≡ *SI*; (b) ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~; (c) ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~ → *UI*, which, when applied to Austin and Searle, approximately translates into: 'Austin and Searle are phono-logocentric Cartesians by arguing for *SAI*, which happens to be identical to *SI*, and so the phono-logocentrism of their position has to be deconstructed and replaced with *UI*'.

It is now easier to see why Searle's statement "in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions" by Derrida is read as a confirmation of his (a)-part.

> In this passage I find confirmation not only of the fact that the criterion of intention (responsible, deliberate, self-conscious) is a necessary recourse in order that the 'serious' and the 'literal' be defined … but also and *above all of the fact that this intention must indeed, according to his own arguments, be situated 'behind' the phenomenal utterance*.[29]

Derrida cannot see beyond his first confusion of psychological with pragmatic intentions, the *SAI* ≡ *SI*, even when Searle explicitly *rejects* the existence and relevance of something lying "behind" the utterances. He assumes a single concept of intention as something existing *behind or before* the utterance, and must consequently insist on this "behind" in Searle's sentence, thus conflating *SI* and *SAI* as self-identical. We may see this esoteric reading of Searle's explicit statements as an illuminating example of Derrida's own unconscious intentions (*UI*), his "blindness" or his "polemic desire" escaping his rational control.

The formulaic simplification of Derrida's argument to (a) *SAI* ≡ *SI*; (b) ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~; (c) ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~ → *UI* is admittedly my effort at reconstruction, and is far from being explicitly spelled out in the texts. On the contrary, Derrida has a tendency to avoid simplicity and oftentimes obscures his positions rather than explicating them. By doing so he seems to lend his text a certain impenetrability by turning his positions into something different than what we thought we were reading. Sometimes he turns positions into their opposites, then turns these opposites into opposites of themselves, leading them back to the beginning in order to start all over again.

We could cite multiple examples of this complexity or dubious profundity, which only seems to generate evermore evasive dialectical depths. I present here a single example. After ascertaining that Searle assumes that intention is "situated 'behind' the phenomenal utterance," Derrida recalls that Searle de facto equates intention with expression,

and suddenly his rhetorical drive changes direction; he now denies the possibility of this equation by surprisingly arguing for the necessity of speaker-intentions (*SI*). Accordingly, speech-acts *must* depend on speaker-intentions (*SAI* ≡ *SI*):

> No criterion that is simply inherent in the manifest utterance is capable of distinguishing an utterance when it is serious from the same utterance when it is not. Solely intention can decide this and it is not identical with "realization." Nothing can distinguish a serious or sincere promise from the same "promise" that is non-serious or insincere except for the intention which informs and animates it.[30]

To further consolidate this position, Derrida argues that speech-act-intentional promises (*SAI-promises*) *cannot* exist, because on the surface of the speech-act we have no criteria by which to distinguish between a sincere and insincere promise; the only criterion we *do* possess is "*the intention* which informs and animates it"; i.e., *SI*. This assertion is of course meant to apply to Searle: what Derrida means to say is that Searle, despite his denials, *must depend* on inner mental acts. Thus Searle involuntarily confirms the existence of intentions "behind" the utterance, and cannot help but believe in *SI* while promoting *SAI*. In his involuntary equation of *intention* and *expression* we see his unwitting and unwilling confirmation of *SI*. Thus the conditions of possibility (or perhaps conditions of impossibility) for making *sincere* promises must always be (so Derrida) that they fulfill intentionality-conditions in their fullest and most ideal form (*SI*). What we witness here is the execution of the (a)-part of Derrida's polemical strategy: necessarily *SAI* ≡ *SI*.

Searle, of course, explicitly rejected the necessity of such metaphysical intentionality-conditions (*SI*), so Derrida's response is a repetition of that original rejection of *SI*, although presented as the correction of Searle's mistake. Derrida wants to emphasize (a) that when Searle discusses the promise, he necessarily resorts to and cannot help but imply (*SI*); however, when Derrida corrects Searle's misunderstanding, he declares (b) that a promise *does not* depend on (*SI*): "For a promise to be a promise, it ultimately matters little whether or not in fact a promise has ever existed, or whether one has ever been actually discovered which would fully and rigorously satisfy the requisite conditions."[31] Derrida must mean that the reason the metaphysical intentionality-conditions of a promise hardly matter is that the promise is expressed in the speech-act, no matter what the intention was. In which other sense could they not matter? Briefly, what is said is said, which means that we do not have to resort to *SI*, because also without *SI*, a promise functions as a promise, namely as a speech-act. But this was exactly Searle's point.

While there seems to be agreement between Derrida and Searle (at least in some contexts), Derrida insists on their major disagreements. This insistence seems to be pursued as a rhetorical device generally employed by Derrida here as well as in several other works as, for example, when he examines Saussure's concept of the *signified* or Husserl's concept of *presence*.[32] Derrida attacks what he sees as repressive philosophical theorists that resort to concepts such as *meaning* and *presence* even when the very same philosophers have questioned these very constructions.

In the present case, Derrida is fighting *Sarl*. The (a)-part of his argument (*SAI* ≡ *SI*) implies that *Sarl* may believe that he/it resorts to manifest and expressed intentions (*SAI*), but he/it cannot help but fall back on psychological speaker-intentions (*SI*), the

objection to *Sarl* being that he/it should have insisted on the purely apparent (*SAI)* without any help from or adequation with *(SI)*. First he applies the formula (*SAI* ≡ *SI*) to Searle, then he corrects Searle for not insisting on its opposition (*SAI* ≠ *SI*), which happens to be the crux of Searle's argument: "To reject the belief in 'intentions' or 'inner pictures' behind the utterances, however, does not amount to endorsing the belief in any simple adequation of the utterance to itself, or, in terms that are strictly those of Sarl, in an adequation between 'the intention and its expression'."[33]

Such a rendition makes promising impossible on any count; first psychologically, because the seriously intended promise is impossible; secondly, because the conventionally expressed promise only refers back to the psychological. The first form is a simple regression to Cartesian metaphysics, but the second is no improvement because it presupposes the first and is consequently a regression to Cartesian metaphysics as well. Austin and Searle are in a bind, because they, on Derrida's reading, believe in intentions as inner pictures "behind" the utterances, despite their denials to the contrary.

Iterability and Constitutional Forgetfulness

The outcome of Derrida's reading is that his Searle is an "expressionist," a "representationalist," a "subjectivist," and a "psychologist":

> Even were I to accept [Searle's] expressionist or representationalist description of language; even were I to consider the utterance as the "realization" of an "intention," I would at the very least have to recall that the *dehiscence* [rupture] already discussed does not intervene, primarily, between an "intention" and an "expression," but already, from the start, as an effect of iterability within each of these putative instances.[34]

An "utterance as the realization of an intention" represents "not primarily" a rupture between intention and expression, but a much more original rupture, occurring much earlier in the production of meaning. This much earlier rupture is an effect of *iterability*, a concept to which we will return. At this point, Derrida concludes by restating that *UI* are incompatible with speech-act theory. The enterprise of "Signature Event Context," he writes,

> is in principle designed to demonstrate a type of "structural unconscious" … which seems alien, if not incompatible with speech-act theory given its current axiomatics. The latter seem constructed in order to keep the hypothesis of such an Unconscious at a safe distance, as though it were a giant Parasite … of every ideal model of a speech-act (simple, serious, literal, strict, etc.) … as it is used in the theoretical strategy by Austin or by Searle.[35]

We are back to the (c)-part of Derrida's argument, the assertion of "an Unconscious" (i.e., unconscious intentions [*UI*]), replacing the deconstructed (*SAI* ≡ *SI*)-complex according to the third part of our formulaic expression, (c) ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~ → *UI*.

In Austin and Searle's speech-act theory this "unconscious" is repressed; it is "kept at a safe distance" "as a giant parasite," and as such they participate in the repression of the unconscious in Western (Cartesian) thinking. We notice that the formulaic expression, (a) *SAI* ≡ *SI*; (b) ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~; (c) ~~*SAI* ≡ *SI*~~ → *UI*, summarizes Derrida's fundamental argument: here as elsewhere, *SAI* as identical to *SI* are to be deconstructed and replaced with *UI*.

However, Derrida's introduction of the notion of *iterability* gives us an argument for the absence of meaningfulness in speech quite different from the notion of unconscious intentions. It presents another deconstructionist explanation that I can only address briefly in the following.

The process described as iterability indicates in its most elementary sense the ability of language to be repeated. It is self-evidently the case that language would not be language and could not function as language if it was not repeatable, for otherwise, we would attach private meanings to words and develop our own private vocabularies, making communication and social interaction impossible. This observation is trivially true, and it is also not Derrida's most pregnant sense of the term. He suggests a more radical sense in which iterability still implies repeatability, but uniqueness as well. This seems again a fundamental correct intuition. Linguistic signs must be repeatable as the same, yet simultaneously identical signs are never exactly repeated as the same. There is always difference in the apparently identical. The sender and the receiver may refer to the same sign but invest it with different meanings; or the sign may have been transmitted in one context, but received in another, where it is given a new linguistic value.[36] It is this insight that concerns the fundamental rupture Derrida calls *dehiscence* in the passage cited above, because even in the here and now of a conversation, the same sentence uttered by the speaker and received by the listener may take on radically different meanings for each of the interlocutors.[37]

Derrida sees this rupture as a general condition of language-acts, spoken or written. The utterance, the expression, or the word, though stabilized as conventional linguistic signs, will *always-already* disappear from the self-present intention and/or context of the speaker/writer in the *very moment* of utterance or inscription. As soon as transmitted, the utterance never returns to quite the same intentional state or context as that in which it was uttered or written.[38] This condition occasions the rupture or *dehiscence* and explains the so-called necessary possibility of absence in utterances and expressions discussed earlier.

A further implication of the basic rupture in language is that we cannot interpret ourselves because we cannot reconstruct our intention in writing or uttering this or that sentence in the past. It may have been high noon when I wrote "I love you more than myself" but now, as I reread my letter, it is midnight, and I read this expression of pathos with embarrassment. I read myself as I read a stranger. We notice as well that this condition may be applied generally, because if an expression will never reach the *same ego* as the self-same, *a fortiori* it will never reach an *alter ego* as the self-same. Thus we will never be able to recover the *first original intention* by which something was expressed.

On this, I agree with Derrida. It must be fundamentally correct that there is an irreparable rupture between *this* present and *that* past, and we are unable to restore the past with any modicum of sufficient clarity and precision. As Derrida notes, we may also apply this to very short time-intervals, because even at such intervals memory sinks back and disappears into what we may understand metaphorically as an indeterminable *trace*. When applied to the briefest of moments, like the moment of inscription itself, the here and now of "writing a shopping list," as Derrida says, there is still a temporal difference between "sending the shopping list to oneself" at the moment of writing it down, and receiving it on rereading it in the supermarket. This time-difference distorts or erases the halo of intentions with which the list was originally composed.

Conclusion

This is fascinating thinking. Still, I would argue that the pertinent observations regarding iterability lead to a different conclusion. Let us admit the rupture, the irreparable loss of the original moment of inscription, but rethink and re-evaluate its consequences. Contrary to Derrida's conclusion, we discover that the very erasure of original intentions enables us *to live the present*. This may at first seem paradoxical, but the *disappearance* of original intentions is not the "necessary possibility" of absence and "necessary impossibility" of presence, whether as present sensational event or present communicative instance. If and insofar as we are constitutionally forgetful of the original moment of inscription (which seems to be the core of Derrida's idea), we are so because we cannot hang onto all our past intentions, experiences, memories, or desires as this would paralyze our cognitive apparatus. If perchance we hang onto our past experiences, they would so interlace themselves with our present experiences that we would be unable to experience anything at all. This would destroy our ability to sense, to speak, and to act in the *present now*. Past sensations would interfere with present sensations, past utterances with present utterances, and any conscious attention would dissipate before it even materialized as perception or language. It thus follows that our "constitutional forgetfulness" is the necessary condition of the possibility of presence.

Granted our clever biological constitution, forgetfulness is introduced into our existence in order for us to interact with reality and our fellow humans as the two most important externalities constituting our life-worlds. As organisms, we forget details because it would be self-destructive to remember them. According to this naturalistic-pragmatic explanation, which also Rorty sometimes defends,[39] forgetfulness is a sign of health, enabling us to act, live, and even enjoy the present. As Nietzsche realized, to introduce "a little *tabula rasa* of consciousness, to make room for new things … that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette. So it becomes immediately obvious that there would be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present, without forgetfulness."[40]

The insistence on presence is thus an anti-metaphysical move. As Cavell noted, the presence of the speech-act is not the same as the metaphysical appeal to presence.[41] In the presence of the speech-act, we also practice forgetfulness and ignore detail, because awareness of distorted intentions, whether unconscious or lost to the past thanks to the original rupture between sending and receiving, would paralyze interaction. To put an unwitting interlocutor on the psychoanalytic couch in her everyday discourse—to reinterpret speech-act intentions as unconscious intentions and impose unconscious intention-motives on speech-act intention-performances—almost appears as an act of betrayal of the dialogical situation.

Notes

1. Moati, *Derrida/Searle*, 2–3.
2. Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc*., 1–25.
3. This analysis is similar to Habermas's in "What is Universal Pragmatics?" See also McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Jügen Habermas*, chap. 4.
4. Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 15 (my emphases).

5. I describe these common irrational moments in discourse as "unconscious" and the intentionality they espouse as "unconscious intentionality" (*UI*). In his writings Derrida uses "structural unconscious" and sometimes "textual unconscious," to emphasize that discourses express intentional moments that are undermined by some other kinds of intentions, if not "unconscious" in a Freudian sense, then at least *non-consciously* appearing on the discursive surface. The subject is therefore never in absolute control of his or her discourse. Derrida thus does not fully condone the Freudian unconscious—he does not talk about childhood memories, repressions, traumas, and the like, as much as about aporia, inconsistencies, paradoxes, performative self-contradictions, etc. He is more interested in the textual manifestation of unconscious material, than in a theory of the unconscious. He is clearly not referring to the concepts of the unconscious found in the nineteenth-century psychophysiology developed by Fechner, von Helmholtz, Nietzsche, Wundt, and indeed, the young Freud. These theories are not relevant to his project, while the metaphysical project of deconstructing the rational self is. We see this prioritization in his attempt in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" to engage with the neuropsychological discussions in Freud's "Project," where he symptomatically reinscribes Freud's observations into his grammatological difference thinking, as if neuropsychology has a deeper transcendental-logical foundation. I elsewhere question Derrida's conviction that science has this transcendental-(grammato)logical foundation, which Grammatology so urgently seeks to determine.
6. This is the same example Derrida and Searle use throughout their debate.
7. Cf. Kenaan, "Language, Philosophy," 123: "Failure is understood as a possibility into which the communicative act may eventually fall or deteriorate. This means that failure is not constitutive of what a speech-act *is* but, rather, only functions as a 'trap into which language may fall or lose itself as in an abyss situated outside of or in front of itself.' In other words, although failure is taken to be a condition that constantly haunts the communicative act, a condition into which specific communicative acts regularly fall, it is nevertheless not understood as intrinsic but as always exterior to the essence of the phenomenon."
8. Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 48 (original emphasis).
9. In "Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," Ricoeur also emphasizes how writing detaches itself from its moment of inscription, defined by the author's intention: "Writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author. What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant" (139). In Ricoeur too, this detachment—Ricoeur prefers the term distanciation—has as its immediate consequence that the text becomes infinitely readable. Within its new hermeneutical horizon, the text achieves a different meaning: "It transcends its own psycho-sociological conditions of production and thereby opens itself to an unlimited series of readings, themselves situated in different social-cultural conditions. In short, the text must be able, from the sociological as well as the psychological point of view, to 'decontextualise' itself in such a way that it can be 'recontextualized' in a new situation—as accomplished, precisely, by the act of reading" (ibid.). Ricoeur's definition of the text is almost identical to Derrida's by also emphasizing detachment and absence (of author-intention), readability, reiterability, and context-sensitivity as general qualifications of writing.
10. This is tantamount to saying that a text has no functionality in-itself, i.e., that there is no "transcendental logic" (such as absence, iterability, *differance*) that in-itself secures a text's functionality. The important question regarding Derrida's status as "transcendental philosopher" was introduced by Rodolphe Gasché in *Tain of the Mirror* and is also discussed by Geoffrey Bennington, in "Derridabase." The discussion is important and seems inevitable if I were to address more abstract issues such as Grammatological epistemology or metaphysics. I agree with Gasché and Bennington that Derrida indeed is a transcendentalist, and simultaneously disagree with Rorty that he is not (see Rorty's riposte to Gasché in "Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?"; see also Critchley, Derrida, Laclau, and Rorty, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. However, my agreement comes with a caveat, as I happen to see this transcendentalism as a severe shortcoming of Derrida, which is why I do not share Rorty's view that he is another pragmatist.

11. Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 15, 17 (original emphasis).
12. See also Moati: "Austin never ceased to submit intention to a world of conventions that precedes and conditions the deployment of speech acts: meaning in Austin is no longer conditioned by intention, but by the adequacy of words used to the circumstances required by conventions. … The force of the illocutionary act is *conventional*, that is, the act indicates a certain number of effects defined by convention. … Austin remains an author whose approach distances itself radically from the subjectivism that Derrida projects onto him. In the end, Derrida wants to lead Austin back to a subjectivist thesis." Moati, *Derrida/Searle*, 43, 61, and 67.
13. Cf. Alfino: "Does speech act theory continue the traditional and unwarranted association of meaning with the immediate and infallible presence to the speaker of his intentions? Does the requirement that the successful performance of a speech act include sincerity represent an extra-linguistic stipulation, needed to reinforce presence, but not essential to language?" Alfino, "Another Look at the Derrida-Searle Debate," 146.
14. Cf. Dahl: "[One must] accept the other's behavior as expressive of his or her mind … even though [we] cannot redeem the absolute metaphysical foundation of our knowledge of it. But to acknowledge also means to respond responsibly to the claim made upon me, from the world or the other. Such responses are not theoretical, but practical in nature. *The question of sincerity and insincerity of a particular utterance cannot be settled by theoretical speculations of private intentions*, but it will have practical consequences for how we relate to each other, both now and in the future." Dahl, "On Morality of Speech," 91 (my emphasis).
15. This is also Dahl's objection: "Derrida simply attacks what he takes to be the metaphysical understanding of intentions and fails to see how ordinary language has already challenged this. … An intention is definitely not a hidden psychological presence to itself prior to expression, as Derrida seems to presuppose. … In Derrida's reading, Austin places the intention at the conscious 'determining center of context'" (ibid., 88).
16. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 9.
17. Cavell, *Pitch of Philosophy*, 62. We notice that Habermas too rejected the 'ego cogito' as constitutive in communicative interaction. In Habermas, we encounter a duality of Ego and Alter in their attempts to attain intersubjectively valid knowledge; communicative rationality is expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding, which secures for the participating speakers an intersubjectively shared life world, thereby securing at the same time the horizon within which everyone can refer to the one and same objective world. (Cf. Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 315).
18. Moati, *Derrida/Searle*, 89, 35.
19. Several commentators have voiced this criticism, including Moati: "Derrida sees in communication the expression of an intended meaning at work, which Husserl had always denied. … Derrida plays Husserl against himself on this point" (ibid., 37). For other commentaries critical of Derrida's reading of Husserl, see Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction*, which is still the most thorough. See also Mulligan, "How Not to Read," and "Searle, Derrida and the Ends of Phenomenology"; and Schwab, "Fate of Phenomenology in Deconstruction."
20. It is doubtful whether this commonplace characterization of the "Cartesian subject" is fair to Descartes. I suspect it describes a pseudo-Descartes, launched more as a strawman for criticizing Rationalism in the historical context of the 1960s where a more anarchistic playful personality structure was celebrated.
21. Derrida's essay "Signature Event Context," followed by Searle's response, "Reiterating the Differences," was published in *Glyph*, vol. 1 (1977): 172–97; in *Glyph* vol. 2 (1977): 162–254, Derrida added a long essay responding to Searle, "Limited Inc … a b c." When parts of the debate (without Searle's participation) were later published as a book, *Limited Inc*. (1988), Derrida added a second long essay, "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," composed as an interview with a polite but skeptical Gerald Graff.
22. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences," 204, 202. (my emphasis).
23. Derrida, *Limited Inc*., 66.

24. Derrida's "Sarl" refers to a whole set of philosophers of which Searle is only a single representative. The French SARL abbreviation stands for *Société Anonyme à Responsabilité Limitée*, the English equivalent of which is *Limited Liability Company* (or *Limited Incorporated*), indicating a "business or company organized in such a manner that its owners and shareholders are not personally liable for debts or other business liabilities (such as damages from lawsuits)" (cf. *Babylon English Dictionary*). Searle is in other words a 'shareholder' in a greater company that has declared itself immune to prosecution. In the follow-up essay in *Limited Inc*., whose title we now understand as a synonymous label for SARL and therefore directly referring to Searle (cf., *Searle ~ Sarl ~ Limited Inc*.), Derrida looks back on the debate and seems to be sure that 'violence' had been committed against him and deconstruction. He therefore calls for an 'Ethics for Discussion' that would stop the dubious Sarl enterprise and its shareholders from inflicting further damage.
25. According to Norris, Derrida demonstrated "quite easily that Searle has missed the point, here as elsewhere; that he has failed to grasp what is essentially at stake in this questioning of ideas like 'context' and 'intention'." Norris, *Derrida*, 179. In his later work, Norris emphasized Derrida and deconstruction's philosophical rigor while simultaneously developing a resolute critique of postmodernism (see, e.g., Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism*). For Norris and other commentators, like Rorty, Derrida's apparent inconsistencies were seen as deliberate playfulness that, since deliberate, could redeem Derrida. Thus for Norris, Derrida was "shrewdly" quoting Searle's argument "out of context" and "rigorously" reinforcing his point by an "elaborate textual play designed to trap Searle in the typecast role of literal-minded innocent dupe." Norris, *Derrida*, 178. Rorty was aware of the inadequacy of Derrida's reasoning, but he too adopted a benevolent interpretation of his flaws as "playfulness." Cf. Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing." It was as if agreed by members of the deconstructionist community that Derrida did not commit errors, even when something looked like an error, which was interpreted as a polemical strategy designed to outmaneuver the opponent.
26. Derrida has attempted a number of readings of "unconscious intentionality" in "autobiographical" moments of a text. Best known is perhaps his "To Speculate – On Freud" (in *The Post Card*, where he attempts an analysis of Freud's unconscious (not to be confused with the Freudian unconscious) in Freud's writing in and around his 1920 seminal essay "Jenseits des Lustprincips" ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle"). Derrida here endeavors to establish a connection between Freud's notion of a "death-drive" and the personal tragedy befalling him in the aftermath of World War I, by reading Freud's unconscious concerns as textually manifesting themselves in his letters. On Derrida's reading, Freud's speech-acts (*his SAI*) are exactly reconstructed as "unconscious intentionality" (*UI*), insofar as Freud writes things that he does not fully "intend" and which we consequently are justified in calling "non- or unconscious." To talk about "unconscious intentionality" is on the one hand not dramatically misleading, but on the other, it fulfills an exigency pressing itself upon us—the economic necessity of inventing concepts; writing pragmatically must imply that we without further ado accept taking *decisions* regarding creating conceptual distinctions in order to express *theory*.
27. For Habermas in *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, the discussion between Searle and Derrida was "impenetrable" and "complex," since Derrida did not "belong to those philosophers who like to argue" (193–94).
28. Moati too observes in *Searle/Derrida* that Derrida always understands intentionality restrictively as intentional *presence*: "This means that the pragmatic or intentional value of an utterance resides for Derrida entirely in the *presence* with which the author is able to infuse a sequence of signifiers, whereas for Searle the intentional value of an utterance resides entirely in the *usage of conventions* that a proposition translates: no need in such a case to trace intentionality back to the presence of a living subjectivity preserved in written

sentences. Searle thus disarticulates two notions that Derrida assimilates, namely, *intentionality* and *presence*, since for the former, the intentions of a speaker can only be grasped in terms of conventions" (121). Precisely because we cannot access "intentional presence" (*SI*), we can grasp intention only in terms of conventionality; pragmatically speaking, we ought to expect no more.

29. Derrida, *Limited Inc*., 69 (my emphasis).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid. The sentence seems to paraphrase Kant, *Metaphysics* of *Morals*: "even if there has never existed a sincere friend, sincerity in friendship is an idea that is still required of every man"; and "Even if an unselfish act has never been performed, unselfishness is still the ideal for moral action" (19).
32. See, e.g., Bornedal, "Derrida's Paralogism of Writing"; and Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction*.
33. Derrida, *Limited Inc*., 69.
34. Ibid., 72.
35. Ibid., 73.
36. Cf. Cavell, *Philosophical Passages*: "Any conventional utterance, such as a speech-act, is able to be iterated in the absence of a fixed sender and receiver. With iterability comes the unavoidable fact that the meaning is altered in each instance it is actualized, according to the shifting situations and horizons in which it is interpreted" (85). See also Bearn, "Sounding Serious: Derrida and Cavell."
37. This play between self-identity and self-difference, between ideality and alterity, in a sign's fundamental iterability, has been emphasized not only by Derrida (in *Limited Inc*., 190), but also by Bennington, and Gaschè in *Tain of the Mirror*, where Gaschè writes: "As a result of the difference inscribed in each ideal unit as the possibility of its iteration, that unit is always already something other than it purports to be. … The time and the place of an other time must from the outset affect the first time if the latter is to be susceptible to repetition" (215). See also Bennington, "Derridabase" in *Jacques Derrida*: "A statement that could be quoted in another context would not be a statement, for a statement exists only through the possibility of repetition in alterity" (86).
38. This notion is most likely borrowed from Ricoeur, "Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," where he uses "de-contextualization" and "re-contextualization" for the double-movement of the reiteration of a word, sentence, or text on being detached from one context and reattached to another when passing from sender to receiver.
39. See, for example, Rorty "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism," in Critchley, Derrida, Laclau, and Rorty, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, 13–18.
40. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals II*, 58. Rorty was inspired by the American tradition of naturalism and pragmatism, represented by William James and John Dewey, while I am influenced by the central European tradition of naturalism and pragmatism of Lange, Nietzsche, Avenarius, and Mach, which I tend to see epistemologically in contrast to Derrida.
41. Cf. Cavell, *Pitch of Philosophy*, 62.

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