BIO-MYTHOGRAPHIES: A STUDY OF TEXTUAL REFLEXIVITY IN JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, PAUL DE MAN, LOUIS ALTHUSSER AND JACQUES DERRIDA

ELAINE C. WINDLE

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ELAINE WINDLE

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Re-reading Rousseau, using cognate works by de Man, Althusser and Derrida, this thesis hopes to destabilise the convention of reading 'confessional' texts in terms of authorial intention.

Chapter One undermines critical responses to Rousseau's work, tracing a tradition of reading which rejects his *oeuvre*, not due to a rigorous reading of his texts, but through an *ad hominem* attack. We establish de Man, Althusser and Derrida as writers who lie outside this tradition.

Chapter Two examines the intellectual debate surrounding the revelation of Paul de Man's wartime journalism, concentrating on this journalism's power to contaminate his *oeuvre*. We unsettle the terms of this debate, revealing its reliance upon a crypto-biographical reading of the author into the text. We account for the problematic nature of de Man's deconstructive stance differently when we read de Man's texts as a conscious type or copy of Rousseau's texts.

Chapter Three studies the anti-Althusserian polemic which attacked his 'theoretical' Marxism with reference to insanity and murder. Again, a reading which might have located a resistance to theory within theory itself instead favours a reductive, biographical reading. We trace a reading of Rousseau in Althusser's work in order to destabilise this debate.

Chapter Four looks at the concepts of *scandal* and *slander* and their current usage in both legal and literary contexts. Our aim here is to unite our authors in the shared aim of re-synonimising the two terms so as to reveal biography as necessarily fictional. Rousseau's *Confessions* is re-read as an instance where the concepts of *slander* and *scandal* are equated.

Chapter Five upsets a traditional theory of the archive when it reads Althusser's autobiography as a deliberate copy of Rousseau's *Confessions.*

Finally, Chapter Six unites all our writers in a discussion of the necessarily fictive nature of a re-iterable autobiography.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN ABERRANT TRADITION: TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF ROUSSEAU CRITIQUE

> Nul ne peut écrire la vie d'un homme que lui-même. Sa manière d'être interièure, sa véritable vie n'est connue que de lui.
>
> Rousseau, "Neuchâtel Preface", 1764[1]

1.0. Introduction

This thesis examines a tradition of literary criticism intent on censuring the texts of certain authors, not through any rigorous reading of those texts but rather through an *ad hominem* attack on the author's private life which is then read 'into' the texts. I trace this crypto-biographical approach, this reliance on the availability of authorial intention within the text, back to the reception of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work over two centuries ago. From Rousseau I turn to a series of controversial writers who have undergone a similar type of 'literary trial'. My main protagonists will be Paul de Man, Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida, chosen - not only because of the similar fates that they have suffered in academic circles - but because their books demonstrate a reliance upon a re-reading of Rousseau which works to unsettle the terms of the critical debates they are faced with. This re-reading of Rousseau's texts, along with

their continued re-reading of each other's work, establishes the priority of re-iteration, stereotype and repetition - hence fiction - in theoretical and autobiographical or confessional narratives. This textual reflexivity, which is a dominant feature of their work, not only unsettles a tradition of criticism which depends on a type of 'literary detective work', it also has far-reaching implications for contemporary literary, legal and archive theories, all of which are seen to depend upon a naïve view of what autobiography is. So that while I will examine the literary 'scandals' which surround these four writers, I will attempt to destabilise the very notions of scandal or slander, to re-define the archive and to re-situate the autobiographical subject, thus undermining any attempt to establish a meta-text.

This first chapter, then, examines a tradition of critical responses to Rousseau's work, prioritising the reception of his autobiographical work, *The Confessions.* It also works to establish de Man, Althusser and Derrida as writers who lie outside this tradition.

1.1.Setting the scene

There is only one school of thought when it comes to interpreting Rousseau and then there is what lies outside of this school - less than a handful of men whose fate must be regarded as highly ironic if one is not to succumb to a belief in destiny. This chapter will set the scene. It will examine over two centuries of Rousseau criticism - a task simplified by the homogeneous nature of Rousseau's reader response over the last two hundred years - dividing an orthodox school of interpretation into three branches which, nonetheless, proceed organically from the same, deep-rooted trunk. The first school will encompass eighteenth and nineteenth century religious and

political responses, the second, early twentieth century psychoanalytic readings and the third, stylistic readings of Rousseau. Sheltered under a common canopy, these three variants upon the one theme will be contrasted to more recent, if less prolific, interpretations of Rousseau. Importantly, I will reveal a tremendous body of work directed against Rousseau's *oeuvre* through an *ad hominem* assault on Rousseau "the author." This anti-Rousseauian polemic will be shown to be intent on constructing a specific type of negative reader-response to Rousseau's work geared towards terminating the need for any further reading of his texts. I will also examine the questionable use of morality in a debate which appears to be fundamentally controlled by distorted principles of responsibility based on ideas of mental and physical health or cleanliness. Opposing this negative trend in treatments of Rousseau, I hope to account for a small group of writers who have attempted to counter this truly massive and entrenched critical body by offering new interpretations. I refer here to Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida and Louis Althusser whose alternative responses to Rousseau struggle through the mire of author-centred and crypto-biographical debates by preferring instead to look to the text itself to resolve textual problems.

1.2.Reader Responses

Eighteenth and nineteenth century reader responses

Despite the truly astounding efforts of Bernard Gagnebin to consign all the available archival documentation surrounding the event, one cannot possibly appreciate the degree of anticipation with which people all over Europe awaited the publication of Rousseau's *Confessions*.[2] What I here propose is that there were, in effect, two types of contemporary response to Rousseau's *Confessions*: one public, another private.

Of course, Rousseau was quite a *cause célèbre*: he was renowned all over Europe for the controversy that his work always entailed. As early as 1754 Rousseau had had difficulties with the authorities. In that year his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* was banned by the Vatican in Rome. In 1762 his *Émile* was condemned by the Sorbonne and the Parliament of Paris and in Geneva the book was actually burnt.[3] The *Social Contract*, parts of which were written concurrently with *Émile*, was also publicly burnt and a total ban was placed on any further publication in Europe save England.[4] A warrant for Rousseau's arrest was issued and Rousseau, ostracised by the authorities, began what was to be a lifelong exile.[5] From 1762 onwards, *ad hominem* attacks in Jansenist, Jesuit and philosophical journals threatened Rousseau.[6] Chased off mainland Europe towards England, archives show how Rousseau was accused of lycanthropy, deist heresy and even, by the general public, of being the anti-Christ.[7] The effect of the authorities' reactions on public opinion was probably extremely injurious. Court proceedings, published for all to read, attacked not only Rousseau's texts but their author aswell.[8] Rousseau was physically persecuted from 1762, culminating three years later, on September 6th,1765, when his house in Motiers was stoned.[9]

And yet the arrival of Rousseau's *Confessions* in the shops was met with avaricious book buying, that is, where stocks were not already depleted by advance orders. Rousseau had a huge literary following all over Europe and his public's reaction to the *Confessions* mimicked their earlier reception of his *Nouvelle Héloise*:

> The contemporary writer and editor of Rousseau's works, Louis-Sebastien Mercier, points out that in Paris the rent for the best-selling novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, supplies of which ran short, was twelve sous for sixty minutes per volume.[10]

There were many, many people who genuinely, if privately, respected both Rousseau and his work. Indeed, both the Kings of France and England had offered him their patronage - his refusal to accept, however, did little to endear him to them. But *La Nouvelle Héloïse* had gained him a tremendous following, especially among the female population, and *Émile* did 'give a new direction to education'.[11] The diversity of reader reactions will always be impossible to quantify but it does seem that Rousseau's *Confessions* did find much sympathy privately. It is important to note that *The Confessions* were published four years after Rousseau's death and that in those four years, demand for the book had grown so rapidly that, despite Rousseau's wish that the book's publication be postponed until the death of his widow, Thérèse Lavasseur, and indeed the deaths of all those mentioned in its pages who might find cause to blush, it arrived in the shops when Mme. Lavasseur and many others mentioned, could still purchase an edition.[12]

According to the *Oeuvres Posthumes*, 'Paris s'agita, on cria au scandale'.[13] It is perhaps true that delicate Parisian sensibilities were offended but this is most likely because Rousseau's wishes had been ignored and, in publishing his *Confessions* too soon, the *memoir* tradition of concealing character's identities had been broken. Yet it was the impatience of the public which led to its early publication and so the public, if indeed they were affronted, had only themselves to blame.[14] Du Peyrou, Rousseau's friend and editor, had supposedly pestered Girardin, the secretive guardian of Rousseau's *Confessions*, to publish because of public demand. Girardin initially denied possession of the manuscripts replying:

> Tout que je scais [*sic*] par lui-meme [Rousseau], c'est que son voeu particulier étoit [...] que ses *Confessions* ne fussent imprimés autant que faire se pourroit que longtems [*sic*] après sa mort et celle des personnes interessés.[15]

Any criticism which targets Rousseau's abomination of the memorialist tradition should bear this in mind. Certainly, some might have thought it improper that Rousseau write a memoir at all and especially one that included descriptions of the banalities of early childhood development and embarrassing scenes of adolescent sexuality.[16] However, even if it might seem that Rousseau's social status as a bourgeois Genevan should preclude him from the privilege of authoring such a text, his was certainly not an endeavour without precedent. So that whilst it is true that Mme. de Boufflers complained in a letter to King Gustave III (May 1st, 1782)[17], that such a book, filled with the banal quotidian actions of a low born Genevan citizen, was grotesque, it is similarly true that there were many people who wanted to read about Rousseau despite, or even because of, his low status, just as they had read books by and about other people of ignoble birth before. So while it was certainly the accepted norm that historical memoirs would concern people of a certain social standing, it was in no way unusual to read books where the author, if not himself or herself a person of high birth, was at least as well connected as Rousseau undoubtedly was. Rousseau was certainly privy to the rich and aristocratic members of the French court and, as part of this social scene, joined the likes of Rose Delauney, a contemporary author and woman of low birth with high connections and tales of injustice[18].

So what exactly did shock Rousseau's contemporaries? Well, obviously some of them were not shocked at all. Some people found Rousseau's *Confessions* delightful as is evidenced by the huge amounts of supportive mail sent to the editors de Peyrou, Moultou, and Girardin after the publication. Indeed, in 1782, the *Confessions* became the most sought after of Rousseau's *Oeuvres Complètes*. One must obviously try to discern different types of reader response. The public could be supportive but there

were notable religious and political figures whose position had to be maintained and these 'critics' tried to make it difficult for Rousseau's supporters to voice their opinions safely. A prior reading of Rousseau's overtly political texts and an appreciation of the need to react against their content in order to preserve the status quo, shaped the response of the *philosophes*, politicians, Jansenists, Jesuits, Calvinists, Genevans and members of the Court to his autobiographical work. Certainly, Rousseau had often felt that there was an organised conspiracy against him - originating among those who gathered at the French court and the Sorbonne - and a fickle public reaction seems to confirm this. He believed that he was being constantly spied upon, 'les planches sous lesquels je suis ont des yeux, les murs qui m'entourent ont des oreilles'.[19] This is not so far-fetched considering he was seen as such a great threat to the status quo. Rousseau had many enemies in high places who, always and already antagonistic, regarded *The Confessions* as merely another text which might be used to build the pyre of Rousseau's public, if figurative, execution.

Immediately following upon the publication of *The Confessions* two major journals of the time, the Catholic *Année Littéraire* and the *Correspondence Littéraire*, denounced both text and author whilst choosing the terms which would delineate Rousseau criticisms for the next two centuries:

> What becomes apparent in the two centuries of Rousseau criticism is that the phenomenon of reader-reaction to Rousseau is surprisingly consistent, [...] and reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, the remarks made by Rousseau's first critics.[20]

Both periodicals admitted to the beauty of *The Confessions* but condemned this same beauty as the product of a 'demented, asocial individual'.[21] Grimm - perhaps Rousseau's greatest enemy - Fréron and Meister all used contemporary publications to attack the public's impression of just who Rousseau was.[22] Indeed, the criticisms levelled against Rousseau seem so consistent as to constitute a manifesto. Fréron, in

the *Année Littéraire* of July, 1782, criticised Rousseau's lack of remorse and his perversion of the confessional genre alleging that Rousseau reveals his crimes but does not regret them. Despite the title *The Confessions*, according to Fréron, do not constitute a Christian apologetics. For Fréron then, Rousseau is not contrite and, though he might assume a sort of responsibility for his actions, this is not a Christian responsibility but is more akin to a legal vindication of his actions. What is interesting is that most academic eighteenth century criticisms objected to the detail in *The Confessions*. All in all, there was an embarrassing surplus of description where less would have sufficed, an abundance of anecdotal evidence where discretion might have been less shameful. Such a tendency to dwell on detail, itself a strategy in Rousseau's conceptualisation of responsibility, discredited the text and its contents in the eyes of the Church and the philosophers. Meister complained, 'ces mémoires sont remplis de disparates, d'éxtravagances, de minuties, de platitudes, si vous voulez même de faussetés'.[23]

Too many details, it would seem, add up to a lie. The truth, by contrast, is simple. Meister is perhaps the first in a long line to claim that, in order to write such trivia, Rousseau must have suffered from insanity or, as he puts it, 'une triste folie'.[24] Another contemporary, Servan, offered the same analysis: 'on voit clairement ce germe de folie se developper dès son jeune âge, en extravagances, en bizarreries'.[25]

The list of detractors is long and marks the beginning of an orthodox tradition of Rousseauian critique, where the style and the content of the text can incriminate the author of that text. Somewhere, it is accused, "behind" or "beyond" the plethora of detail, Rousseau must be hiding something else - here called the *truth*. In its simplicity the *truth* is as obvious as the Christian message emanating from the beatific

face of a silent statue of Christ. By contrast, Rousseau's *logodaedaly* - his verbal legerdemain - evidences both an insanity and a dishonest desire to deceive the reader. Those in authority, who had always detracted against Rousseau's work, could now attack his style as further evidence of either insanity or heresy.

If it is right to say that responses to Rousseau's autobiography depended largely on the social position of the reader - and on whether that response was a public or a private one - then Catherine Beaudry is only partially correct in writing 'when Rousseau's *Confessions* were published in 1782 his readers were stunned, [...they] found that *The Confessions* were outside their experience of historical memoirs and Christian apologetics'.[26]

One might not be able to agree with the extremity of her first sentiment but the contention upon which it is based is not without foundation: Rousseau did secularise the confessional model. What is important to note is that the press reacted as if the first sentiment were true when we have little proof of such public outrage, especially when we consider, as I have already noted, that Rousseau was hardly the first person of low birth to write his memoirs. Yet both the literary and the religious press attacked the text and assumed a high moral tone which persists in present day analyses such as Beaudry's. To this extent, the potential diversity of private responses to Rousseau's *Confessions* are, at least archivally, lost. Compared to the preservation of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature written against his autobiography very little can be read about the reactions of a public who had come to expect that memoirs would be punctuated by influences from the then popular *picaresque* novels and who relished the opportunity to read anything which might divulge so-called 'facts' about those in power.

Thus it is a necessary blindness towards the true nature of the response to *The Confessions* which can lead and has indeed led to the strict delimitation of possible interpretations. Since its publication, orthodox responses to the text are straight-jacketed into observing three cardinal rules: they must criticise Rousseau's rhetorical skills, they must propose the likelihood that Rousseau was mentally and/or physically abnormal, and they should question the motivation behind a text which secularises the Christian apologetic and, in so doing, abnegates the idea of a Christian concept of responsibility.

Early twentieth century responses and the psychoanalytic school

With the vogue of Freudian thought and the beginnings of what could be called a school of thought in the tradition of Freud, it is right to point out that Rousseau's *Confessions* came to be read within this interpretative field. Perhaps the first such treatment was Laforgue's study in the *Revue Française de Psychoanalyse* in 1927.[27] Laforgue trivialised *The Confessions*, hastily reading the text in order to quickly move away from it, beyond it, to a conjectured 'flesh and blood' Rousseau. The literary persona is here mistaken by Laforgue for a "real" Rousseau and the autobiography then becomes no more than a clinical case study. When Meister and Servan declared Rousseau mad it was because he said too much. Later, it would not be the amount of text which offended the critic, but its content. In the 1950's Ellrich would reiterate Laforgue's symptomatic treatment.[28] He condemned the text and dismissed its cultural significance, claiming that Rousseau suffered from a psychological illness. Ellrich explained Rousseau's rhetorical strategy of including the reader within the text as 'essential to the sado-masochistic syndrome with which Rousseau is here supposed to have been afflicted'.[29]

On purely anecdotal evidence collated from, by then, nearly two centuries of Rousseau studies, the author could, without fear of opposition, read Rousseau only by taking into account his presumed psychological shortcomings. *The Confessions* then became nothing more than evidence to support something "already known"- the fact that Rousseau was mentally ill. Thus, for Ellrich, the text is merely 'symptomatic of the author's personality disorder'.[30]

Many other early psychoanalytic treatments of Rousseau persisted in interpreting the text as a symptom of its author's moral and physical degeneration. J.M. Cohen read Rousseau's *Confessions* as the product of a 'persecution-mania',[31] reducing the text to a delirious aberration: an insane product of dementia and paranoia. Because of the fact that late eighteenth century critics chose to ignore any tangible evidence of Rousseau's very real persecution and despite the referential evidence in the form of published court proceedings and journalistic accounts, a contradictory fact emerges and prevails in order to protect the powers of the State apparatus. This 'fact' states that Rousseau suffered from paranoid delusions. So it is that over a century after those first psychobiographical readings, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was even easier to dismiss Rousseau's *Confessions,* within a psychoanalytic school, because of this by now familiar logic of a psychobiographical approach. A reading of Rousseau which once existed alongside its potential deconstruction - a parallel appreciative reading amongst a supportive public - emerges unchallenged over a century later and strengthens itself within a school of thought intent on reducing the text to a symptom. In the 1960's and the 1970's, notably Starobinski,[32] but also Borel,[33] Benoussan[34] and Blanchard,[35] would psychoanalyse Rousseau. Starobinski wrote that 'every artist leaves mortal remains, but we can never discover his art by

inspecting them',[36] a citation which perhaps encapsulates the leitmotif of the psychoanalytic school. Starobinski is thwarted because mortality cannot reveal art. The reverse is surely truer and more significant. Every artist leaves artistic products, but we cannot discover the artist by inspecting those artistic products. Yet the psychobiographical reading of the text continually seeks evidence of the man, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, within an artistic product we here call a text. This school of critics always exhibits a certain impatience with the text which they seek to resolve through psychoanalysis and the reliability of a clinical diagnosis. The result is arresting, literally, because, quite simply, such a reading terminates the need for any further dialogue with or on the text.

Other critics within this tradition of (mis)reading which is such a feature of the 1950's, the 1960's and even the 1970's, are Lester Crocker[37] and Jakob Huizinga.[38] Both these so called 'literary' critics condemn Rousseau's decision to give his children away to an orphanage and write extensively about Rousseau's psychiatric illnesses, dwelling particularly on his paranoid delusions about plots against his life. Charles Rabant's reading targets Rousseau's possible mental disorders.[39] William Boyd's reading ascribes to Rousseau 'the penalty of madness'[40] and Nicolson, despite the fact that Rousseau fathered at least three children, writes: 'I incline to the theory that Rousseau was sexually impotent, or at least abnormal.'[41]

William Mead, in the same tradition, writes of the 'disgust' which the text of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* inspires within the reader, and implicates Rousseau, as author of the text, in provoking the 'right reader's repulsion'.[42]

In all the above cases, the literariness of Rousseau's text is overlooked in favour of a "realistic" approach. As recently as 1991, still within this tradition of reading,

Catherine Beaudry also insists that Rousseau's style was the product of dysfunction. Rousseau, it would seem, despised his contemporaries. This leads Beaudry to two conclusions: firstly, that Rousseau demanded from his readers the love and attention which he was 'incapable of experiencing at the appropriate moment with the women in his life',[43] and secondly, that this alienation among his peers led Rousseau to write his *Confessions* for a future audience. Without dismantling Beaudry's argument too easily by pointing out the obvious fact that all books are written for a future reader, the implications of Beaudry's interpretation are clear - she criminalises Rousseau by turning his writing into the product of petty revenges and she justifies her reading above all others. She becomes this chosen reader of the future, elected over a contemporary audience which, however hostile, however misguided, surely could never have desecrated the text as much as the twentieth century reader has done. At least in the eighteenth century this type of reaction to Rousseau's work had been sparked by a genuine fear. We must not forget that Rousseau had offered a new theory of the nature of mankind which upset many people. Rousseau was convinced that Man was naturally good and here he broke with the Calvinism of Geneva and with both the Jesuits and the Jansenists by saying that *if* man was bad, society had made him so.[44] He had also angered the *philosophes* by contrasting their materialism with his belief in a co-ordinating self at all stages of life. So that the "secret" behind Meister's, Freron's or any other prominent eighteenth century reading of a madness into the text, is probably this fear motivated by the potential of political unrest. It was of paramount importance that Rousseau's texts be left unread and undiscussed. It was important that his work be discredited and by far the easiest approach when seeking to discredit a rigorously written text is to attack its author. It was this fear which fuelled the contemporary extremist attack on Rousseau's *oeuvre* but this "secret"- the political

impetus behind the *ad hominem* attacks - was suppressed in later criticisms which reiterated Rousseau's physical and mental ill-health until, by the twentieth century, psychoanalysis had a ready made specimen on its couch.

The Rhetoric of a Romantic

The second reaction to Rousseau is the first's bedfellow and is summed up in the charge of eloquence. Eighteenth and nineteenth century critics rallied against verbosity as a sign of degeneracy. For Rousseau's contemporaries the idea of strict documentation was unknown and unexpected. The idea of demonstration or evidencing is one whose time came later in our history and to this extent Rousseau was a pioneer in his attempt to do the impossible: to write everything. So that whilst his attention to detail was criticised by his contemporaries, it could not be attacked in later years because it was expected. Thus, later critics would translate the previous attack against detail into an argument against Rousseau's style. Where his contemporaries expected the use of rhetoric, the twentieth century critic would denounce rhetoricism as evidence of insincerity. In both cases the charge is against Rousseau's use of language but couched in terms best suited to the critical context. Rousseau's contemporaries had incriminated him because of his verbosity, two hundred years later the charge remains:

> Rousseau claims that the reader is as responsible for his/her reading as the author is for the writing of the story. His exposition, however, is never as innocent as he would have us believe. Rousseau's autobiographical language, as Voisine has pointed out, is 'replete with oratorical, rhetorical, literary, didactic and conversational techniques {which} persuade the audience'.[45]

Beaudry's recent and anachronistic criticism of Rousseau's rhetorical strategies ignores the eighteenth century reliance upon rhetorical techniques of address. More

importantly perhaps, she overlooks the very obvious feature of all Rousseau's work, the fact that he continually alerts the reader to the effects of his rhetorical techniques. However, her reading stands - Rousseau's is not an innocent text, whatever that might be, because it is guilty of persuasion. Beaudry here tacitly agrees with Voisine: 'Rousseau est un plaidoyer *pro domo*, leur auteur est un avocat de la défense rompu aux traditions d'éloquence du prétoire.'[46]

Alongside Ellrich's criticism of Rousseau's rhetoricism, this reading allies itself to the psychoanalytic tradition. Rousseau is deceitful because he knows how to use words. Starobinski is probably the leading voice in this type of attack. In 1982 Starobinski reiterated his suspicion of Rousseau's rhetoric in a text which recalls at least two of his previous articles.[47] Starobinski knowingly implicates himself within a particular tradition of anti-Rousseauian thought which centres itself in an attack on Rousseau as a dangerous rhetorician. Whist he understands that Rousseau deliberately and painstakingly alerted his readers to the potential effects of his rhetoric, Starobinski believes that Rousseau's eloquence forgets itself ('se fait oublier').[48] Somehow then, Rousseau's is at once an eloquence which both advertises and conceals itself. Starobinski, ignoring the consequences of his own argument, believes that eloquence is no longer for "us" what it was to an eighteenth century audience - a genre. Yet surely, it is our problem if we forget the context within which Rousseau wrote and it is unprofessional if we criticise an eighteenth century text for failing to meet twentieth century criteria. Stubbornly, Starobinski insists that Rousseau's use of eighteenth century rhetorical devices incriminates him, writing, 'les choses sont plus mêlées: c'est de manière éloquente que Rousseau prend l'éloquence pour l'objet de son propos théorétique ou de son argumentation défensive'.[49]

Even when the object of enquiry is his own eloquence, Rousseau is guilty of tackling the subject eloquently. Indeed, as far as Starobinski is concerned, Rousseau uses eloquence to seduce his reader in one of two ways: either to provoke nostalgia for a lost happiness and/or to seduce the reader into a belief in the possibility of its reparation. Rousseau substitutes 'un valeur d'authenticité' with 'une qualité d'art'.[50] Significantly, it is this text of Starobinski's which encapsulates a tradition of post-war readings which have allied Rousseau with totalitarianism: with an authenticity replaced with artifice. In this reading then, Rousseau's text is not as rhetorically complex or paradoxical as he would like us to believe because ultimately, he holds the pen and writes these complexities into the text in order to conceal his all-controlling figure. The text is, therefore, no more than 'la peinture fidèle de celui qui tient la plume',[51] and later:

> Le mythe d'un 'monde idéal' peuplé d'initiés, dont Jean-Jacques Rousseau fait partie de naissance, pose comme une donne de nature (mais reservée à une élite limitée) la possibilité d'une communication parfaite, allante du coeur au coeur sans distortion du message, sans partie d'energie affective.[52]

This accusation - that Rousseau wrote of a desired Utopia populated by an 'elect' race able to 'evidence' itself through some sort of perfect and natural language - was voiced by Starobinski for over two decades, culminating in the above statement at a lecture series at Cambridge University in 1982 where it remained unchallenged. Starobinski's Rousseau accuses everyone else of having fallen from grace whilst he remains in possession of an identity, an image of nature here called authenticity. To convince us of this Rousseau supposedly manipulates his self image using *words*: the pen, then, is Rousseau's secret, 'peut-être est-ce là, le secret de l'efficacité toujours agissante de l'éloquence de Rousseau'.[53]

Only a subversive and dishonest use of language enables Rousseau to establish himself as the natural leader of men. This type of reading, which focuses on Rousseau's absolutism, his totalitarianism and his mental illness, has been very prominent in post-war Europe. Charles Rabant has used *Émile* to argue this point. Citing out of context, Rabant quotes Émile's tutor at the moment where he alerts the reader to the potential abuses of his position: 'There is no subjugation so perfect as that which has the appearance of liberty.'[54]

Rabant uses this passage to prove that Rousseau supported such a devious method of thought-control. Likewise, Berman and Crocker[55] situate their readings of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* within the context of totalitarianism. Similarly, William Mead writes of the 'disgust' that the text inspires in the reader and Marshall Berman writes that, though the text is the work of a genius, that genius is 'perverted'.[56] Isaiah Berlin, within the same tradition, suggests that Rousseau believed in the community as larger than the individual. Discussing the 'permissable limits of coercion',[57] Berlin situates Rousseau's thought within a school of 'positive freedom' which believes in a self at once both rational and irrational. Our rational self is equated with a "higher" self and, in turn, this "higher" self can be represented as something larger than the individual. Berlin's Rousseau identifies the "true" self with the social "whole" and therefore thinks it right that the community should impose its '"organic", single will upon its recalcitrant "members" [to achieve] its own, and, their, "higher freedom"'.[58]

Berlin's Rousseau is one who, unquestioningly, looks 'upon society as a design constructed according to the rational laws of the wise lawgiver'.[59] Similarly, Harold Nicolson links Rousseau's very specific, if vague, abnormality to Nazism and a school emerges which allies Rousseau's conjectured psychological and physical maladies to a

will to power made manifest in a rhetoricism no longer appreciated in the twentieth century. For Nicolson *The Social Contract, Émile* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* evidence Rousseau's totalitarian bent. Nicolson here takes a previous partial reading of Rousseau's *oeuvre* to substantiate his own parallel misreading which is now given a post-war gloss: 'In my own youth there survived some sentimentalists (generally of German nationality) who, when visiting the woods at Clarens, would have tears in their eyes.'[60]

More recent critics continue to use terms established by post-war readers of Rousseau. In a reiteration of Nicolson, Thomas Kavanagh claims that Rousseau's 'ideal' society of Clarins in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is only possible through the presence of a beneficent, yet perverted paternal presence which must be read as Rousseau.[61] The possibility of Clarens, according to Kavanagh, depends upon a praxis of intervention characterised by the ability to efface all traces of itself as constraint. Nature, the Symbolic, the Father and the Law are everywhere in the text and their name is Rousseau.

Another recent critic, Alessandro Ferrara, claims that the theme of authenticity in philosophy unfolds within a tradition whose origin lies with Rousseau.[62] Yet Ferrara is too liberal with this notion of authenticity, believing that Rousseau used the term unambiguously within his texts. Ferrara's Rousseau opposes the possibility of deconstructing the concept of authenticity:

> Deconstructionists avoid using the term authenticity because to their sensibilities it conveys the illusory myth of a totalising, harmonious, unitary self, which they seek to replace with the image of a fragmented, plural, centerless and irreconcilably split subjectivity.[63]

The implication is clear, Rousseau managed to achieve an authenticity "despite" the self: an authenticity played on the register of the sublime. Importantly, Ferrara's

Rousseau believed himself to be the only truly authentic subject. This takes the reader back to Starobinski's previously cited belief that Rousseau created 'une valeur d'authenticité' through 'une qualité d'art', that is, writing somehow provided the means for Rousseau to create a unitary, harmonious self and, more significantly, this writing enabled Rousseau to establish himself as a natural leader of men. Perhaps it is significant that this view has been most strongly voiced in post-war English speaking countries. Sadly, this vindictive, accusatory attitude inverts Rousseau's own position and thus, 'as a result, [Rousseau] has often been, not so much an object of study, investigation or understanding, as a scapegoat or a whipping-boy'.[64]

1.3. The responsibility of responding: autobiography and obligation

A third type of response to Rousseau emerges in the twentieth century. This is the response which responds for Rousseau's own perceived lack of response, that is, his lack of respons-ibility. I have already noted that for eighteenth century readers of Rousseau what stood out clearly was how his *Confessions* differed from orthodox Christian apologetics. Rousseau was not traditionally contrite and what was obvious was that he had overtly borrowed literary techniques to write his autobiography. To a large extent, dissatisfaction with this adoption of fictional references still fuels criticisms of Rousseau's autobiography. There is a majority of readers who hold the opinion that autobiography must provide a factual account of a life which can then be proven via a cross referencing with other documentation or non-textual types of evidence. That Rousseau's *Confessions* does not stand up to this test is made obvious in the vast amounts of historical research written to prove the discrepancies between Rousseau's account of his life and other contradictory archival evidence. A typical

example of such literary 'detective' work can be found in Cohen's preface to his translation of Rousseau's *Confessions*:

> The details of his memories may often be inaccurate. It is exceedingly difficult, for instance, to ascribe his early journeys to their definite dates. Occasionally, where a check is possible, as of the length of his stay at the hospice in Turin before his abjuration of Protestantism, he may well prove to have exaggerated weeks into months.[65]

and later, 'Rousseau's memory may have betrayed him over facts'.[66] Cohen goes on to attack Rousseau's 'flagrant errors of memory',[67] thus transforming the possibility of memory loss into a very deliberate policy to misinform. For further information on the discrepancies between *The Confessions* and the 'probable facts' of Rousseau's life Cohen recommends the 'excellent, though slightly hostile' biography by C. E. Vulliamy,[68] thus endorsing biographical readings of Rousseau's texts which pursue this type of detective work.

Elizabeth Bruss's *Autobiographical Acts*[69] discusses this need for the autobiography to be verifiable. The autobiography, according to Bruss, must be consistent with other 'evidence'. To determine its veracity we should be able to compare the autobiographical text to other documents that describe the same events. Therefore, the truth-value of autobiography depends upon its ability to refer convincingly to things outside of itself: things which are here taken by Bruss to be other texts. Thus, Bruss' belief in autobiographical referentiality is perhaps little more than a belief in intertextuality. However, she believes that two mutually agreeing intertexts can somehow add up to an *extra-textual* truth. So that, when two textual givens coincide they constitute a truth beyond textual confines. For Bruss, autobiography is about responsibility.[70] Her criteria are problematic when applied to Rousseau because he is frequently unaccountable. His texts often contradict themselves or are inconsistent with other 'evidence'. Such a lack of internal coherence within an *oeuvre* consistently

undermines the archivists' attempt to 'discover' Rousseau either behind or beyond the confines of the text. Bruss refuses to examine the implications of such textual inconsistencies for the genre of literary biography. Rather, such inconsistencies within Rousseau's texts merely uphold Bruss's view that textual contradictions constitute lies. Bruss cannot believe in a responsible Rousseau within a contradictory text. Gita May similarly writes against Rousseau's use of novelistic techniques where he might be expected to document "facts". For May, Rousseau uses 'l'invention propre au domaine fictif'.[71] Catherine Beaudry agrees:

> Violations of a wide range of linguistic rules, permissible in fictional texts (because they are resolved by the end of the narrative), produce misrepresentations and misunderstandings in autobiography. Rousseau's 'ornement indifférent' in the preamble immediately places the truth-value of he text under suspicion. In [Rousseau's] autobiography, violations of the rules of language are most often left unresolved.[72]

If the author of an autobiography has certain obligations towards his reader, Rousseau does not uphold them. Paradox and hyperbole are counterproductive when it comes to truth-telling. Like the psychoanalytic school of literary analysis which she supposedly writes against when she attacks its dependence upon cryptobiographical interpretations of Rousseau's work, Beaudry believes that the text holds the key with which to unlock secrets about the man. The text poses a challenge: 'to find the thread and a way out of his labyrinth'.[73]

The text then represents no more than a voyage of discovery - it is tenacity rewarded, confusion overcome, contradiction resolved and, ultimately, harmony restored. Where could this thread lead us if not out of the labyrinth to deposit us, ever so humbly, at the feet of Jean-Jacques himself? This response to the text repeats previous responses which look outside the text to explain its structure rather than look to the universal structure of the textual process and the inevitably literary conceit of ones own textual self.

1.4. Autobiography as a fiction

In the 1970's something started to change. Perhaps it commenced with Lejeune's *L'Autobiographie en France* (1971), or with his later *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (1975). Or perhaps the catalyst was Démorais' 1975 study of the first person novel. Certainly it is only since these works that theorists have been willing to consider Rousseau's *Confessions* as a necessarily literary text.

In 1971 Phillipe Lejeune discussed autobiography as a genre separate from the memoir novel. Concluding that there was no way of distinguishing an autobiography from a first-person novel if one considered only the text, he wrote:

> Si l'on reste sur le plan de l'analyse intèrne du texte, il n'a aucune différence. Tous les procédés que l'autobiographie emploi pour nous convaincre de l'authenticité de son récit, le roman peut les imiter, et les a souvent imités .[74]

With this statement Lejeune offered a radical possibility: that one might examine the text of an autobiography as one would a novel rather than attempt to look beyond the text to a real signified. Démorais espoused a similar theory, writing:

> Dans une existence, il n'y a donc peut-être pas de continuité réelle qui justifie le récit; il y a du moins cette continuité imaginaire que le héros, bien avant d'écrire, veut donner à sa vie et qui est la grille à travers laquelle il entend la déchiffrer. Cette intention de continuité fait que le personnage se trouve devant sa vie dans une position assez analogue à celle que connait l' écrivain en train de bâtir une fiction.[75]

The writer of the autobiography, faced with the predicament of memory loss, is in an analogous position to the novelist who must not only fill in these *lacunae* or elaborate a plausible plot, but must construct an entire fiction from the imagination. Lejeune's *Pacte Autobiographique*, written in the same year, examined the concept of the Proper Name. This name, according to Lejeune, establishes a pact between the reader and the author who uses this name. For Lejeune, the name used determines reader expectations. So that, if an author with a literary following uses his name, the book will be read as a literary text. This nominal determinism, where the name governs 'le

mode de lecture du texte', is, according to Lejeune, the real subject of autobiography.[76] It is only because we recognise the proper name of the central character in an autobiography, due to a prior "reading" of that name, that we presume this name capable of referring to the extra-textual signified. Rather, as Lejeune points out, the name should be read as an indication that this text is also fictional. Lejeune's interpretation of autobiographical structures, for all its novelty, still held on to certain trends from the orthodox school of Rousseauian critique. Whilst Lejeune might have wanted to avoid any definition of autobiography which might rely upon extra-textual criteria, he still interpreted key scenes of *The Confessions,* such as the breaking of Mlle Lambercier's comb, in terms of paternal absence and other extra-textual, psychobiographical speculations.[77]

Must we all burn our fingers holding on to that elusive thread leading out of the labyrinth? Perhaps not. It is possible to find an alternative response to the texts of Rousseau, a response which values a close reading of the work itself. Louis Althusser's essay *The Discrepancies* was first tested in a series of lectures delivered at the École Normale Supérieure between 1965 and 1966. In this, his most sustained theoretical treatment of Rousseau, Althusser offers a rigorous reading of the theoretical discrepancies in Rousseau's *Social Contract.* Opposing a tradition which has always sought to point out the inconsistencies within Rousseau's writing, Althusser uses the terms of this debate only to turn them back against this same school. His first conclusion - that Rousseau was well aware of the discrepancies within his work and deliberately sign-posted them - and, perhaps more importantly, his second conclusion - that all writing, not just Rousseau's, functions because of the necessary existence of discrepancies and that, to this extent, all writing is fictional - signal a new approach to Rousseau's work.

Similarly, Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1977), whilst it is perhaps inspired by Lejeune, is refreshingly different in its renunciation of the psychoanalytic model of reading: 'The reading of the literary "symptom" is most banal, most academic, most naïve.'[78]

Derrida rejects the possibility of an extra-textual moment, what he calls the *hors texte* and thus shuns the concept of discovery. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is very definitely not available. For Derrida, who quite deliberately writes in opposition to Starobinski and the tradition he established, we must look to the text to resolve textual problems 'rather than trying to exceed it toward a psychobiological signified whose link with the literary signifier then becomes extrinsic and contingent'.[79]

Finally, Paul de Man, also writing in 1977, is similarly concerned with a rigorous method of textual analysis which opposes psychobiographical procedures. As early as 1967, in his *Gauss Seminar*, de Man was at odds with Starobinski's portrayal of a "guilty" Rousseau. He said Starobinski: 'adopts a point of view not too different from that of the analyst toward his patient, assuming a possibility of deciphering, by means of [Rousseau's] language'.[80]

In his *Allegories of Reading* (1977) de Man concentrates on the scene in Rousseau's *Confessions* involving the theft of a ribbon.[81] De Man does not say that Rousseau lied about the theft.[82] Rather, according to de Man, *all* confessions are necessarily discursive and, to this extent, they lie beyond the possibility of referential verification. To the extent that confessions are non-verifiable, they are fictional. Here de Man attacks a tradition of thought which had always singled out Rousseau's *Confessions* as uniquely literary. De Man universalises this linguistic predicament and threatens to topple a debate where excuse supersedes responsibility rather than defines it. Against

the backdrop of a pseudo-moralistic debate which denounces Rousseau's epistemological stance as catastrophic - if no one assumes responsibility, who can we blame? - de Man shifts the focus of the discussion towards an understanding of the *aporia* at the heart of any discussion about responsibility. To be accountable one always needs to offer more and more evidence. Rousseau, before anyone even demanded such a detailed chronicle, realised and revealed the fact that his account of a life could never 'evidence' enough.

It is to these three theorists that I turn in the rest of my thesis in order to trace a body of work which attempts to stand up to conventional interpretations of Rousseau for the sake of re-defining what autobiography *means*. In the next chapters I hope to show how the very fate of these three men who have chosen to prioritise Rousseau within their own philosophical agendas has become entangled with the fate of Rousseau. We will examine how writing "under the influence" of Rousseau can appear to effectively pollute a discourse and force its author to share in Rousseau's unenviable fortune.

[1] *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, book 2, p.49 (ed. Gagnbin, Bernard, and Raymond, Marcel, Paris: Gallimard Bibliothèque de la Pleiade, 1959-69). This original preface to Rousseau's *Confessions* was later re-written, for the Genevan edition, but appears here in its original form.

[2] See Gagnebin, Bernard, "L'Héritage Littéraire de Rousseau", in *Rousseau after Two Hundred Years: Proceedings at the Cambridge Bicentennial Colloquium* (Leigh, R.A., ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p.156. Gagnebin writes that, whilst Moultou, du Peyrou and Girardin, the holders of Rousseau's manuscripts, debated whether or not to publish his work: "Des bruits se mirent à courir sur la publication des *Confessions* de Rousseau, ces fameux mémoires que toute l'Europe lettré attendait."

[3]For a discussion of the banning and burning of both *Émile* and *The Social Contract,* see Gourevitch, Victor, *The Social Contract and Other Later Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.xxxiii. For an insight into the authorities' reaction against these texts, particularly amongst members of the Sorbonne and the Parliament, see Lullin, Pierre, in *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.37, p.129. Lullin writes that "Le Parlement de Paris et la Sorbonne réagirent avec une étonnant vivacité contre [*L'Émile*] tout rempli de 'poisons mortels' et de 'suc empoisonné.'" For a further discussion of how Rousseau's works were treated in Geneva see Lullin, Pierre, "La Condemnation du *Contrat Social* et d'*Émile* Prononcée par le Conseil de Genève" in *Annales de la Société de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.9, p.208. Lullin writes about how Genevan authorities incited hostility against both the text of *Émile* and its author by proclaiming at the book's publilc burning; "On aurait pu rôtir Rousseau".

[4] See Gourevitch, Victor, p.ix, and p.xxxiii. See also Guéhenno, Jean, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau,* transl. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Routledge, 1966), vol.2, p.80

[5]For details of the circumstances of Rousseau's arrest at Montmorency, see Lullin, Pierre, *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.37, p.134. See also Rousseau's "Lettre à Moultou" (24 Juillet, 1762) reproduced in *Corréspondance Générale*, ed R.A. Leigh (Geneva: 1966), vol.viii, p.53:"L'arrêt a été fabriqué à Montmorency par deux prêtres déguisés qui font la gazette écclésiastiques et qui m'ont pris en haine parce que je n'ai pas voulu me faire Janséniste". For a discussion of Rousseau's exile see Gagnebin, Bernard, "L'Héritage Littéraire de Rousseau", p.154: "À la fin de l'été , puis en automne 1756, [...] Rousseau dut quitter précipitamment Môtiers, puis l'île de Saint-Pierre". See also Gourevitch, Victor, p.xxxiv.

[6] For a discussion of how articles published at the time of Rousseau's arrest attacked the author aswell as the texts, see Lullin, Pierre, *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.37, p.147: "La violence des poursuites montres que l'ennemi visé est la personne même de Rousseau. See also, p.129 of this article where Lullin discusses the publication of the *Observations sur Quelques Articles de la Censure de la Faculté de Théologie de Paris* (Paris: Prieur, 1762), pp.4-14. Gervaise, lead the *Syndicat de la Faculté de la Théologie* in condemning Rousseau on religious and moral grounds. Lullin writes: "[Il] ne trouve pas de mots assez forts pour assouvir sa rage contre le 'monstre annoncé par l'Apocalypse' [...]. Face à ce 'monstre philosophe', à cet 'auteur sacrilège', Gervaise proclame l'état d'urgence et la lutte sacrée". Gervaise calls Rousseau "un philosophe en délire".

[7] See "Extraits des registres de la Faculté de Théologie", in *Observations sur Quelques Articles de la Censure de la Faculté de Théololgie de Paris*, pp.3-4. See also "Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques", 30th Jan., 1763 (Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, T.P.122. Also, Guéhenno, Jean, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.2, p.93: "In Paris, the Sorbonne was in session for several days to decide on the wording of its *Censure* in French and Latin. On 20th August, Archbishop Christophe de Beaumont issued a pastoral letter denouncing *Émile*: Jean-Jacques was well on the way to becoming the anti-Christ"

[8] See *Arrêt du Parlement de Paris* (Amsterdam: Rey, 1762), pp3-4

[9] See Guéhenno, Jean, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.2, p.152: "He stayed on at Motiers through sheer stubbornness. Towards midnight, the whole household was roused by shouts coming from the veranda and stones shattered the windows. See also Philippe Lefèbre, "Jansenistes et Catholiques contre Rousseau: Essai sur les Circonstances Religièuses de la Condamnation de l'Émile à Paris" in *Annales de la Société de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 37, (1966-68), pp.129-148

[10] Sweetman, John, *The Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution: 1700-1850* (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), p.51
[11] For an excellent analysis of educational reforms following *Émile* see William Boyd's *Émile For Today: The Émile of Jean-Jacques Rousseau Selected, Translated and Interpreted by William Boyd* [*sic*] (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1956).
[12] See Gagnebin, Bernard, "L'Héritage Littéraire de Rousseau", pp.153-184 for a detailed discussion of how the *Confessions* came to be published. See especially p.154 where Gagnebin reproduces Girardin's letters to du Peyrou and Moultou restating Rousseau's wish that the *Confessions* be kept private for the sake of his "malheureuse femme" , Thérèse Levasseur, (These letters are stored at Neuchâtel, ms.R 118, fol.2). See also pp.177-179 where Gagnebin tabulates the sales of first edition copies of the *Confessions*. Among buyers we find the King of England and many famous libraries. Out of 7,972 first editions, 7,892 copies sold immediately, leaving only 80 available for bookshops to sell.
[13] Anonymous contemporary source [1782], cit. Gagnebin, Bernard, in a note to Rousseau's *Oeuvres Posthumes* (Gagnebin, Bernard, and Raymond, Marcel, eds., Paris: Gallimard, 1969) vol. 1, p.1613.
[14] Gagnebin, Bernard, "L'Héritage Littéraire de Rousseau", pp.153-184 for a fuller discussion of ho Rousseau's *Confessions* came to be published.
[15] Gagnebin, Bernard, "L'Héritage Littéraire de Rousseau",p.154
[16] I am thinking here of Catherine Beaudry's *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions* (vol. 2 of *The Age of Revolution and Romanticism*, New York: Peter Lang, 1991), where she discusses Rousseau's perversion of the memoir tradition.
[17] The letter is reproduced in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Les Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* Néraudau, Jean-Pierre (Paris: Larousse, 1971), p.173
[18] See Catherine Beaudry's *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions* p.34, p.69 and p.74 for a discussion of the publication, in 1752, of Rose Delauney's *Mémoirs*.
[19] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Confessions* (*Oeuvres Complètes*, vol.1), p.279
[20] Beaudry, Catherine, *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions*, p.30
[21] ibid., p.29
[22] See Grimm, Michelior, *Correspondance Littéraire*, ed Tourneux, vol.13, July, 1782, p.162 (reproduced in *Annales de la Société de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, vol.27, p.107) and Abbé Fréron, *L'Année Littéraire* vol. 4, 1782 and vol. 5, 1783 (cited in Orlando, Francesco, *La Découverte du Souvenir d'Enfance aux Premiere Livre des Confessions*, reproduced in *Annales de la Société de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 37 (1966-68), p.152).
[23] Meister, in the *Correspondance Littéraire*, July, 1782, collected in the *Annales de la Société de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 27, p.107
[24] ibid., vol. 27, p.107
[25] Servan, Joseph, *Réflexions sur Les Confession de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (unpublished: Brussels, 1783), p131, reproduced in the *Annales de la Société de Jean Jacques Rousseau*,vol.19, p.223
[26] Beaudry, Catherine, *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions*, p.3
[27] Laforgue, René, "Étude sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau", in *Revue Française de Psychoanalyse*, vol.2, no.ii, 1927, pp. 370-402
[28] Ellrich, P., *Rousseau and his Reader: the Rhetorical Situation of the Major Works* (Chapel Hill: University of N. Carolina Press, 1953)
[29] ibid., p.43
[30] ibid., p.43
[31] Cohen, J., Preface to his translation of *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.11
[32] Starobinski, Jean, "The illness of Rousseau", in (*Yale French Studies*, vol. xxviii, Fall/Winter 1961-62).
[33] Borel, Jacques, *Génie et Folie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: José Corti, 1966)
[34] Benoussan, David, *La Maladie de Rousseau* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974)
[35] Blanchard, William, *Rousseau and the Spirit of Revolt: a Psychological Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967)
[36] Starobinski, Jean, "The Illness of Rousseau", p.67
[37] Crocker, Lester G., *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Quest, 1712-1788*, (New York: Macmillan, 1968)
Crocker, Lester G., *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Prophetic Voice, 1758-1778*,(NewYork:Macmillan, 1973)

Crocker, Lester G., "Julie, ou la Nouvelle Duplicité" in *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol.36 (1953-1956)
[38] Huizinga, Jakob Herman, *Rousseau, the Self-Made Saint*, (New York: Grossman, 1976)
[39] Rabant, Charles, "L'Illusion Pédagogique" in *L'Inconscient*, (October, 1968)
[40]Boyd, William, *Émile for Today*, p.180
[41]Nicolson, Harold, *The Age of Reason (1700-1789)*, (London: Constable,1960), p.533
[42] See Mead, William, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, où le Romancier Enchâiné* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1966).
[43]Beaudry, Catherine, *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions*, p.100
[44]Boyd, William, *Émile for Today*, p.172
[45]Beaudry, Catherine, *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions*, p.4
[46] ibid., p.4, citing Voisine, Jacques, "Le Dialogue avec le Lecteur dans *Les Confessions*: Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son Oeuvre" (in *Actes et Colloques 2*, Ed. Fabre, Paris: Klincksieck, 1964), p.15
[47] Starobinski, Jean, "Rousseau et l'Éloquence", in Leigh R.A., ed. *Rousseau After Two Hundred Years: Proceedings at the Cambridge Bicentennial Colloquium*,(Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982); "Rousseau: Accuser et Séduire", in *Le Nouveau Commerce*, Automne 1972, pp.21-36; "The Accuser and the Accused", in *Daedalus*, Summer, 1978, pp.41-58
[48]Starobinski, Jean, "Rousseau et l'Éloquence", p.185
[49] ibid., p.185
[50] ibid., p.190
[51] ibid., p.191
[52] ibid., p.191
[53] ibid., p.199
[54] Rabant, Charles, (citing *Émile*, p.120), "L'Illusion Pedagogique", in *L'Inconscient* (October 1968)
[55] See Crocker, Lester G., *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Quest (1712-1788)* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).
[56] In Jones, James F., Jr, *La Nouvelle Héloïse: Rousseau and Utopia*, (Genève: Librarie Droz, 1977), p.86.
[57] Berlin, Isaiah, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 31st October 1958*, (Oxford, Clarendon, 1958), p.6
[58]Ibid., p.17
[59] Ibid., p.35
[60] Nicolson, Harold, *The Age of Reason (1700-1789)*, p.563
[61]Kavanagh, Thomas, *Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987)
[62] Ferrara, Alessandro, *Modernity and Authenticity*, p.24
[63] ibid., p.24
[64] Leigh, R.A., ed. *Rousseau After Two Hundred Years* p.viii
[65] Cohen, J., "Preface" to his translation of *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, p.9
[66] ibid., p.9
[67] ibid., p.14
[68] Vulliamy, C.E., *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1931)
[69] Bruss, Elizabeth, *Autobiographical Acts* (Lonodn: John Hopkins University Press, 1976)
[70] Ibid., pp.299-300
[71] May, Gita, "Les *Confessions* de Rousseau: Roman Picaresque?" in *Französisch Literatur im Zeitalter Der Aufklärung*, ed. Wido Hempel (Frankfurt: Vittario Klastermann, 1985), p.236
[72] Beaudry, Catherine, *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions*, p.12
[73] ibid., pp. 12-13
[74] Lejeune, Phillipe, *L'Autobiographie en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p.24
[75] Démorais, René, *Le Roman à la Première Personne: du Classicisme aux Lumières* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1975) p.408
[76] Lejeune, Phillipe, *Le Pacte Autobiograpique*, (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p.44
[77] ibid., p.81
[78] Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology* [1967], trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p.159
[79] ibid., p.159

[80] Reproduced in de Man's *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.25

[81] See de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading: Figural language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*, (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

[82] For this reading see Beaudry, Catherine, *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions*, p.106

CHAPTER TWO

DE MAN'S CRIME

2.0. Introduction

This second chapter proposes an evaluation of the homogeneous debate surrounding the death of Paul de Man and the subsequent discovery of his wartime journalism for collaborationist newspapers. In 1987 a Belgian post-graduate student called Ortwin de Graef 'uncovered' early wartime writings by de Man in the Nazi newspaper *Het Vlaamsche Land.*[1] One article in particular, "The Question of Jews in Literature", became the catalyst for an entire debate limited to the discussion of de Man's possible antisemitism and the implications of this stance for subsequent interpretations of his *oeuvre.* I wish here to examine how this response to de Man, a response reliant upon a cryptobiographical reading of the de Manian *oeuvre*, misunderstands both the deconstructive tendency and de Man's philosophical 'itinerary'. I will trace this itinerary to de Man's intertextual use of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work, specifically the much (mis)read text *Émile*, and reveal the importance of de Man's negative hermeneutics in unsettling the terms of any post-de Manian critique which would denounce de Man's texts through a naïve reading of the author into the text.

The first section will treat the strongest voices in this debate, exploring a rich, 'aberrant tradition'[2] and the implications of its conclusions for the theory of

deconstruction. I will then offer comparisons between these readings of de Man, concentrating on what I believe to be the major concern of the debate: to establish a disappearance of the de Manian subject within his texts in order to permit the reintroduction of this subject 'on its own terms'. This issue will lead to a wider investigation of the 'death of the author' in literary theory.

Following on from this, Section Two will examine Rousseau's *Émile* and the de Manian *oeuvre* as evidence of a strong reading of this text. Analogies drawn will hopefully complicate a post-de Manian debate which relies on the possibility of the disinterested author. My reading of Rousseau's work in de Man's texts will problematise the entire framework of a critical response to the work of both de Man and Rousseau which has as its aim the uncovering of authorial intention within the text.

2.1. The death of de Man and the loss of subjectivity

The death of an author and the subsequent desire for a 'story' about that author constitutes nothing less than a desire for the return of that author on the reader's terms. This is the most prominent feature of the critical activity surrounding de Man's death and the revelation of his wartime journalism. The strongest voices in a debate on authorial accountability which demanded the 'return of the author' - specifically de Man - fabricated textual scenarios within which de Man's intention might reveal itself. All this in spite of, or perhaps because of, the de Manian insistence on the unavailability of intention.

In the Foreword to the second, 1983 edition of *Blindness and Insight*, de Man wrote:

> I am not given to retrospective self-examination and mercifully forget what I have written with the same alacrity I forget bad movies- although, as with bad movies, certain scenes or phrases return at times to embarrass and haunt me like a guilty conscience.[3]

In the debate which follows the revelation of de Man's wartime 'secret' this passage is endlessly recycled as 'evidence' of de Man's obsession with a guilty past; of a return (within the text), to a primal (textual) scene of guilt and embarrassment - a scene which, since 1987, must be associated with a type of war crime. For critics of de Man, the desire to tell his story - to discern the intention behind his work - becomes the desire to reinstate de Man's biographical or subjective status by welcoming him back as their 'guest'.

For Sean Burke, de Man was 'capable of considerable duplicity in both his private and public lives'.[4] With this duplicity in mind, the foreword to *Blindness and Insight*, and by extension the entire *oeuvre* of de Man, becomes suspect:

> De Man is ostensibly reflecting on the volume of essays dating from the mid-1950's which have been collected as *Blindness and Insight*. If we read this passage against its biographical background, however, and take these statements as a *secreted* reflection on his *Le Soir* articles, de Man cuts a sinister figure indeed - a puppeteer putting in place all the strings of his legacy, an executor to his own dark codicil.[5]

It seems that de Man's textual admission to his biographical self, to his status as subject, becomes evidence, within the debate, of guilt. For de Man had a secret or story which he did not tell. Burke tries to uncover this story through conjecture, and it is this shared desire for the secret, always traceable to an early textual production (a fascistic journalism), which disinters many of the loci of author-centred criticism in the debate surrounding de Man: a debate which concerns intention, autobiographical accountability and the importance of de Man's signature.

It is the framing device of autobiography which necessarily shapes this discourse on *oeuvre*: the de Manian text must become explicable either as autobiographical

suppression or elliptical confession. The entire *corpus* of De Man's must then, as Burke contests, be

> seen to be autobiographical in essence, [as] a text which generated an entire philosophy of language and of the absence of subjectivity in order to keep its secret or to atone for its previous errors.[6]

With de Man's death the issue of authorial accountability is treated through a belated reading of a textual body previously believed to be disinterested but, with hindsight, revealed as a discourse tainted with the bio-graph. Menae Mizimura[7], like Burke confesses her impulse to write de Man's story, and it is this desire for a story, a story symmetrically structured about an axis which she calls a 'turn', which motivates her essay and leads her to discover an impression of 'deprivation' in de Man's work. It is the (physical) death of the author which instigates the need to grasp what has been read as having its own (hi)story: 'An end calls for a beginning - and a good story in between.'[8] The *lacunae* in her knowledge of de Man only excites her imagination as to his 'possibly shady past'.[9]

In a similar treatment, Alice Kaplan's *Memoir* requires that de Man's story be told.[10] Thus, in an ironic movement her autobiography becomes, at some point, this indispensable story about de Man. Kaplan's criticism of de Man as her Yale professor is complicated by her subsequent knowledge of his wartime journalism. Thus, the inculpation of her tutor shapes itself, significantly, around an imagined de Man. A prior, more intimately known accusation of de Man as a poor teacher, gathers impetus and form from a later, 'textual' indictment based upon the specifically hypothetical guilt of his 'war crime'. Her search for the motivational force behind de Man's deconstructive stance engineers a specifically biographical interpretation of his

theoretical texts, where the bio-graph is specifically and exclusively linked to a suppression and/or distorted confession of his wartime activities as a journalist. The 'new' crime, replacing the old crime of antisemitism, becomes de Man's deliberately concealed subjectivity behind the now-recognisable 'guise' of disinterestedness in a discourse written entirely with the purpose of suppressing his own guilty subjectivity:

> What a waste! [being de Man's student] Taking apart meaning, looking at words, shunning the illusion of the fully present communicative voice - these aspects of deconstructive theory as we absorbed it may have been part of de Man's intellectual struggle against the manipulative tendencies of fascist propaganda.[11]

Barbara Johnson's approach draws parallel conclusions. She reproaches de Man for neglecting his 'duty' to explain himself.[12] In 'refusing to tell his own story'[13] de Man remained uncritical of himself and, therefore, open to a belated criticism which can rightly, Johnson thinks, reconstruct this story exclusively around his early journalistic career. The story, required by Johnson, would be a revelation of de Man's textual motivation and would 'offer a guarantee of de Man's moral character and political vision'.[14]

Terry Eagleton continues the trend of a debate centred around a criticism of the possibly sinister motivation behind deconstruction. Eagleton calls de Man a 'fascist sympathiser' who was 'silent about his affiliations'.[15] Silence - here embodied in de Man's refusal to tell his story - protects an uncritical self and is ultimately traceable to a suppression of the historico-political self through the guise of disinterestedness. The anti-de Manian polemic demands that this political self be reinstated in order to re-assess de Man's theoretical contribution in the light of his Nazi sympathies:

> It is possible to read de Man's post-war work as an extreme reaction against the politics of Being, elements of which he himself had espoused in his notorious early essays. In the later de Man, all notions of language as replete with Being, of signs as organically related to things is denounced as pernicious mystification.[16]

Eagleton detects a '*more than* literary motive'[17] behind de Man's theoretical prose and, yet again, this 'more' is traceable to a secreted, and therefore incriminating, subjectivity.

Christopher Norris also chooses to speculate *vis à vis* the de Manian 'story'. Again the *oeuvre* becomes contaminated by the 'life' of the author. Norris recalls not only de Man's textual connection to fascism but also that his uncle, Hendrik de Man, was a Belgian socialist with a role in the rise of Nazism. Norris's self-avowedly reductive reading of de Man is an attempt to attribute a textual production to the 'sobering memories' of an uncle's wartime activities.[18] Such conjecture satisfies the need to understand the intentions of the author. When Norris writes that 'one could read the entire course of [de Man's] subsequent work as a single-minded effort to redeem or exorcise the memory of those earlier reviews',[19] a 'more than literary motive' is suspected. And again he writes: 'There does seem reason to suppose that de Man is here [*Allegories of Reading*] engaged in something *more than* a piece of purely diagnostic commentary.'[20]

De Man's hi[story] is suspect and his theory is necessarily implicated in this suspicion because it can no longer claim to be 'pure'. No longer altruistic, no longer evidence of a neutral pedagogy, it has become contaminated and 'deeply suspect on ideological grounds'[21] specifically due to the 'unearthing' of what is considered as de Man's essentially unique prehistory.

My intention here is not to deny an interest in de Man's wartime journalism but rather to question its power to contaminate his later theory where this contamination is dependent upon *the collapse of a previous discourse with pretensions to non-political disinterestedness.* Accusations made against de Man which suggest that he attempted

to secrete his (inevitably) subjective and therefore, partisan status, rely upon a belief that de Man ever claimed to have achieved a purely diagnostic theory of reading.

The reappearance of the author as guest

The indictment against de Man is based on the simple claim that de Man successfully (a)voided his personality from his theory in order to suppress his guilty secret: 'The biographical subject [was] entirely eliminated- the author's life history and personality disappear[ed] irretrievably into the textual machine.'[22]

The de Manian text is understood to have somehow performed a philosophy of language reliant upon the absence of subjectivity, and to have achieved this due to de Man's strong need to absent the self. It is this absenting of the subject which interests us here because it is here that we locate a crucial misunderstanding of the deconstructive tendency. It seems that de Man's detractors explain the absence of the subject within the text - an absence due to the priority of language - by describing this absence as de Man's suppression of his subjectivity due to a guilty past. In this interpretation, subjectivity can be reintroduced into the text. What can be read as the large scale misunderstanding of academics over the aims and self-proclaimed limits of deconstruction is turned now to their advantage in an attack against the author which in turn becomes an attack against deconstruction itself. De Man's texts were believed, according to the debate, to have been essentially author-less in their objectivity. With the physical death of de Man the author returns to the text only because his critics, demanding a response from de Man, 'reinsert' him. What is paramount to the debate on de Man after 1985 is therefore the revelation of a shared belief in the possibility of a disinterested discourse.

Kaplan's criticism of de Man reaches its apogée when she writes, 'all he offered his students was *disinterested* close analysis [...] indifferent to much of what had come to pass as criticism'.[23] This *acedia* supposedly included de Man's inability to appreciate the beautiful. A voiding of the self and the killing off of subjectivity, led to an absence of essentially human responses. Kaplan's assertions sit together uncomfortably: to be disinterested is not the same as to be indifferent. If, as Barthes writes, 'the death of the author is the first and sufficient step towards refusing to assign a secret, an ultimate meaning to the text',[24] then, it would seem, the debate posits that de Man successfully killed the author that was himself in order to *remove his own secret* from the arena of textual interpretation. Kaplan, with the author reinstated on her own terms, can now ask: 'What do students need to know about teachers?'[25]

Kaplan admits to a prior knowledge (before 1985) of de Man's uncle's ambiguous involvement in the evolution of Nazi Germany. However, she had imagined de Man to be 'cleansed of his families' historical improprieties'.[26] Her terminology here not only adheres to the logic of contamination and purification which is the very logic of Nazism, it also states her belief in the possibility of a death of the subject entailing a break with one's own prehistory. Put another way, Kaplan's testimony here assumes the possibility of an absolute forgetting of a former self to make way for a new, radically innocent self, essentially uninvolved with what has already gone before. This belief is in no way limited to Kaplan for it is necessary that his detractors establish de Man as disinterested in order that this immediately be denied through the recognition of the impossibility of a neutral pedagogy. But the debate is only willing to shun the possibility of a disinterested discourse due to this specifically incriminating biographical event. So that what is crucially problematic here is that the anti-de

Manian critique establishes the impossibility of a neutral or disinterested text, not through general linguistic analyses but, in the case of de Man, it prejudices his discourse because of a specifically individualised biographical event.

Barbara Johnson's desire for a story about de Man's *intentions* stems from her own prior belief in de Man's discourse as 'dauntingly and quintessentially independent'.[27] Her retrospective experience of crisis (the death of an idea about de Man as well as the death of de Man) relies upon a belief in a non-partisan language existing outside the laws of exchange and desire. Johnson concludes that the political parameter must be admitted into literary theory, a conclusion which naively posits an absence of the political at the heart of de Man's deconstructive stance.

E.S. Burt defines as a 'moral trait' in de Man what he 'sensed to be as complete a detachment from the claims of subjectivity and individual personality as was possible'.[28] Confusingly a personality 'trait' becomes an index of a dislocation from personality. Similarly Mizimura and Eagleton focus on the absence of a de Manian subjectivity. Mizimura writes of a turn away from a human subject to a concern with language in de Man's work as emblematic of the death of a de Manian subjectivity. This death is marked textually by a transition in terminology and content from 'the homeland of literature where even familiar faces like death, suffering, sorrow, inwardness, reflection, consciousness and self-knowledge are found',[29] to the later work, a 'barren land inhabited by the strangest terminologies'.[30] Before the death of the de Manian subject de Man was able not only to write 'better', he was also able to react 'sensibly' to literature.[31] The turn then is a transition to a sterile discourse emblematic of the death of the subject and representative of a move away from a prior belief in the availability of linguistic meaning. In the same vein Eagleton writes:

> few critics have been more bleakly unenthused by bodiliness - by the whole prospect of a creative development of the sensuous, creaturely aspects of human existence, by pleasure, by Nature and self-delighting powers, all of which now [Eagleton here presumes a turn away from the wartime journalism] figure as insidious aesthetic seductions to be [...] refused.[32]

And so the terms of the debate have been established. De Man's discourse was believed to be unique when it somehow (a)voided his subject. With his physical death and the 'discovery' of his past, the sham was revealed: de Man did not destroy his subjectivity, he merely concealed it. This concealed subjectivity returned, distilled in a specifically locatable event - an event, it would now seem, capable of uncovering authorial intention and thus reducing the meaning of the text to an investigation of the author. So it is that a cryptobiographical reading of the author, which it seems must always focus on de Man's wartime journalism, attempts to undo the possibility of the deconstruction of the subject.

Anti-authorialism

> The novelist is but a recorder who is forbidden to judge and to conclude [...] for if he wishes to go beyond phenomena he will enter into hypothesis [....The novelist] disappears, he keeps his emotions well in hand, he simply shows what he has seen.[33]

At what point did the subject die? It would seem that the entire de Manian debate enacts (as though for the first time) the discourse on anti-authorialism. Was the death of the author ever successfully theorised? Sean Burke's recent book which sets out to problematise the 'anti-authorial theories' of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, merely reveals what had always remained in plain sight; that the death of the author was never achieved, rather it was always authored as an (im)possible, desired, future event: 'It is possible to enjoy the codes even while nostalgically imagining that someday they will be abolished.'[34]

It was the influence of structural linguistics in the mid-1950's, of the linguistic anthropology of Levi-Strauss and Lacan which led to the tracing of a change in the status of the subject's relation to knowledge. Both subject and the knowledge of the subject were seen to be fictive emanations of a language/writing which subverted the subject's attempts to control that language. If there is a death of the subject, a "death of the author", it remains a highly ambiguous and necessarily qualified proposition for these writers.

In his essay, "The Death of the Author" (1967), Barthes defines this 'death' as the loss of a belief in intention and omniscience. Derrida would term this the death of the author as the Transcendental Signified or as the unitary cause of the text. As previously stated, Barthes believed that this type of 'death' would terminate any attempts to give the text a 'secret' or meaning which is reducible to authorial intention.[35] It would be naïve to believe that the author is here being authored out of existence, what is discussed is rather the unavailability of intention in language and the recognition of the author as linguistic construct. Barthes writes:

> The Author himself - that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism - can or could someday become a text like any other: he has only to avoid making his person the subject, the impulse, the origin, the authority, the father, whence his work would proceed, by a channel of expression; he has only to see himself as a being on paper and his life as a biography, [...] a writing without referent, substance of a connection and not a filiation.[36]

Barthes writes of a future cessation of the need to look to the author for evidence of textual meaning. This future knows that this author (as evidence of textual meaning) is desired, 'in a way I desire the author in the text',[37] and similarly, 'I need his figure [...] as he needs mine'.[38]

The desire, reiterated as necessity, ensures that the 'death of the author' be displaced to a future. And so Barthes adumbrates an ideal made impossible by our complicity in keeping the author alive. What is stated by Barthes, however, is that if the author

must exist due to this mutual need, the most acceptable type of author is 'amicable'.[39] The amicable author provides 'evidence' of being a writer, of 'siding with semiosis rather than mimesis'.[40] A visible breach is maintained at the level of writing resulting from the sustained revelation to the reader that the author's creations are combinative and influenced rather than inspired. It is this honesty which, for Barthes, most closely approaches the death of the author - an honesty which ensures the death of the realist author and the deconstruction of mimesis. Through this recognition of the author as writerly, as combinative, comes the impossibility of the reductive reading of a text as the product of a specifically authorial intention. As Derrida writes:

> The subject is absolutely indispensable. I do not destroy the subject; I situate it [...] one cannot get along without the notion of the subject. It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions.[41]

And the implication again is that this ability to situate the author is reliant upon an authorial honesty *vis à vis* the reader; an amicable relationship which reveals the author within the text. It is obviously important to understand the nature of this debate on the author as it concerns our understanding of the de Manian *oeuvre*.

I must now ask two questions; whether de Man was ever dishonest in his relationship with the reader, and whether the critical response to de Man is valid when it resurrects a supposedly buried subjectivity - ironically dependent upon a *textual* source - in order to discern a non-textual intention *behind* or *within* de Man's texts. That is, does this response not rest on a basic misunderstanding of the deconstructive stance? If it is true that the work is always 'more' than the work - that it is also the subject who writes this work - is it not enough to recognise that subjectivity in the work rather than attempt to fix that subject within an identity. In answer to the question: 'What does it matter who is speaking?',[42] is it not enough to realise that a 'someone' speaks

especially if endeavours to trace that subjectivity are somewhat ironically dependent upon textual 'evidences'?

Honesty in authoring

> Philosophers display altogether insufficient honesty [...]. They pose as having discovered and attained their real opinions through the self-evolution of a cold, pure, divinely unperturbed dialect [...] while what happens at bottom is that a prejudice, a notion [...] a desire of the heart is sifted and made abstract.[43]

If de Man was dishonest, as the debate postulates, it becomes necessary to redefine his 'itinerary': 'For the critic of philosophical disinterestedness, the art of reading becomes that of retracing this primordial itinerary over and against the manifest structures of the text.'[44]

This word 'itinerary' is arresting. As I have noted, the debate on de Man persistently traces this itinerary back to de Man's earlier textual production - to articles written for *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land* - thus establishing a reductive interpretation of this itinerary as no more than his private battle against the ideological mystifications associated, specifically and exclusively, with Nazism. My reading of the texts of de Man's will problematise both the already incoherent notion of de Man as author of his own 'disappearance as author', and the possibility of uncovering an authorial intention through recourse to a specific bio-graphical (written) event.

Fidelity to an Itinerary

It seems that with the revelation of de Man's earlier writing, a close reading of his later texts has been largely neglected in favour of a cryptobiographical approach. To

move away from this one must look to readings of de Man's *oeuvre* from before the 'revelation'. Here the de Manian itinerary is no longer traceable to a 'warcrime' and must be differently written. It is one such reading which I wish to examine now, hoping to prioritise the importance of Rousseau's work for de Man.

Menae Mizimura, in the 1985 edition of *Yale French Studies* dedicated to the teachings of de Man, attempts to trace de Man's itinerary or 'story' through a turn in his work which, according to her, leads to a large degree of unreadability. This turn is here understood as constituting a personal failure for de Man; a movement away from a concern with 'Man' to a concern with language. Mizimura imposes a bipolar structure on the de Manian *oeuvre* and her textual segregation centres around de Man's previously mentioned foreword to the second edition of *Blindness and Insight* where he writes of 'a change not only in terminology and in tone but in substance'.[45]

It is a change which Mizimura calls the 'death of the subject'. However, de Man's ambivalence about the possibility of such a directional shift, of such a personal revolution and the possibility of a radical forgetting, complicates the issue and, by extension, the basis of Mizimura's essay. In the foreword De Man immediately qualifies the possibility of any 'change' in his work:

> When one imagines to have felt the exhilaration of renewal, one is certainly the last to know whether such a change actually took place or whether one is just restating, in a slightly different mode, earlier and unresolved obsessions.[46]

Ignoring this complication, Mizimura claims that a turn (the death of the subject) exists. Textually this is charted in the difference between an early production where she feels 'at home' and a later, 'barren' textual product.[47] If de Man worked to problematise the assumption that we might not feel alienated in language, Mizimura would have it that he did so only after 1969 and his essay, "The Rhetoric of

Temporality". She proposes to illustrate the turn - the destruction of the subject - by charting the progress of the concept of renunciation in three of de Man's readings of Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.[48] Yet her interpretation of these readings generates many problems. The theme of renunciation in de Man's texts is complex and Mizimura rightly acknowledges that 'what is to be renounced is not one mode of being for the sake of another, but, more fundamentally, the compatibility of the two modes of being'.[49]

There is a tension, therefore, resulting from a desire to reconcile incompatible modes of being and a renunciation of this temptation as impossible. This tension, I would say, is where de Man's writing begins.

For Mizimura, the turn is emblematic of an end to de Man's belief in the opposition between an empirical self and a self constituted in and by language. And yet de Man's first treatment of Rousseau (1966) reveals his understanding that the fictional self is prioritised in a necessary renunciation of any belief in an empirical self which could escape the linguistic predicament. He writes: 'The world of Clarens (in the novel) is a world that is founded on a difficult knowledge [...] the priority of fiction is established in the renunciation of oneself.'[50]

And a year earlier he had written of the necessary 'renunciation of the naive belief in a harmony at the beginning of things'.[51] So that it would seem that de Man's earliest treatment of Rousseau's novel concerns the 'gap that cleaves Being'.[52] Mizimura's framework, where literature, once held by de Man as a privileged place of knowledge can contrast with a later literary scepticism, is shaken when we understand that the self-knowledge at stake in his early work is necessarily qualified by the type of knowledge it offers: it is knowledge of the self as textual and combinative. With de

Man's second treatment of the novel I note the continuation of a theme rather than evidence of a dislocation. His discourse on symbol and allegory echoes the prior discussion of self- justification and self-knowledge, where allegory, 'renouncing the nostalgia to coincide, establishes its language in the void of this temporal distance'.[53]

Allegory, like Barthes' 'amicable' author, renounces any attempt at realism and openly reveals its status as language. So why does Mizimura posit a turn at this point? Why does she suddenly become suspicious of the text? Using de Man's words on Nietzsche as indictment she writes: 'There hardly is a trick of the oratorical trade which he is not willing to exploit to the full.'[54]

Mizimura rebels against de Man's theory because he uses language assertively to point out the divisions in language. De Man's methodology is suspect because it 'convinces the reader that he offers an ultimately correct reading',[55] whilst undermining that argument through the problematisation of language. Thus, her accusation is levelled against de Man at the precise point at which he attempts to 'perform' the dilemma of any theory, his own included, which would attempt to assert a truth using quotidian language. Mizimura believes in the turn because now de Man writes of language rather than of characters in a novel. She misunderstands the basic tenet of de Man's philosophy: that man is a linguistic construct and so to write of language is not to kill the subject but to interpret that subject through an analysis of the problems inherent in language: 'The cognitive function resides in the language and not in the subject.'[56]

Thus, what is questionable is not de Man's assertion of the unreadability of the text (where readability would fix meaning in a discernible intention), but Mizimura's location of its debut as *topos* in the second reading of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

What becomes important for us here is that Mizimura allies de Man's turn - falsely read as the death of the subject rather than the re-interpretation of that subject - with his rejection of Rousseau as a precursor. Yet, not only is subjectivity necessary to an understanding of the de Manian deconstructive stance, but the nature of this subjectivity is dependent upon an understanding of de Man's philosophy as a strong and persistent re-reading of Rousseau's own linguistic theory. It is her separation of de Man from Rousseau which ensures the collapse of Mizimura's reading. The turn, if it exists, must, according to Mizimura, affect de Man's textual treatment of Rousseau. She proposes to illustrate this through the juxtaposing of two texts written by de Man about the same textual event in Rousseau's work. The event, taken from Rousseau's *Confessions* concerns the episode where Rousseau steals a ribbon and falsely accuses the servant-girl, Marion.[57] The first treatment is from before the alleged 'turn', the second from after it.[58] However, de Man's texts, devastatingly for Mizimura's argument, in fact discuss two very different episodes. Where the 1977 passage from *Allegories of Reading* does discuss the ribbon narrative, the text from 1966 discusses an episode some ten years earlier within the narrative of the Confessions, when Rousseau himself is wrongly accused of stealing a comb.[59] Mizimura rightly comments upon de Man's recognition of Rousseau's attitude of benign universalism but wrongly attributes this to the later textual event of the theft of the ribbon. She is therefore misguided when she writes, concerning the texts that:

> The same confession which is here [1966] said to have originated from the "individual self", "genuine self insight" or "consciousness of the self" becomes, in 1977, a possible outcome of the absolute randomness of language.[60]

Her determination to consolidate a turn in de Man's work based around the death of subjectivity is radically undermined when we understand that de Man treats of two very different passages here. In refusing to read Rousseau, Mizimura misreads de

Man and fails to understand his 'itinerary'. Mizimura would have done well to read another passage from *Allegories of Reading* (1977), where de Man treats of the comb episode in the same manner as he did in 1966.[61] This reveals the persistence of de Man's allegiance to Rousseau rather than any dislocation from him as a precursor.

Mizimura's conclusions allow her to play out a turn which is no more than this by now familiar scene of the 'death of the subject'. But what they crucially allow is the possibility of a bifurcation - they enable, in this prioritising of a 'turn', a time when de Man believed in the subject as a location of meaning not restricted to textual meaning. Yet her (mis)readings of Rousseau destabilise the possibility of such an interpretation and point to de Man's adherence to Rousseau and his belief in the priority of language. Her essay deserves such prolonged treatment because it not only separates de Man from Rousseau at the very moment when Rousseau is established as the precursor of de Man's deconstructive stance, but Mizimura's failure to understand the 'itinerary' leads to a misreading of de Man and Rousseau - a misreading perpetuated by later (post-1985) critics keen to trace a de Manian itinerary independent of Rousseau and inspired only by the guilty desire to suppress a guilty subjectivity. Having abandoned Rousseau, Mizimura's de Man somehow kills his subjectivity and this death of the subject 'resembles the story of de Man's own life'.[62]

The way opens for a crude pseudo-biographical interpretation of the de Manian *oeuvre* where the turn (also a turn away from Rousseau) enables one to believe in the singularity of de Man's deconstructive stance. It is important to stress that Mizimura's falsely referential reading is used in later attempts to disparage de Man's textual production. When Mizimura writes of an author moving away from the subject to a belief in the priority of language she fails to generalise this philosophy

because she detaches de Man from Rousseau. So that when she particularises the predicament and formalises it into a specifically de Manian desire for authority (in the guise of disinterestedness), she enables the turn to be relocated by later critics who assume her terms without recognising their problematic status.

So that, for example, in the hands of Christopher Norris, her essay becomes a useful intertext, easily reinforcing opinions produced by the discovery of de Man's wartime journalism. The turn is conveniently shifted - after all it was always a portable entity in Mizimura's essay - and her terms lend themselves to a new reading which possesses the 'knowledge' about de Man. Mizimura's misguided interpretation of de Man's personal temptation to language and his abandonment of the subject allied to her suggestion that he had always been engaged in speaking about temptation, now becomes 'evidence' of de Man's association with Nazism and its seductive promise of accountability. It is her essay which lays the foundations for a debate perpetuated by Norris, Eagleton, Lentricchia, Johnson, Burke and Kaplan: a debate that postulates a belief in the possibility of the turn. It is their construction of this turn, against the manifest movement of de Man's texts, which enables the death of the (early) author and the birth of the dishonestly disinterested scholar. The paradoxical nature of this construction permits a later scenario: the renunciation of the possibility of the disinterested rhetorician and the return of the (guilty) author to the reader's circle to face the accusation of secreting authorial intention. Linguistic deconstruction is not the impetus for this renunciation of disinterestedness. Rather, this rejection is based on a firmly held belief in the availability of intention. It is, therefore, the readers who kill the author only to resurrect him and then accuse him of his untimely death. More importantly, they kill the 'amicable' author in order to resurrect the guilty realist.

2.2. 'A rich, aberrant tradition'[63]

De Man's self-proclaimed itinerary concerned a re-assessment of Rousseau due to a tradition of (mis)reading. A continued erroneous reading of someone de Man considered to be perhaps the most rhetorically aware writer among writers, necessitated that Rousseau be re-examined in order to rectify what had become, quite simply, the ossification of an interpretation.

An examination of Rousseauian criticism from the mid-50s - taking structuralism as our starting point - has persisted in dwelling upon Rousseau's 'totalitarian' leanings. This 'aberrant tradition', which I have previously traced traced from the mid-50's and Isaiah Berlin, through Starobinski, Nicolson, Berman and Crocker is still evident in contemporary readings of Rousseau's texts.

The three Rousseauian texts with which I am concerned: *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Le Contrat Social* and *Émile* do articulate a (universalised) desire for the death of the mimetic author and the birth of the disinterested or realist author. The texts reveal a mutual *telos*: that the Master, the Legislator and the Preceptor all exercise an authority based on the possibility of objective rule: a rule unquestioned because the command is effaced in the appearance of naturalness. Thus, the education of the preceptor would be both untutored and unstudied, legislation would be unworldly, and the master's rule paternal. Rule will be absolute in a perfected state of disinterestedness. Yet the Rousseauian text ultimately presents a critique of the possibility of the disinterested design. Thus at every stage within the texts, Rousseau is at pains to reveal how despotism is only possible through a shared belief in and desire for an impossible disinterestedness:

> '[the pupil] always believes himself to be the master and yet it is always you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which has the appearance of liberty.'[64]

So that whilst the text desires the possibility of liberty in and through the truth - through the disinterested author who would show things as they are - it necessarily renounces the temptation in an admission of its impossibility. The disinterested author must be

> a man who saw all of men's passions yet experienced none of them, who had no relationship at all to our nature yet knew it thoroughly; whose happiness was independent of ours, yet who was nevertheless willing to attend to ours.[65]

Thus, although the texts might desire the parousia they do not and cannot establish it: and it is this inability to achieve transparency which is elaborated repeatedly in the Rousseauian *oeuvre*. Any reading of Rousseau which begins to understand the explicit problematisation of the issue of disinterestedness within the text must question a tradition of scapegoating which would establish Rousseau as advocating a belief in the possibility of an objective rule. It is here, in a reading alert to the *aporias* of the Rousseauian text, that I locate a de Manian itinerary.

More recently readings have begun to problematise Rousseau as a realist author, however, even these readings are severely limited in their critical appraisal of Rousseau's work. Most readings are marred by a lack of attention given to the intertextual dimensions of Rousseau's writing. Blind to the self-referential nature of his *oeuvre*, the most lucid readings of Rousseau are often limited to single texts and thus, espouse the idea of a radical turn in the Rousseauian philosophy. Certain readings within what I here call an 'aberrant tradition' do offer slim opportunities to glimpse what we believe to have been central concerns for Rousseau. Thomas Kavanagh's recent investigation into authorial intention continues to exhibit an unwillingness to problematise themes which, within Rousseau's texts, are complicated through a rigorous rhetorical exegesis. In *Writing The Truth*, Kavanagh subjects

Rousseau to a reading similar to Mizimura's treatment of de Man.[66] An attempt to trace a turn structured about the death of the subject and leading to unreadability, offers the chance to compare critical reaction to both Rousseau and de Man.

Kavanagh divides the Rousseauian *oeuvre* about a turn. The hiatus, located in the *Letters to Malesherbes*, therefore occurs after the production of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *The Social Contract*, and *Émile*. It is a turn, according to Kavanagh, marked by a change in both style and intention[67] because it locates Rousseau's desire for a new and transparent language. Yet, if in these letters Rousseau does indeed write about the invention of a new language and content,[68] this statement of renewal, like de Man's own assertion of change in the *Foreword* to *Blindness and Insight*, is qualified by the recognition of its impossibility - here made explicit in Rousseau's placing of this linguistic revolution or 'turn' in a possible future (*il faudroit*) rather than as a *fait accompli*. If, as Kavanagh states, the letters are representative of any turn, they are essentially unable to live, or write up to, this turn. The letters write against the possibility of an unsocialised semiology; a solipsistic language which would convey the Truth without the mediation of the sign. Without comment, within Kavanagh's text, the turn changes to become both turn and desire for the turn. Desire for the turn (for a disinterested rhetoric) now operates where previously the turn itself functioned as subject. Thus Rousseau's new desire, born in the letters, is defined by its impossibility.[69] Yet because the desire itself is 'newly apparent'[70] it can be the turn itself, for it represents a break from a past where, according to Kavanagh, the desire, and its renunciation as impossible, did not exist. According to Kavanagh then, prior to the turn, Rousseau believed in the availability of meaning through the sign: in the possibility of the disinterested author. Thus, Kavanagh is willing to write that Clarens, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, represents Rousseau's 'ideal' society and that Rousseau

believed in the possibility of the benevolent objective ruler. Yet Rousseau wrote of a society which Kavanagh, as reader, can reveal to be one where the Master's rule is dependent upon a praxis of intervention marked by its ability to erase all traces of itself as duress. Kavanagh thus (re-)reveals the desired *parousia* as perverted totalitarianism. The turn is constructed by the reader (Kavanagh) so that this access to meaning can disappear and the Rousseauian discourse become unreadable with the immersion of the subject within the text. But Rousseau's protest against the identity's dependency upon the linguistic function, whilst apparent in the *Letters*, does not originate there as topos. The construction of a burgeoning literary scepticism mid-career would abandon Rousseau to isolation and silence. Yet Rousseau continues to write, as before, of the impossibility of the disinterested discourse, in the recognition that his own discourse is implicated within any critique (it is, after all, the implication of the Rousseauian text within this discourse which prevents it, and any text, from becoming unreadable). The tension between the desire to be present in language and the (im)possible renunciation of that desire through language, has always been at the heart of the Rousseauian text. It is within the space of this oscillation that Rousseau is able to write. Kavanagh's turn would insert the subject within Rousseau's text believing that, prior to the turn, the subject had been (a)voided through a writing of and on authenticity. Such a reading ignores the impossible demands Rousseau always made of disinterestedness. Again, the critic kills the subject only to resurrect it at a later date and on his own terms.

Ferrara's reading, perhaps one of the most recent within this 'aberrant tradition', provides an excursus on authenticity.[71] The topos of authenticity, elaborated as the unitary self, is here established unproblematically as the achievement of the Rousseauian *oeuvre*.[72] Yet this response refuses to recognise a persistent

problematisation of authenticity where it must be dependent upon the achievement of what Rousseau termed 'private virtue': selflessness or disinterestedness in favour of the general will. Ferrara's reading of *The Social Contract* ignores a discussion of authentic action which undermines its possibility through a discussion on the unavailability of intention. For any act to be disinterested, Rousseau understands that its instigator (the authenticity), must be able to project the consequences of the act upon the future condition of that which is acted upon. It is this impossible foresight, 'which places us where we will never arrive',[73] which effectively terminates the possibility of legislation within the Rousseauian text and destabilises any reading which would concretise the Legislator as a benevolent and authentic Patriarch. The social impossibility of disinterestedness damningly terminates the possibility of any contract in *The Social Contract.* Yet, whilst Ferrara admits that the text might be slightly ambiguous, he does insist that the Rousseauian text reveals a belief in the possibility of the disinterested author (of behaviour). Thus, any problematics in *The Social Contract* are, according to Ferrara, reconciled in *Émile.* Ferrara refuses to comment on Rousseau's problematisation of the tutor, writing that Rousseau 'was ignorant of the fact that roles and social expectations not only restrict individual identity but also sustain it'.[74]

Within such an ignorance, Rousseau is said to have been able to elaborate a belief in the disinterested tutor. The Rousseauian educative process is written by Ferrara as an asymmetrical dyad where one member has access to 'knowledge' and prohibits the other member within the dyad from imposing his or her judgements or views.[75] The disinterested preceptor is able to help the weaker member to deal with society 'without being a representative of that society'.[76] All this despite the fact that the text of *Émile* reasserts the necessary fragmentation of identity. When Ferrara concludes

that, perhaps, authenticity might have to retain a 'normative thrust'[77] this ambivalence, called 'balance', destroys the possibility of an authenticity achieved within the text. Authenticity, expressed in terms of possible deviations from normative behaviour, becomes itself a normative principle.[78]

I wish, at this juncture to call on one further contemporary reading of Rousseau. This is perhaps one of the more lucid interpretations, limited only by its confusing refusal to implicate *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in an intertextual treatment with texts composed by Rousseau at the same time: namely *Émile* and *The Social Contract.*[79] Again, the determination to see this novel as, somehow, standing alone, constitutes a desire to believe in the Rousseauian turn as the (re)turn of the subject. Jones, discussing *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in terms of utopian fiction and its themes of duration and egalitarianism, notes that in place of these universally desired goals, Rousseau's novel reveals the totalitarian thrust behind utopias. Rousseau, therefore, whilst constructing a desired, textual utopia is credited as sufficiently rhetorically aware to deconstruct that same utopia and expose it within the novel as an undesirable totalitarian community. The utopia, once written, is denied as invalid. It is recognised as both Truth and Untruth,[80] as universally desired, yet as failing to fulfil the desire. The utopia necessarily forgets that man is finite, that he is a union of being and non-being and that, therefore, it is impossible to regard his essential being as attainable: 'Utopia describes impossibilities as real possibilities - and fails to see them for what they are, impossibilities, or as an oscillation between possibilities and impossibilities.'[81]

Truth, desired and unattainable, is perhaps only available in the space of a writing which hovers between the desire to be in language and the renunciation of this desire. This is the space which Rousseau's text would occupy. Jones' interpretation falls

short in its refusal to understand that the utopia (here Clarens) cannot be denied or quitted within the text, where the text as linguistic construct is complicit in the utopian masquerade. The characters within *La Nouvelle Héloïse* cannot leave Clarens unless they exist in another type of utopia. The utopia cannot be quitted but it can, to a certain extent, be revealed in the 'amicable' text.

The de Manian itinerary and *Émile*

> I can remember that the first thing I was told about Rousseau [at school] was that he had written a treatise on education but given away his children.[82]

Perhaps an identification with Rousseau always figured in de Man's readings of the Romantic author. The accusations levelled against Rousseau's texts, grounded as they are in a belief in some sort of 'evidence' of a duplicitous life at odds with the text and in a belief in the availability of an authorial intention which would contaminate the text, unfolds a tradition of debate not unsimilar to the post-de Manian debate traced in the first section of this chapter. Having problematised a critical tradition through a reading of that tradition as itself author of a certain type of 'death of the subject' which relies on a guilty suppression of subjectivity, I would like to re-examine Rousseau's *Émile* as the text of an 'amicable' and therefore 'honest' author, revealing de Man's implication within this same authorial "honesty" due to the prioritising of the Rousseauian text within his 'itinerary': 'The desire to exempt Rousseau (as you say) at all costs from blindness is, therefore, for me, a gesture of fidelity to my own itinerary.'[83]

I have traced a post de Manian debate which continually discerns evidence of de Man in the work yet will not read Rousseau. There can be no doubting de Man's strong

personal investment in Rousseau,[84] yet few are ready to pass beyond such a generalised statement or to understand that any accusation of authorial dishonesty on the part of de Man is seriously undermined if the de Manian *oeuvre* is recognised as a persistent response to a Rousseauian negative hermeneutics.

Whilst Barthes, Derrida and Foucault were influenced strongly by the work of Levi-Strauss, de Man, it would seem, traced a linguistic anthropology through Levi-Strauss to Rousseau and this tracing leads to de Man's being a necessarily open and self-avowedly 'combinative' *oeuvre*. The de Manian text, when it does not discuss Rousseau directly (*Allegories of Reading*, *Blindness and Insight, Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*), uses Rousseau intertextually, as referent in any discussion of another (see, for example, de Man's discussions of Holderlin, Wordsworth and Heidegger). This recurrent invocation of Rousseau within his texts is both an attempt to redeem Rousseau from accusations that his might also be a delusive language, unaware of its own problematic entailments, and the result of de Man's 'honest' efforts to reveal his textual products as combinative, writerly and as issuing from somewhere other than himself. Within this schema, the text of *Émile* must be understood as one in which the question of the author is "revealed" and problematised to an unprecedented degree. It must also be understood as a highly influential text for the work of de Man.

Émile and de Man's negative hermeneutics

In the "Preface" to *Émile* Rousseau immediately problematises the authority of the text. The text is 'disordered and almost incoherent', its methodology 'chimerical'.[85] From the outset, Rousseau both anticipates and creates a reader (response) which

would judge and problematise *Émile* as a valid educational treatise through a prolonged examination of the role of the author. Rousseau's fictional reader, alert in its created 'opposition' to Rousseau, punctuates the narrative at regular intervals when it would seem that the author's voice disappears within the text. The preface and the reader-construct work together to reveal Rousseau's limited status as author, his necessarily partisan and contingent position in relation to the text and, importantly, work to emphasise the problematics of a polemic which attempts to shape itself at the limits of intelligible discourse. Rousseau is the assertive author who, ironically, asserts the author's lack of authority:

> It is up to me not to go overboard, not to believe that I alone am wiser than everybody. That is all I can do: and that is what I do. If I sometimes adopt an assertive tone, it is not for the sake of making an impression on the reader but for the sake of speaking to him as I think [...]. I so little expect that [my sentiments] be taken as authoritative that I always join them to my reasons so that they may be weighed.[86]

At each point here above, Rousseau is at pains to alert the reader to his manipulations of the text. Within the same movement he not only refuses a suasive power which could and should alter the reader's mind, he also reveals his text as a concerted irrealism:

> 'Propose what can be done' they never stop repeating to me. It is as if I were told, 'propose doing what is done.' What can be done is what you want to do. Ought I to be responsible for your will?[87]

The text then will oscillate between the possible - what can be done and is therefore done already- and the impossible - what ought to be done - in an agenda which alerts the reader to the insufficiency of the possible and the danger of any belief that the impossible (here called the *sufficient*), might ever be possible. His text, necessarily failing in any attempt to explain in quotidian language the attainment of the impossible, will, however, maintain a rigorous critique of the possible.

The first book of *Émile* continues, very deliberately, to 'reveal' to the reader the impossibility of the task elaborated: an education in and for disinterestedness. The book enacts the utopian predicament we discussed previously when we cited Tillich and Jones with reference to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*: it oscillates between the possible and the impossible and occupies this space as the site of a rigorous *écriture*. For the child educated to be disinterested, the nature of the teacher is an obvious source of contention: 'Who can hope entirely to direct the speeches and deeds of all those surrounding a child?'[88]

The text as hypothetical treatise, as a concerted irrealism, persistently negates the possibility of offering the child a neutral environment. In the enunciation of an (im)possible neutral pedagogy which would create a disinterested pupil - one who is no longer a 'fractional unity dependent on the denominator'[89]- the present educational system is critiqued. Yet in the lucidity of this critique of the possible, nature itself is found to be lacking and fragmentary: 'No one can remain in the state of nature when it is impossible to live there, for the first law of nature is the preservation of the self [...] and this attaches man to things.'[90]

The recognition of nature's lack and of a necessary supplementarity at the beginning of things, admits the impossibility of an authenticity necessarily shaped by independence: 'To be something, to be oneself and always one, a man must act as he speaks [...]. I am waiting to be shown this marvel.'[91] This 'marvel' must escape the fragmented subjectivity of fractional man: this marvel must be whole and disinterested. And so the text wonders: can the disinterested individual be created? Such a person must be, so to speak, 'untouched', so that Rousseau's education policy ironically becomes a concerted effort 'to prevent anything from being done'.[92] Yet, if

nature itself requires a supplement - if we are born weak and need help - to be disinterested one must, evidently, create oneself. The child must be allowed a contact which is, somehow, a non-contact. There must be contact with another who has been self-created and is therefore disinterested and desireless: with a man who is 'more than a man'.[93] The tutor must already be what the pupil will be, and this necessity creates new difficulties. If the governor must be this 'marvel':

> It becomes necessary to go from education to education back to I know not where. How is it possible that a child could be well raised by one who is not well raised himself?[94]

One must, then, be able to trace a path back to a pre-socialised state of plenitude, the maintenance of which might ensure a race of Nietzschean Übermensche: men who had not felt the division within being, disinterested men with whom any contact constituted a non-contact. The book is written in the knowledge of this impossibility, and in supposing this marvel found within the text, such a marvel - here the teacher - can only be written in the knowledge of what he is not. Rousseau, in creating himself as this Übermensche, attempts to theorise the impossibility of authorial objectivity. The subsequent narrative attempts to expose the teacher's power as symbol when Rousseau describes a society-machine which is 'faites avec paroles'.[95] The teacher cannot be this 'isolated' or 'uncontaminated' being because he is necessarily implicated within language.

Importantly then, the lessons of the text are not directed towards the pupil within the text, Émile, but at the reader-construct. Characteristically, after each lesson has been directed at this 'reader-pupil', Rousseau alerts the reader to his own problematic status as author and therefore, to the problems inherent in learning his lessons. If each lesson is a warning against the duplicity of language, each lesson necessarily must include, within its own problematic rhetoric, a warning against any belief in the lesson

as true. At the point of deconstruction, Rousseau 'withdraws', becomes the 'reader', and examines the stance from which the lesson might be elaborated for it to be true. Each time the lesson is undermined, whilst it is right to say that there remains a sense of optimism within the text - a sense that there remains something to be learnt, 'I know of no philosopher who has yet been so bold as to say: this is the limit of what man can attain and beyond which he cannot go'.[96]

Qui non c'e la radice (here is no root)

The lessons of Rousseau in his *Emile* are directed against the *Trivium*: against the art of reasoning as it infiltrates science, philosophy and legislation. All the lessons in Rousseau's negative pedagogy stem from the first, which teaches that, unable to posit a language that might ever have been natural to men, we can only ever say that 'all our languages are works of art'.[97] Because there is no extra-linguistic dimension to language, it follows that any discourse is 'artistic'. Discourse is recognised as aesthetic ideology rather than truth-statement. From this Rousseau directs his lessons against the discourse of mathematics, history and geometry, revealing our inability to penetrate beyond the sign to attain that which is signified.[98] He reveals the non-objectivity of any discourse and alerts the reader to the danger of giving authority to what is only a defective fiction. His lessons reach their apogée in the assertion, 'concede nothing to the authority of men',[99] and his own text is necessarily, if confusingly, implicated in the warning.[100] The idea of disinterestedness has been rejected in a recognition of the unavailability of intention through language: 'We will never be able to disentangle the secret intention which dictates the scream.'[101]

As with Rousseau's *Social Contract,* which was disabled by the impossibility of foresight, language cannot discern motivation. When one tries to account for intention in language the imagination comes into play and fabricates possible textual scenarios. Thus, when we try to discern the intention behind the universe - why the earth is in motion - we think we see a hand that moves it.[102] If intention escapes language then Rousseau, as educator, would alert the reader to the measures and instruments upon which we depend for our knowledge. The greatest measure, obviously, is language. These linguistic fabrications upon which we depend he terms 'frames' and these 'frames' serve us as proverbs.[103] Any knowledge produced will be 'framed' by the pupil/teacher dyad in order that it exist, so to speak, in inverted commas. Within this frame knowledge can be recognised as an 'artwork'. The telos of this negative education then is to produce the deconstructive reader who would discern the frame in the discourse, to produce a reader who would be 'backstage, seeing the actors take up and put on their costumes, counting the cords and pulleys whose crude magic devices deceive the spectator's eyes'.[104]

With the death of the realist author the deconstructive reader is born, and this reader is born with the knowledge of his or her implication within a framed discourse, but with the optimistic hope that a certain 'honest' admission to the machinations of language is possible: 'One must use a great deal of art to prevent social man from being totally artificial.'[105]

And it is in this oscillation between the possible and the impossible that we discern the optimism of a negative hermeneutics, for in recognising insurmountable difficulties, it could be said that:

> in applying oneself to them, one does overcome them up to a certain point. I show the goal that must be set; I do not say that it can be reached.[106]

It is from this difficult space that a negative discourse must attempt to articulate itself, and it is in this space - as the result of the temptation to be 'present' in language and the renunciation of that temptation as impossible[107] - that I believe de Man decided to establish his own problematic philosophy.

The lessons of Paul de Man: an honest philosopher

It remains that I discuss the de Manian *oeuvre* as re-reading of the 'honesty' apparent in a Rousseauian authoring. Certainly de Man's suspicion of the aesthetic is repeatedly written with reference to this strong precursor. At every moment in the de Manian text one is reminded of a former moment which recalls Rousseau. And so, when de Man writes of language's failure to match up with phenomenal experience;

> All the obstacles to understanding [...] belong specifically to language rather than the phenomenal world; consequently the expectation that they could be mastered by analogy with processes that stem from the psychology of perception is by no means certain[108]

I am reminded of Rousseau's statement to the effect that truth is in things and not in the mind which judges those things.[109] The aesthetic is denounced by de Man as a seductive notion, appealing to the pleasure principle[110] and this description of the aesthetic as desirable also recalls the moments where *Émile* discusses the aestheticisation of history and the seduction of the lie.[111] De Man's persistent analogy in his *Resistance to Theory*,[112] which specifically links the belief in the aesthetic to an illness which seeks its cure in that same aesthetic recalls, in style and content, the warning offered in Rousseau's *Émile*:

> They always assume that in treating a sick person one cures him and that, in seeking a truth one finds it [...]. I will be told that the mistakes are the doctor's, while the medicine itself is infallible, then let it come without the doctor, for so long as they come together, there will be a hundred times more to fear from the errors of the artist than to hope from the help of his art.[113]

The contamination of scientific discourse through its association with the aesthetic is always written by de Man with reference/deference to Rousseau. If language cannot be reduced to phenomenal cognition, the 'surplus' - the 'more' of Eagleton and Lentricchia and the 'story' of Burke, Johnson, Mizimura and countless others - must always be the production of an aesthetic ideology, otherwise termed a fiction. The reflections of de Man upon the *Trivium* are directly influenced by a reading of *Émile* and his reading of Pascal's "Réflexions sur la Géométrie en Générale: de L'Ésprit Géométrique et de l'Art de Persuader", deconstructs mathematical rigour in the spirit of *Émile*: the proofs of the mathematician are, according to de Man, 'allegories' where nothing but the textual inventiveness of the mathematician is revealed.[114]

The pollution of the political by the aesthetic, perhaps the dominant *thema* in the de Manian *oeuvre* also pays tribute to a reading of Rousseau. De Man's discourse emphasises the impossibility of knowing - as the New Critics claimed to know - where to draw a firm juridical line between literature and other types of language. Recognisably taking its shape from Rousseau, de Man's texts acknowledge the necessary figural dimension in language - a dimension which would be suppressed by discourses not willing to admit any allegiance with rhetoricism. As in *The Social Contract* and *Émile*, historical knowledge is seen to be defective due to its reliance upon a complex rhetorical structure with no real access to any world beyond the text. By extension, political action, dependent upon this historical knowledge, is defective due to its refusal to realise that 'social forms of separation derive from ontological and meta-social attitudes' and that any political solution refuses to recognise that 'thought cannot overcome the division inherent in being'.[115]

Thus it would seem that accusations levelled against de Man and, more specifically, against the de Manian *oeuvre* - accusations which traced a dishonest 'itinerary' to a private battle against the ideological mystifications associated exclusively with Nazism - must be reassessed in the light of an 'itinerary' associated with a reiteration of the early Romantic philosophy of Rousseau. Allegations, levelled by Lentricchia and Eagleton, trace de Man's political quietism to previous fascist sympathies - to a conjectured, specific biographical event - rather than to a re-reading of Rousseau at the moment when he argues against the possibility of successful political action. De Man's continued assertion that meaning is not reducible to any form of phenomenal cognition is self-avowedly the result of a reading of Rousseau.[116] So that when he works to discredit political thought in his radical essay on the textualisation of history - "Literary History and Literary Modernity" - he writes that 'the basis of historical knowledge is not empirical facts but written texts'.[117] This text, condemned by Sean Burke as 'rash', is again traceable to *Émile*.[118] As long as the anti- de Manian debate discusses this political quietism in terms of a possible reaction to; 1) his uncle Hendrik de Man, 2) a 'guilty' textual event, or 3) the Holocaust, it refuses to trace an intertextuality in the *oeuvre* which would lead to a scene before the Second World War thus permitting a universalisation of a (linguistic-ontological) predicament rather than a particularised and necessarily hypothetical scene of individual guilt traceable to a discourse we here call Nazism.

All the criticisms levelled by the debate at the de Manian *oeuvre* and the dishonest philosopher can be read as criticisms which de Man himself, through his texts, had *already* openly discussed. A close reading of de Man's discussion of authoring, written before the 'discovery' of his early journalism, deconstructs the terms of this later debate against de Man and turns it into a critique of authoring *in general.* That

is, the terms of the post-de Manian debate have, *a priori*, been consistently deconstructed by de Man throughout his work and can be used here to dismantle the very foundation of the critique which later challenges him. The specific trend in post-1987 critiques of his work, which attacks his rhetoric at the precise point where it attempts to remain intelligible in the face of language's own undecidability, prefers to equate a rigorous rhetoric with a dishonesty of intention. Culler argues: 'One can only make sense of [de Man's] writing if one already has a sense of what he is saying.'[119] But this type of attack against de Man's dishonest discourse is pre-empted in de Man's own reading of Rousseau: 'In any study whatsoever, unless one has the ideas of the things represented, the representative signs are nothing.'[120]

All theories are necessarily stated in a mode of error. Because we have no extra-linguistic ideas, de Man's theory and *all* theories must necessarily take their place in the framework of a prior discourse. So that a criticism of de Man's supposedly uniquely guilty discourse must be understood to encompass all discourse if, by guilty, we mean partaking of ideological moments. De Man's reading of Rousseau attempts to counter this inevitable critique of the deconstructive stance - this reliance upon individual scape-goating - by revealing the limits of any theoretical 'facts' which must rely upon the speculative or aesthetic aspect of language. Because de Man's itinerary is, self-avowedly, to openly re-read and re-write Rousseau's *oeuvre*, any criticism of de Man's texts must also criticise Rousseau's texts. And if this criticism of de Man's texts relies on a specific, biographical event when it dismisses de Man's discourse, how can it dismiss Rousseau's parallel discourse since he never wrote for *Het Vlaamsche Lande* or *Le Soir*? The method used by the debate to indict de Man, a method which centres around his dishonesty as an author, is seen to rest on a misunderstanding of deconstruction's major tenet. When Norris writes, 'there is a

tension between the demystifying rigour of de Man's critique and the fact that comprehension must rely on the suspension of that rigour to a certain degree',[121] he not only reasserts Culler's criticism, he re-articulates the debate's main objections to deconstruction. If deconstruction is a theory about the undecidability of language, how can it be delivered authoritatively within language? De Man's 'brand' of deconstruction must be uniquely dishonest because, at its core, it conceals the secret of his suppressed subjectivity. Whereas in fact, de Man's texts continually and openly assert the problematic nature of his authorial status through a reading of Rousseau's examination of the authorial role in *Émile* and through his own continued textual occupation of a site which I have identified as an oscillation between the theoretically possible and the impossible. Thus, de Man reveals his text to be 'as systematic and rigorous *as possible*', he writes that deconstruction 'states the fallacy of reference in a necessarily referential mode', and that 'nothing can overcome the *Resistance to Theory* since theory is itself this resistance'.[122] Like Rousseau's texts, de Man's *oeuvre* desires the *parousia*, but cannot establish it.[123] Norris is mistaken to write of the suspension of rigour. The tension within the de Manian discourse results from a rigour which cannot be suspended - just as the utopia cannot be quitted - the rigour is instead recognised as part of our reliance on the aesthetic.

2.3. The turn

De Man's writing against modernity and against the possibility of a revolutionary act which would forget the past, is a writing against the 'turn'. A belief in history and in the revolutionary act, represent for both de Man and Rousseau, the desire for something which would endure: a desire made possible only through an act of the

imagination. For de Man and Rousseau meaning cannot only be linguistic, that is, meaning could only be determined on the basis of some further fact about language which might leave no room for hermeneutic doubt. Because this further fact does not exist, because the sign always substitutes for the signified, only a deconstructive rhetoric, aware of its own complicity, is possible. However, the debate which opposes itself to de Man would believe that this 'further fact' does exist: that there is an aspect to language which can access meaning or intention. This aspect is called here the imagination or the speculative text which offers the temptation of permanence (where meaning is a permanence of interpretation). A successfully hermeneutic reading would do away with the necessity of any further reading and thus establish a permanence (here a story about de Man). This 'further fact' then is the 'more' of Eagleton and Norris, it is the story which Johnson required as guarantee of de Manian intention, it is the 'more' Mizimura believes she uncovers in her 'story' about de Man. Each of these interpretations of de Manian intention relies on a Hegelian concept of the imagination as able to overcome quotidian knowledge and on the possibility of a turn. Yet the theory of deconstruction writes against the possibility of the turn and the creation of a radically new self and in this 'amicable' writing it deconstructs the debate which follows de Man's death. Deconstruction reveals this 'further fact' to rely on the powers of the imagination to fabricate an impossible permanence, so that any debate about authorial intention is necessarily conjectural: it is a debate which believes in the imagination's power to return the subject - which it killed - to a scene of hermeneutically successful reading. So that, just as a negative hermeneutics seeks to deconstruct the possibility of disinterested truth through the discovery of a necessary politicised aesthetic, positive theorists - here the debate - argue that a principled account can be given to avoid a situation

where discourse might serve to articulate the interest of the author. Thus the debate misunderstands de Man's deconstructive stance, it refuses to read Rousseau and, finally, it kills the 'honest' author in order to resurrect the realist. The author is returned to the text as omnipotent, as the Author-God understood as unitary cause, source and master of the text. The debate can then 'discover' the author 'behind' the work and thus explain the text. *Polysemia* is cancelled in a debate which assigns an ultimate meaning to the text - a 'secret' traceable to authorial intention. To this extent, the debate represents a politics of violence because, whilst it protests against the Author-God of a dishonest philosophy, it succumbs to the desire to resurrect this same Author-God within the logic of its own debate: 'One of the pupil's first efforts is to discover the "secret" of those who govern them.'[124]

A necessary part of any reading, the desire for narrative meaning becomes a desire to understand authorial intention. The debate, then, represents an instance when many voices chose to ossify textual meaning through the tracing of an itinerary which denounces both de Man and the deconstructive tendency through a conjectured connection with the rhetoric of Fascism. De Man's *oeuvre* becomes nothing more than a struggle against this rhetoric. Such scapegoating refuses to admit that all theories are necessarily articulated from within an aesthetic or ideological framework tempted by the lure of permanent meaning and that writing from within this position does not necessarily enable one to tar the text with the brush of totalitarianism. Similarly, the indictment of Rousseau by an aberrant critical tradition intent upon exempting itself from any involvement within his discourse parallels de Man's treatment. It is too easy to dismiss an entire *oeuvre* through a conjectured link to Fascism, and I am not alone when I note that Rousseau's texts have, undeservedly,

been read in this way: 'Perhaps after the barbaric totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin, critics of ideas have been too prone to search for a scapegoat in Rousseau.'[125]

[1] The story broke in *The Times*, Dec. 1st, 1987, in an article entitled "Yale Scholar's Articles found in Nazi Paper". David Lehmen's *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man*, (London, Andre Deutsch, 1991), pp.163-165, chronicles de Graef's discovery and recommends other press releases which broke the "story", such as *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Village Voice*, *The London Review of Books* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* Further details about the discovery of the articles can be read in Ortwin de Graef's "Aspects of the Context of Paul de Man's Earliest Publications", in *Responses: on Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed., Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz and Thomas Keenan,(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p.115

[2] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, second edition (London: Methuen, 1983), p.141

[3] ibid., p.xii

[4] Burke, Sean: *The Death and Return of The Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p.2.

[5] ibid., p.2 (my italics).

[6] ibid., p.4

[7] Mizimura, Menae, "Renunciation" in *The Lesson Of Paul de Man*, ed. Peter Brooks, Shoshona Felman, and J. Hillis Miller, *Yale French Studies*, no.69 (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1985) pp.81-97

[8] ibid., p.81

[9] ibid., p.81

[10] Kaplan, Alice, *French Lessons: A Memoir* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.45

[11] Ibid.

[12] Johnson, Barbara, "The Surprise of Otherness: A Note on the Wartime Writings of de Man" in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (London: Polity Press, 1990), p.20

[13] ibid., p.20

[14] ibid., p.20

[15] Eagleton, Terry, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990), p.311

[16] ibid., p.311

[17] ibid., p.311

[18] Norris, Christopher, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.163

[19] ibid., p.163

[20] ibid., p.163 (my italics)

[21] Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change* (1983), cited in Norris, Christopher, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the critique of Aesthetic Ideology*, p.182

[22] Burke, Sean: *The Death and Return of The Author*, p.2.

[23] Kaplan, Alice, *French Lessons: A Memoir*, p.148 (my italics)

[24] Barthes, Roland, "The Death of the Author" [1967] in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p.147

[25] Kaplan, Alice, *French Lessons: A Memoir*, p.174

[26] ibid., p.154

[27] Johnson, Barbara "The Surprise of Otherness: A Note on the Wartime Writings of de Man" in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (London: Polity Press, 1990), p.20

[28] Burt, E.S., "Paul de Man" *Yale French Studies*, 1985, p.11

[29] Mizimura, Menae, "Renunciation" in *The Lesson Of Paul de Man*, ed. Peter Brooks, Shoshona Felman, and J. Hillis Miller, *Yale French Studies*, no.69 (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1985), p.83

[30] ibid., p.83

[31] ibid., p.83

[32] Eagleton, Terry, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p.10

[33] Zola, Émile, *The Experimental Novel* (New York: The Cassel Publishing Company, 1894), pp.125-126

[34] Barthes, Roland, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* trans. R. Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), p.131

[35] Barthes, Roland, *Image-Music-Text* trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p.143

[36] Barthes, Roland, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1975), p.140
[37] ibid., p.140
[38] Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1976), p.27
[39] Barthes, Roland, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1977), pp. 8-9
[40] ibid., pp.36-37
[41] Derrida, Jacques, "The Structuralist Controversy", in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), p.271
[42] Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author?", in Harari, Josue V., ed., *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p.141
[43] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.18
[44] Burke, Sean, *The Death and Return of The Author*, p.112
[45] de Man, Paul *Blindness and Insight*, p.xii
[46] ibid., p.xii
[47] Mizimura, Menae, "Renunciation", p.83. See de Man, Paul, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.84:

> We think we are at ease in our own language, we feel a coziness, a familiarity, a shelter in the language we call our own, in which we feel we are not alienated.

[48] The first reading is from *Preuves* 190, December 1966, ("Mme. De Stael et Jean-Jacques Rousseau", *Preuves* 190, December, 1966, pp.84-90); the second is in *The Rhetoric of Temporality* (1969); the third from the second edition of *Blindness and Insight* (1983).
[49] Mizimura, Menae, "Renunciation", p.86
[50] de Man, Paul, *Preuves*, p.87
[51] de Man, Paul, "The Mask of Albert Camus" *New York Review of Books*, Dec. 1965, pp.10-13
[52] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight*, p.245
[53] de Man, Paul, *Rhetoric of Temporality* [1969], pp.207-209 ("the Second Treatment")
[54] Mizimura, Menae, "Renunciation", p.90, quoting Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p.131
[55] ibid., p.90
[56] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight*, p.137
[57] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Confessions*, trans. J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1953), pp.86-89
[58] Mizimura is reading de Man's "Mme. De Stael et Jean-Jacques Rousseau", *Preuves*, 190 (December, 1966), pp.84-90) and *Allegories of Reading*, (1977)
[59] ibid., p.20
[60] Mizimura, Menae, "Renunciation", p.95
[61] See de Man's *Allegories of Reading*, p.287.
[62] Mizimura, Menae, "Renunciation", p.95
[63] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight*, p.141
[64] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile, or On Education* [1762], introd. and trans. Allan Bloom, (London: Penguin, 1991)), p.91
[65] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract and Other Later Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.123
[66] Kavanagh, Thomas, *Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987)
[67] ibid., p.22
[68] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Confessions* (*Oeuvres Complètes*) : 'Il faudroit pour ce que j'ai à dire, inventer un language aussi nouveau que mon projet' (p.12).
[69] Kavanagh, Thomas, *Writing the Truth*, p.22
[70] ibid., p.22
[71] Ferrara, Alessandro, *Modernity and Authenticity*
[72] See this in conjunction with an earlier study along similar lines: Berman's previously mentioned *Politics of Authenticity*.
[73] Rousseau, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.82
[74] Ferrara, Alessandro, *Modernity and Authenticity*, p.78
[75] ibid., p.83

[76] ibid., p.84
[77] ibid., pp.108-109
[78] For further (mis)readings of *Émile* which perpetuate the idea of a Rousseauian desire for and belief in the possibility of a neutral pedagogy see Rabant, Charles, "L'Illusion Pédagogique" in *L'Inconscient*, Oct.1968. See also Imbert, François, *L'Émile ou L'Interdit de la Jouissance: L'Éducateur, le désir et la loi, (sic)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1989).
[79] Jones, Jr., James F., *La Nouvelle Héloïse: Rousseau and Utopia*
[80] Jones, Jr., p.88, on Tillich, Paul: "Critique and Justification of Utopia", in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, Frank E. Manuel, ed. (Boston, Houghton-Mifflin,1966), p.299.
[81] Tillich, Paul: "Critique and Justification of Utopia", p.300
[82] De Man, Paul, 'The Gauss Seminar' (1967), in "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self", *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.28
[83] Derrida, Jacques, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, revised ed., trans. Cecile Lindsay, Johnathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p.130
[84] See, for example, Norris, Christopher, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.10.
[85] Rousseau, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.33 and p.34
[86] ibid., p.34
[87] ibid., p.34
[88] ibid., p.38
[89] ibid., p.39
[90] ibid., p.193
[91] ibid., p.40
[92] ibid., p.41
[93] ibid., p.41
[94] ibid., p.41
[95] Lacan, Jacques, *Le Seminaire - Livre I* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p.255
[96] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.62
[97] ibid., p.65
[98] On maths he writes:

> The method of defining all the terms and constantly substituting the definition in the place of the defined is [...] impracticable, for how can a circle be avoided? Definitions could be good if words were not used to make them. (*Émile*, Penguin edn., p.108)

On geometry:

> This is an affair as much of the imagination as of reasoning. When the proposition is state, it is necessary to imagine its demonstration, that is, to find of which proposition already known, this one must be the consequence [....] In this way the most exact reasoner, if he is not inventive, has to stop short.' (*Émile*, Penguin edn., p.107)

On history:

> 'History is a seducing lie' (*Émile*, Penguin edn., p.112), which 'sensible men ought to regard as a tissue of fables.' (Ibid., p.156) 'I see little difference between novels and histories' (Ibid., p.239), because 'facts change in the historians head, they are moulded according to his interests [....] Who knows how to put the reader exactly in the spot of the action [...] ignorance and partiality disguise everything.' (Ibid., p.234)

[99] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile*, (Penguin edn.), p.241
[100] The "amicable", "honest" author, here overtly problematises his own text throughout the narrative, revealing the fictional status of *Émile* as a philosophical treatise. See particularly (Penguin edn.) pp. 94, 118, 284, 294 and 315.
[101] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.66
[102] ibid., p.453
[103] ibid., p.145
[104] ibid., p.242
[105] ibid., p.316
[106] ibid., p.95
[107] Compare with Rousseau's *Émile*: 'What is forbidden to us by conscience is not temptations but rather letting ourselves be conquered by temptations' (p.229).

[108] de Man, Paul, *Resistance to Theory*, p.62
[109] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.272
[110] de Man, Paul, *Resistance to Theory*, p.62, p.64 -5
[111] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.112
[112] de Man, Paul, *Resistance to Theory*, p.64
[113] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile*, p.54
[114] de Man, Paul, "Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion.", in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Allegory and Representation*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.2
[115] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight* p.240
[116] See de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading* and *Resistance to Theory* and Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.108.
[117] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight*, p.165
[118] See Burke, Sean, *The Death and Return of The Author*, p.4; see Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* pp.112, 156, 234 and 239.
[119] Cited by Norris, Christopher, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the critique of Aesthetic Ideology* p. xiii.
[120] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.109
[121] Norris, Christopher, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the critique of Aesthetic Ideology*, p.xiii
[122] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight*,p.263; *Allegories of Reading*,p.152; *Resistance to Theory*, p.19
[123] de Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight*, p.258
[124] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.120
[125] Jones Jr., James F., *La Nouvelle Héloise: Rousseau and Utopia*, p.91

CHAPTER THREE

ALTHUSSER'S CRIME

3.0. Introduction

This chapter resembles its predecessor in both structure and aim. It too investigates the debate surrounding the 'death' of an author - here Louis Althusser - and the simultaneous revelation of a crime. I will concentrate on the response to this crime as one which initiates a crypto-biographical reading of Althusser's philosophical *oeuvre* and, more specifically, as a response which would cite the crime in any subsequent textual reading. This response, I believe, misunderstands both the deconstructive tendency and Althusser's 'itinerary' which here, as before, is traced to an intertextual commitment to Rousseau. I here propose that Althusser's reading of Rousseau into his own work unsettles the terms of a 'post'-Althusserian debate on theoretical autonomy.

Section One will discuss the anti-Althusserian debate as it stood after the events of November 1980. I will pay particular attention to the belief held by the debate that the Althusserian discourse - prior to the crime - had, somehow, achieved the 'death of its author' through the attainment of a disinterested theoretical objectivity. The necessary *dénouement* of such a widely held belief is that, in the event of a crime, an Althusserian subjectivity can be re-introduced, by the debate, into this, allegedly,

purely scientific, independent discourse via a specific reference to that crime. This re-introduction will necessarily, according to the debate, deligitimise and disparage Althusser's thought. Section Two will examine the criticisms voiced against Althusserism prior to the crime in order to isolate specific critical trends, that is, themes specific to the debate prior to November 1980. Section Three will look at the Althusserian *oeuvre* concentrating specifically on Althusser's reading of Rousseau's *Social Contract* in his *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx.* Recourse to this Althusserian text enables us to complicate and unsettle a debate which must establish Althusser as a wilfully disinterested theorist. Althusser's *oeuvre* also problematises any debate which would discuss intention within the text, that is, any debate which desires specific 'evidence' of the author within the text. Finally, Section Four will summarise my findings - firstly, how the anti-Althusserian debate which established itself before his crime was left inadequately challenged due to a refusal to read Althusser closely and secondly, how this debate could then lend credence to the more virulent and worryingly 'policing' anti-Althusserian polemic after November 1980. The arguments used against Althusser - arguments based on mere speculation as to the possible motivation of Althusserism - intensified and were lent an 'air of truth' by the 'evidence' of his crime. Thus it was that the main charges rallied against Althusserism - its élitism, its irresponsibility, its guilt, its anti-humanism, its anti-historicism and its subsequent ethical abyss - were left unchallenged and so could, after 1980, translate into an attack which could fabricate a 'story' about Althusser's 'crime' to lend credence to its critique and so, damningly, terminate his discourse.

3.1. Destruction and self-destruction: the death of an Althusser

On the 16th of November 1980, Hélène Althusser was, allegedly, strangled to death by her husband Louis within the walls of their home in Paris' prestigious École Normale Supérieure. This was, and remains, his sole crime (in legal terms).

It is the nature of the response to Althusser's crime which interests me here. In the case of de Man the revelation of a crime followed upon his death and as such it was both the physical death of an author, and the death of an idea about that author, which initiated a desire for a story about that author. The debate then had to reinstate de Man's missing subjectivity to facilitate the return of the author. In what way then does the very real death of Hélène Althusser constitute the death of Louis Althusser? That is, in what way is Louis Althusser removed from the subjective arena in order that a debate might be able to construct a discourse which could reinstate his subjectivity on its own terms, assured that the author will not rise up to challenge them? Quite simply, with the murder of his wife, Althusser committed a type of suicide.[1] On the night of the crime he was immediately sent to St. Anne's psychiatric hospital. It was there that sentence was passed and Althusser was condemned to the silence of the *non-lieu*. Later, in his second autobiography, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, he would describe this judgement as 'the tombstone of the *non-lieu*, of silence and public death'.[2]

Literally, the *non-lieu* is a no-place. A medical examination diagnosed Althusser as a manic-depressive and therefore denied him any trial, ultimately robbing him of any responsibility and refusing him the right to respond:

> The Penal Code [...] since 1938, makes a distinction between someone held not to be responsible; a criminal who has committed an act while suffering from dementia or 'under duress', and an individual who is quite simply held to be responsible because he is recognised as being normal.[3]

Denied any response Althusser becomes essentially subject-less. Althusser later voiced support for Foucault's definition of madness as being 'without body'. If Althusser is bodiless, existing in a no-place, for all intents and purposes removed from the sphere of response and responsibility through incarceration, he is, is he not, in a way dead? November 16th, therefore, marked the first 'death' of Louis Althusser.

Following upon this 'death' arose the inevitable public desire for a story - for a response which might replace his missing body and answer for his actions. The debate which surrounds Althusser's crime and 'death', like that which tried to contain de Man, is one which centres on the issue of authorial accountability. If the author cannot assume responsibility - because he has been silenced - the debate will take it upon itself to 'return' the author by fabricating textual scenarios within which authorial intention might reveal itself. Responsibility, therefore, shifts as it now becomes the responsibility of the debate to reinstate Althusser's subjective status and intention through an insertion of his bio-graph into the text.

The restitution of the author.

The most prominent feature of the critical activity following Althusser's crime and 'death' is a debate on authorial accountability which reveals the shared desire for a story which might deligitimise Althusserism through reference to his 'guilty' past. The debate against Althusserian theory which began in 1980 was so ruthlessly damning that even now its effects are being felt. In 1988, almost a decade after the crime, Étienne Balibar, speaking of Althusser at a conference in the U.S.A. said: 'In his own country there is an absolute taboo now suppressing the name of this man and the meaning of his writings.'[4]

The reason for this sustained silence is clear:

> We should not underestimate the effects of the scandalous murder of Althusser's wife, which influenced both opponents and friends, and is certainly not the weaker among intellectuals. To the contrary, since they are especially ill at ease when confronted with questions of crime and madness, if these are not (yet) literary cases.[5]

A large part of the reason why Althusserism remains, to this day, a taboo subject, at least in France, is because of the virulence of an anti-Althusserian debate which effectively terminated his teachings. This media debate, which surfaced on both sides of the Channel in the weeks, months and years following Althusser's crime, worked to establish a number of key facts which I now hope to elaborate upon. Specifically, the French (and World) press attempted to create a link between the philosophical thought of Althusser and the tragedy at the École.[6] With this end in mind, it became of paramount importance that Althusser be seen to have lied. Althusser is therefore shown to have been a mysterious character who secreted an enormous discrepancy between his public and private life.[7] He is simultaneously a respectable teacher (*Normalien*) and a mental patient (*A-normalien*).[8] Because of this his writing becomes suspect - Althusser had a secret, he was a mental patient - and he chose to shirk his academic and moral responsibility by remaining silent about this secret. His *oeuvre* must, therefore, be explicable as autobiographical suppression and/or elliptical confession. The text functions as both reflection on insanity and product of that insanity.

It is this shared desire for a secret or story about Althusser, always traceable to his crime, which disinters many of the loci of author-centred criticism. As with de Man, an entire *oeuvre* is reduced to autobiographical status. A text previously held to be disinterested is 'rediscovered' - Althusserism is tainted with the biograph and the motivational impetus behind theoretical marxism is traced to a specific biographical

event. After 1980 this event must be the murder of his wife although before, as I will discuss later, one could substitute an entire series of possible crimes.

The *new* crime - let us note that the anti-Althusserian debate accuses Althusser of 'more than' the murder of his wife - becomes Althusser's hidden subjectivity behind the now recognisable guise of disinterestedness. The debate can now suspect a possibly sinister motive behind Althusser's symptomatic reading of the 'process without a subject' - he hoped to efface his own, pathologically abnormal, subjectivity and created the theoretical environ in which to do so.

My intention here is not to deny the seriousness of Althusser's crime but rather to question its power to contaminate an earlier theoretical production, where contamination is dependent upon the theoretical undermining of a previous Althusserian pretension to disinterestedness - here called a purely scientific discourse - through reference to that crime. The debate must rely upon its claim that Althusser effaced the subject within his theory in order to secrete his own partisan - because criminal - subjective status.

Interestingly, in order to do this the debate must reveal its prior (to 1980) and sustained (excepting the case of Althusser) belief in the possibility of a disinterested discourse. That is, in order for their argument to make any sense, they must exhibit two things - that they did once believe that Althusser had created a purely objective discourse and that a purely objective discourse remains attainable, except in the case of Althusser. So it is only after November 1980 and with specific reference to Althusser that the question is asked - 'What do students need to know about teachers?'[9]

It was generally held, by those intellectuals who voiced criticisms after 1980, that Althusser's theory had been somehow produced in a vacuum, absolutely and irrevocably cut off from the outside world. His, allegedly, was a discourse which claimed, and somehow managed, to achieve the purity of objectivity. A spatial metaphor is employed by his detractors which allows Althusser to remain outside society and 'normal' every day experience, living instead '*à huis clos*'.[10] This idea of seclusion and exclusion is consistently reaffirmed in relation to Althusser. The debate writes in opposition to an academic establishment (with Althusser forming part of this establishment) which protects the élitism of the idea.[11] This leads to two further suppositions, firstly, that Althusser was dishonest about his supposedly disinterested, scientific theories and secondly, that the debate can insert his 'true' intentions into the theoretical works now that it 'knows' Althusser. The debate can sully the so -called purity of the Althusserian idea through the resurrection of his subjectivity here traced to a localisable biographic event:

> À la suite du crime aberrant du philosophe Louis Althusser, intellectuel en renom et mâitre à penser revendiqué par toute une generation, certains se demandent si la philosophé, le monde des idées pures, ne seraient pas résponsables de telles folies.[12]

Two ideas are apparent in the above citation - that intellectualism provokes mental breakdown[13] and, perhaps more interestingly, that a 'pure' philosophy can, sometimes, be contaminated by the life of the philosopher: 'L'ennui, c'est que le penseur [here read Louis Althusser] n'est jamais, dans son existence, seulement un philosophe.'[14]

A previously held belief in the possibility of objective thought collapses when an entire philosophical *oeuvre* is contaminated by the subject who writes. The debate inserts the author into the text, but not just any author - this author is both criminal and madman. Crucially the author is welcomed back into the text as a realist who shunned mimesis in order to suppress his guilty secret:

> Certains ésprits [...] s'inquiétent [...] et s'interrogent [...] si l'ensèignement d'un philosophe, peut être contaminé [...] par son comportement privé [...]. Les idiosyncracies de [Louis Althusser] passaient tout uniment dans ses pensées les déliées, les plus originales. Ses gôuts, ses préférences, mais aussi ses obsessions, ses maladies. Brèf, son subjectivité irreducible.[15]

The possibility of a non-partisan discourse is, thus, collapsed by the debate but only and uniquely with reference to the story of Althusser's history of mental illness and criminal record. It is only through such a *psychologisme* which would reduce all of Althusser's thought to *un sale petit secret de famille* that the debate believes one can interpret the 'more' of the text.

Obviously there are many conclusions to be drawn from this position. Firstly, that the debate wants to assume responsibility for revealing the Althusserian discourse to be more than an inspired vision of the real. The 'more than' literary motive, as we have already noted, looks to Althusser's history for self-validation. Althusser is not just any subject with any history, for of course, there have been other philosophers and they too have had lives. Somehow, Althusser is the exception, just as de Man was. He is a Socrates 'mais engagées'.[16] What might this ever mean? What might it be to remain unengaged and how did Socrates achieve this feat. Whatever the answer, quite fatally such ambiguous statements have the power to render Althusserism redundant because they believe in the attainment of a disinterested discourse. Mental illness, crime and Marxist philosophy are conveniently linked by Althusser's detractors: 'Philosophe, communiste, donc fou deux fois, Althusser aurait du être interdit d'ensèignement.'[17]

Nearly all the journals published around the time of the murder bear witness to the same worrying desire to portray Althusser as some sort of madman poised ready to commit a host of unimaginable crimes.[18] Once Althusser is established as a moral enemy his discourse itself can become the enemy in a confused *mélange* of

indictments which generally work to condemn both the man and the work. Althusser is 'fou, philosophe, sans enfants, passioné, élitist'.[19]

To be diagnosed as a manic-depressive effectively puts an end to Althusser's philosophical influence: '[Ê]tre fou rend caduque toute expression créatrice - on n'a pas le droit d'avoir une insertion professionnelle quand on est une malade mentalle.'[20]

A teacher cannot be a murderer because to admit that a man whose ideas have been widely accepted and lauded by society is both mentally ill and a murderer would necessitate that this society ask itself questions about itself and about Althusser as a product of that same society. The denunciation and ostracism of Althusser(ism) must be complete in order to disassociate the man and the work from that society. Any debate must establish Althusser as somehow apart and aloof from any societal context in order that that society might ignore its part in creating Althusserism. Élitism of the idea is therefore the strategic creation not of Althusser but of the anti-Althusserian debate. Author-centred criticism is revitalised only and specifically to trivialise and destroy Althusser's work because it is the most effective strategy that the debate can use to terminate a discourse which it has *always* opposed. Previous to 1980 it had little evidence at its disposal, that is, the stories fabricated about Althusser in order to disrupt his theories were weak and ineffectual but this new story has the power to black-list him.

The debate against Althusser continues to be just as virulent. As recently as 1992 with the publication of Yann Moulier Boutang's biography of Althusser, the anti-Althusserian polemic continued to unearth 'scandalous' facts about the author's life hoping to demean the significance of his political thought. A more recent article reveals the persistence of a mode of Althusserian interpretation even if it does offer

an interesting variant upon the theme. The article, by Mark Lilla, appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which, on its cover, displayed the title, "Althusser: the Murderous Child".[21] The device employed here is to link Althusser with Foucault in ways calculated to denigrate the life and thought of each by guilty association with the other.[22] The murder of Hélène Althusser and Althusser's subsequent incarceration in a mental hospital are, according to Lilla, 'another morbid episode in the denouement of "la pensée '68", along with Foucault's death from AIDS'.[23]

Lilla continues: 'Althusser's work is one extended effort to make us share his (abnormal) condition.'[24] Luckily, for Lilla, biography offers the solution because it enables (normal) people 'to see what a profoundly intimate meaning the philosophical flight from subjectivity and the attack on humanism had for Althusser'.[25] Of course, because biography allows Lilla to discover a 'truth' about textual motivation, it offers him an effective strategy of deligitimisation which 'avails him in his effort to police the socially established boundaries between the normal and the pathological'.[26]

Similarly, Geraldine Finn's recent book, *Why Althusser killed his wife*, refuses to separate the philosophical thought from the private man and even goes so far as to suggest that Althusser's social theory constitutes a legitimisation of violent and potentially murderous behaviour:

> We cannot afford to continue to separate the intellectual in a man [...] from the emotional: the depression from the ideas; or the political from the person; the commitment to class struggle from the stormy marriage, the dead wife. The truth is that the Althusser who killed his wife is Althusser, the revolutionary. [...]Althusser appeal[ed] to science to authorise and legitimise [his] theories and practices as a social scientist and to authorise and legitimise violence at the same time.[27]

3.2. A different motive

To problematise the already problematical idea of Althusser as author of his own disappearance as author (in a body of work known as Althusserism), and to further complicate any belief in the possibility of uncovering textual motivation through reference to specific biographical events, I will now look to readings of the *oeuvre* established before the crime, where Althusser's itinerary must be differently traced. This section will look at the debate against Althusser prior to November 1980, uncovering the major themes in a body of work directed against Althusser's new Marxist theory.

Before 1980 and the death of Hélène Althusser, the debate which surrounded the work of her husband was, largely, supportive. Indeed, it was difficult to get work published if one wanted to criticise Althusser's highly fashionable reading of Marx.[28] Dissension usually exhibited only small-scale quibbles within largely supportive analyses. However, it would be naïve to suggest that Althusser was without 'enemies' and it is true that the momentum of critical opinion against Althusserism was already gaining strength in the years and even months preceding his 'crime'. The first text of any note published against Althusserism (and Althusser) was the 1972 edition of The *New Left Review*. Following this, the seminal text against Althusser(ism), written by E.P. Thompson and called *The Poverty of Theory*, appeared in 1978. I shall also look at the book, entitled *One-Dimensional Marxism*, published in early 1980 and written as a combined attack on Althusser and his work.

Even before November 1980, the debate against Althusserism desired a 'story' about Althusser and the motivation 'behind' his theory. A subsequent need arose to situate the author within the text in order to understand why he wrote as he did. According

to E.P Thompson in his *The Poverty of Theory* finding such a 'story' is simple. Althusser is a Stalinist and Althusserism is no more than 'Stalinism reduced to the paradigm of theory'.[29] Althusser's anti-humanism and anti-historicism provide a perfect ex-post facto rationalisation for the deeds of the tyrant. Why is his theory Stalinist? Quite simply, it would seem that Stalinism is, for Thompson, a matter of linguistic style and Althusser's rigorously written theoretical utterances are, therefore, Stalinist. Thompson then goes even further, he sees in Althusser's doctrine of determinism - the process without a subject - a rationale for the forced liquidation of millions of people. Thus:

> Althusser's attempts to focus attention on the underlying structure of production relations at the expense of concrete individuals who inhabit these structures is but one of a number of sophisticated ways of denying the reality of human freedom. It is also [...] an evasion of moral responsibility.[30]

The writers in the 1972 edition of the *New Left Review* also seek the 'story' behind Althusserism: 'What impels Althusser to sunder the identity between the real object and the object of knowledge?'[31]

The answer is immediate: the motive behind this break with empiricism is Althusser's desire for theoretical autonomy. Althusser's entire *oeuvre* is thus reduced to the wish to establish himself as autonomous. It is, according to Geras, because of this desire that Althusser elaborated a theory of theoretical practice where this practice is said to have its own distinct - from reality - raw material and product. Geras wants to know the criteria which might guarantee that any knowledge is true. Althusser, he claims, produces an account of science that is idealist.[32] Our preliminary look at Geras will reveal a pattern of objections typical of the anti-Althusserian critique prior to November 1980. Initially, Althusserism is equated with mystification.[33]

> Althusser rejects, as empiricist, the idea that the real object known by science is the object of knowledge, insisting that the object of knowledge is internal to thought: the real object is, nevertheless, the 'absolute reference point'.[34]

Geras objects to the 'mechanism' of the knowledge effect in Althusserianism and to Althusser's refusal to explain the criteria for the validity of scientific knowledge. That is, he objects to Althusser's refusal to offer 'evidence'. Althusser is 'too silent'[35] about the conditions of knowledge production and this leads to an idealism at the heart of his Marxist science.[36] This silence, which is dishonest because it is a willed silence, opens a space for further criticisms. For it can now be seen by Geras that this silence is the result of an Althusserian desire to become, as theorist, somehow omnipotent:

> Althusser thinks the relation between Marxist theory and the working class movement as one of exteriority: the former is produced outside the latter, and must be imported into it, failing which this movement can only arrive at conceptions which are ideological and bourgeois ideological at that.[37]

Geras here initiates a spatial metaphor which will become a dominant feature in this debate. Geras asks where this 'outside' might be only to immediately conclude that it lies 'on the inside of a purely intellectual process without historical conditions or determinants'.[38]

The aim of one who inhabits this intellectual or objective space 'outside' class society must be to effect a unilateral and purely pedagogic relationship with the working classes: to give the proletariat Truth. This élitism is, according to Geras, the final consequence of a theoretical idealism which would celebrate the autonomy of science. Geras continues to develop the spatial metaphor: Althusser desired, and somehow occupied, a purely intellectual position beyond normal human experience. He thus effected his own 'death' as both a subject and an author and rid himself of any historical context, in order that he might appear as a purely intellectual repository for 'truth'. Once Geras has established that this was indeed the motive behind the work,

he denounces Althusser's secret. Whilst other Marxists produced their theories from within the working class movement, Althusser's theories were produced in this intellectual 'outside' that we have already described. But Geras' paradigm falters in his attempt to distance Althusser from other Marxist theorists:

> Marxist theory was not produced outside the working class movement. It was produced inside...True, it was produced by intellectuals and these intellectuals were mostly of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois origin. But that is another matter.[39]

But it obviously isn't another matter. Within the narrow confines of Geras' naïve metaphor, these Marxist intellectuals, precisely because of their bourgeois intellectualism must also inhabit this 'outside' with Althusser. Yet Geras allows that another bourgeois intellectual might somehow be both inside and outside the working class movement. He collapses the inside-outside metaphor to permit a broader field of interpretation wherein the bourgeois outside can become a type of working class inside. Yet Althusser is not admitted into this privileged space. He still remains on the outside due to a self-imposed exile result of his 'well-formed science, elaborated elsewhere'.[40] We are not told where this 'elsewhere' is but it is obviously somewhere that Althusser and only Althusser has access to. Althusser is someone who, it is not stated how, manages to inhabit a space outside both proletarian and bourgeois experience.

The final ingredient of the anti-Althusserian debate now emerges. Having somehow achieved his own 'death', having (a)voided his subjectivity to emerge as pure intellect, Althusser 'purges' Marxism of its ethical content.[41] His, allegedly, unethical reading of Marx is a 'guilty reading indeed'.[42] Althusser has, therefore, written a guilty text, that is, a text specifically made guilty through its links to a man named Louis Althusser. This interpretation of Althusser's theory as unethical - inspired by the fact that in *Reading Capital* Althusser writes 'Capital should not be reduced to an

ethical inspiration'[43] - results from Althusser's supposed desire to remain active in relation to a passive working classes. Thus, for Geras, *Reading Capital* is written to produce 'a new form of ideology in the masses'.[44] Geras wonders why Althusser wants to continue to offer the masses new ideologies if not to perpetuate their subordination:

> Althusser tells us, in at least 100 passages, that ideology is a realm of mystification and deformation, of illusion, falsehood and myth, of confusion, prejudice and arbitrariness, of the imaginary and non-knowledge. He thus cuts off the masses [...]. How then can the intellectuals brandish what they know to be an ideology without violating the first principle of revolutionary politics- to tell it as it is.[45]

In the same vein, Glucksmann's criticisms of Althusser in the same edition of *The New Left Review* attack the 'duplicity' of Althusser.[46] Again, the central criticism shapes itself around the idea that Althusser desired, and achieved, the production of a theory which - somewhat paradoxically we must here point out - established the autonomy of both theory and theorist:

> A concept of production is central [...] because it both regulates the primordial divisions of the Althusserian universe, and establishes the breaks by which scientific theory ensures its independence *vis à vis* ideology and politics.[47]

Althusserian science supposedly guarantees its own objective 'truth' due to its complete rupture with empiricism. Althusser is criticised for posing as the originator of his theory - he is guilty (again) of a 'conceptual empiricism', of a 'forced use of a dictionary' and of using language to establish that everything just so 'happens' to be production.[48] Glucksmann opposes Althusser's assertive style which claims, without evidence, that everything is production. Like Geras, Glucksmann accuses Althusser of being silent about what distinguishes scientific discourse from other forms of discourse and about the criteria which guarantee its truth. Althusser, according to Glucksmann, shirks his responsibility to answer these questions. On this silence rests their assertion that Althusser perpetuated a belief in the truth and autonomy of science. Althusser is accused of 'getting away' with this duplicity due to the rigour of

his analysis. For Glucksmann the structure of Althusser's theory can only operate if there is 'some more secret correspondence between a theory and its object'.[49] This 'secret' leads Glucksmann to speculate that a type of 'transcendental correlation' is at work in Althusserism.

The idea of violence is introduced into Althusserism when his theory is denounced as an inherently violent one - a 'savage structuralism'[50] - which, through the concept of production, is guilty of conceptual empiricism. Once again, it would seem that Althusser's entire aim is to found an anti-historicist and an anti-humanist reading of *Capital* in order to consolidate the idea of a 'process without a subject'. Althusser's work is 'guilty' because it fails to resolve the issues it raises. Of course, we are back with Geras and the question of ideology. Marx has been misread, according to Althusser, through a lack of understanding of the ideological structures at work in our production of knowledge. According to Glucksmann, Althusser's is a duplicitous theory because it proposes that one can examine this misreading from the stance of an ideologically uncontaminated theory. Althusser is guilty because he, supposedly, duplicitously escapes the theoretical circle via a transcendental correlation which identifies the concepts of thought with the 'conditions of existence' of the real rather than the real itself. Althusser, again, is criticised for being, somehow, on the outside of human experience, for transcending limits through a metaphysical philosophy that seeks to explain the whole.

Victor Seidler in *One-Dimensional Marxism* voices much the same problem with his reception of Althusserism. Again, it is as if Althusser were on the 'outside' of normal experience: 'Learning has to be related to experience [...], if ideas are to be reproduced mechanically, very little will be learnt.'[51] Althusser's thought processes

are seen as mechanical rather than subjective. Seidler is 'suspicious' of a 'certain kind of abstract theoretical work'.[52] As with Geras and his limited understanding of what constitutes bourgeois intellectualism, it would seem that this certain type of abstract theory is Althusser-specific. Why? Because once again it appears that Althusser has produced something that remains apart from the living context in which it should have been formulated. Seidler cites Marx's "Theses On Feuerbach" to support his case against Althusser:

> The question whether human thinking can pretend to objective truth is not a theoretical but a practical question. Man must prove the truth, that is the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.[53]

Althusser's is, then, a purely contemplative relationship with the social world. If the theoretical domain is autonomous, and Seidler accepts this as Althusser's claim, then how can it relate to the class struggle? Seidler sets this against the more 'reasonable' claims of Gramsci who refuses to differentiate between philosophy, theory, and science. In Gramsci's forced equivalence, philosophy is demystified and stripped of any special status:

> It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a [...] difficult thing. It must first be shown that all men are 'philosophers'[...] though in [their] own way and unconsciously.[54]

This, according to Seidler, establishes the philosopher on a more egalitarian, hence honest, footing with the working class. The philosophical consciousness of the worker is developed through a critical relationship with experience - although neither Seidler or Gramsci write what might instigate this critical attitude, which they call 'knowing thyself'. Their belief contradicts Althusser's science which is 'brought to the aid' of the proletarians. Again, Seidler's criticism of Althusser's belief in theoretical autonomy is enforced through an attack on the limits of a purely theoretical theory: Althusser does not illuminate class experience from a standpoint

within society. What could be taken as evidence of authorial honesty is rather taken as evidence of the limitations imposed on an autonomous theory which remains outside proletarian experience. The spatial metaphor is repeated: 'Somehow, [Althusser's] science takes up a position which is superior to experience, thereby situating us outside the struggles in society, observing the process.'[55] Althusser (a)voids his subjectivity to become this transcendental all-knowing other. The 'new danger' of Althusserism is, therefore, that his 'overview' of the capitalist mode of production simply 'asserts' that individuality is generated automatically within the capitalist mode of production.[56] Althusser's allegedly mechanical rhetoric leaves Seidler at a theoretical impasse: if Althusser can objectively assert the death of the subject, he can remove the possibility of revolutionary behaviour. Seidler, like the others, objects to the style of Althusser's 'enormously self-confident rhetoric'.[57] Ultimately this argument leads us to the by now familiar territory of authorial guilt. Althusser is incriminated and condemned as unethical because his 'implicit conception of socialism tends to [...] suppress all-important moral discussion'.[58]

This amoral stance is linked to Althusser's (a)voidance of subjectivity within the rigorous formulation of an objective, mechanical and ultimately duplicitous theory of class struggle.

It is important to notice here that Seidler pushes the implications of this argument further than previous critics. Althusserism is indicted as irresponsible. In his construction of a rigorous reading Althusser supposedly dissolves the concept of the individual and replaces it with that of class. The individual is deconstructed and revealed to be 'not responsible' for the kind of life he/she has. The 'clarity' of the argument - that is, its deceptive rigour - can 'tempt' the reader into separating the

individual from society and, therefore, viewing individual blame as the responsibility of a class.[59] In dissolving the category of the individual Althusser thus removes the idea of individual responsibility. This continues to be associated with the idea that Althusser somehow achieves, within the space of his writing, the autonomy of the subject. The spatial metaphor is re-introduced to explain the achievement:

> Somehow the critique moves [readers] to a position of detachment, outside of capitalist society, and estranged from our individual experience. It offers us an overview from which particular conflicts can be observed [...] or particular discourses identified [...]. This gives a sense of enormous power and importance to the theorist, who can remain strangely detached and all-knowing.[60]

The dissolution of the subject allows an irresponsible theory which condones the rejection of any notion of personal responsibility. This, according to Seidler, is the result of a 'very specific temptation'.[61] Althusser alone has been tempted to see social practices as somehow constituted by language, and this temptation results from an 'insensitive',[62] dehumanised philosophy which remains unable to connect to historical experience and whose politics have developed in an unspecified 'outside'.[63]

Simon Clarke, also writing in *One-Dimensional Marxism*, condemns Althusserism as bourgeois philosophy wrapped insecurely in Marxist rhetoric. This 'duplicity' - a word which recurs throughout the critical debate to suggest dishonesty - makes Althusserism 'dangerous'.[64] What is interesting here is that Clarke manages, where the others only speculated, to construct a 'story' around Althusser's theoretical autonomy. The motive behind the *oeuvre* is simple: Althusser believed that the French Communist Party (*P.C.F.*) suffered from the lack of a theoretical substructure. His project thus began 'apparently with an innocent return to the texts of Marx'.[65] Soon this innocence, which was only ever apparent, makes way for an inevitably guilty motive: 'The innocence of this return is, however, only superficial.'[66] Clarke

continues: 'Althusser does not approach the works of Marx, Lenin or Mao as a disinterested student of the texts.'[67]

Once again Althusser is attacked for his duplicitous approach - for removing his subjectivity through a suasive rhetoric which would conceal his 'interested' reading of Marx. Clarke's story revolves around Althusser's 'ambition'. Althusser's 'itinerary', initially aimed at purging Marxism of historicism, became transformed by a desire to establish his authority within the *P.C.F.* In order to establish the anti-historicism of Marx it was necessary to establish the autonomy of theory - and the theorist - and to separate Marxist philosophy from historical marxism. Althusser, therefore, is merely an opportunist. This self-avowedly *ad hominem* critique, aimed at revealing the 'sordid history'[68] of Althusserism is, for Clarke, justified if it helps us to understand the selfish origins of Althusserian theory. Thus, Clarke sides with Rancière and focuses his anti-Althusserian polemic precisely at the point where theory meets politics. Again we see the critic attack a 'mechanical' concept of theory. For Clarke there is a direct link between the guilty ambition of the philosopher and his theory of the autonomy of theoretical labour: Althusser constructs an asymmetrical relationship where theoretical labour enjoys dominance over its manual counterpart. In order to eternalise this theoretical authority, he must construct a theory which will prove that this relationship is not only a feature of capitalist society, but that it is a necessary relationship.

In order to believe that Althusser desired and achieved this theoretical autonomy Clarke must also use a spatial metaphor which is, by now, established as the leitmotif of the debate. Unlike Marx, who developed a theory of real human history, Althusser can only 'dictate theoretically'.[69] As the title of this book suggests, Althusser is

somehow one-dimensional; existing as pure intellect in a multi-dimensional, historico-political world. Althusser is able to separate his mind from his body to offer a 'contemplative' theory which, for Clarke, is essentially bourgeois. Allied with this criticism of Althusser's false objectivity is the by now common criticism of Althusserism's theoretical impasses: its dead-ends and circles.[70] This criticism believes that Althusser, somehow outside human experience, cannot sufficiently theorise revolutionary potential. Althusserism is allied with bourgeois empiricism because

> It mistakes its own ideological preconceptions for reality, thus it gives us knowledge only of its ideological preconceptions: instead of taking reality for its object, it takes its given object for the real.[71]

If Marx subjected the appearance of the real to a critical examination, the error of bourgeois empiricism, hence of Althusserism, is that it remains 'insufficiently critical of its own preconceptions'.[72] Althusser claims to offer a privileged vision of reality whereas, according to Clarke, Marx's critique of the concept of the given allowed him to arrive at a more adequate -and honest - basis for knowledge. The implication is clear: Marx's is an essentially honest concept of knowledge whereas Althusser's is dishonest because of its reliance on vision. For Clarke, Althusser's entire philosophy centres around the concept of production just so that he might establish the autonomy of theoretical practice and, by extension, his own dominance within the P.C.F.. A completely new reading of Marx has its origins in pragmatism:

> This version of Marx does not derive from a reading of Marx at all, but from the need to invent a Marx who can defend the isolation, autonomy, and authority, of theoretical activity.[73]

Althusser initiates an ideological abstraction: ideological because he abstracts a concrete practical activity from the social relations within which any practice must exist. Ultimately, Clarke's indictment leads to a familiar conclusion - Althusserism

is irresponsible and immoral: 'In adopting a liberal defence of the autonomy of science, Althusser adopts the liberal view of society that accompanies it.'[74]

Of course the final criticism in any anti-Althusserian debate must attack the theoretical impasses of Althusserism. The circle of Althusserism is Althusser specific, that is, the dilemma of his thought is a direct result of the man and his (guilty) secret - here read as ambition. Once again, the critic resorts to a spatial metaphor situating Althusser 'outside', in a purely ideological predicament. Althusser becomes the 'scholar-hero' presiding over a 'supporting cast of millions': he is, unlike Marx, confined in a world of speculative thought.[75] Clarke, like Geras, believes that radical action, through the eradication of specific institutions which reproduce material power relations, could pose a real threat to ideology. Althusser's theory of ideology can thus be seen as the real bone of contention for a debate which regards ideology as a visible enemy. Indeed, for his detractors, Althusserism is not a Marxism at all, it merely distorts Marx for Althusser's own sordid ends. Clarke refuses to believe that Marxist theory might have been born within the old theoretical problematic of classical political economy. True, he might allow that a reading of an inconsistent theory called classical political economy might lead to a new development (neo-classical economics) but he will not entertain Althusser's suggestion that such a reading of the inconsistencies within this classical political economy lead to Marxist theory. He must dismiss such an idea as absurd because Marx must not be seen to have been an intellectual. Marx's theory must be seen to have stemmed directly from an active, physical involvement which owed nothing to a re-reading of theory, indeed, Clarke seems intent on elaborating a Marxist theory with no engagement whatsoever in the act of reading. This non-cerebral Marxism can then be contrasted with Althusser's intellectual absorption, his isolation from historical

experience, his essential 'subjectlessness' - his one-dimensionality in a two-dimensional world which produces the 'contemplation that can only be the one-sided appropriation of a part of the social practice of a sensuous-supersensuous person'.[76]

3.3. Fidelity to an itinerary

How might one respond to this debate? At a local level I can seek to complicate specific arguments. For example I can trivialise Thompson's damning of Althusserism as Stalinist due to its rigorous rhetoric and its doctrine of determinism. Anti-humanism is not necessarily pro-Stalinism just as Marxist humanists are not necessarily anti-Stalinist.[77] And if Stalinism is merely a matter of rigorous style what of Kant or Spinoza? To see in the doctrine of determinism a rationale for the slaughter of millions is unwarranted in the extreme. Others, specifically Spinoza, had no difficulty deriving a humane and liberal morality from determinism[78] and it is not right that one should gloss over these complications just to condemn Althusserism as an inherently violent philosophy. However, perhaps the best approach to counter these criticisms, and the one I propose, would be to re-read Althusser in the light of this critique.

Marxist Humanism gained popularity immediately after the War. In its optimism it embraced slogans which called for 'the return of Man'. Yet where did Marxist Humanism come from? A humanist interpretation of Marx was not known in Western Europe until after Goldman's translation of Lukac's *History and Human Consciousness*, a text which interpreted Marxism as a theory of human alienation.[79] Later, Lukac's was to recant and openly criticise the errors of that book, however, it had already become the canonical text for Marxist Humanists. Existential Marxists

converted a critique of society into a general philosophical critique so that alienation, seen by Marx as a social and economic problem, was translated into an eternal 'condition humaine'. After the atrocities of the War, Althusser, unlike Marxist Humanists, but like many others, began to wonder if we could ever return to an idea of individuality based on an intrinsically pure and good 'Man': '[S]euls des coeurs tout à fait purs peuvent séparer sans douleur ni regret le pur de l'impur, les coeurs moins purs restent attachés à l'un et à l'autre.'[80]

The noble idea of an individual existing within society and yet free from ideological contamination and pure of thought seemed implausible after the atrocious events of the War. Thus what Althusser questioned was not 'man', but 'Man', asking: 'Comment ériger l'Homme avec un grand H, comme mésure de valeurs, sachant désormais ce dont il a été capable?'[81]

The aim of structuralism, therefore, was to question the existence of an authentic pre-social man. Althusser looked for the pure heart and the independent self but instead he found a subjectivity mediated within a necessarily overdetermined social context. Althusserians intended to replace a concept of man as the unified centre of history with the study of structures as the unconscious foundations of historical change. So that, Althusserism wanted not to kill the subject but to resituate it by removing it from the centre of social inquiry. Similarly, Althusser did not kill the author but rather attempted to show that it is impossible for the author to be the sole determinant of textual meaning. This does not remove the notion of responsibility but rather stresses its complex nature. Althusser, like de Man, had no naïve belief in any harmony at the beginning of things, and, like de Man, was attacked because of an assertive use of

language to state the divisions inherent in language. Althusser is thus attacked at the precise point where he performs the dilemma of any theory, his own included.

Throughout his life it may be remarked that Althusser attempted to retreat into an organised, one might instead say institutionalised, space: the army, hospital, even the *École Normale*. However, where he might have attempted to resituate himself physically, to live on borderlines within society, at no time did he, or could he, attempt the impossible - to live outside society. Althusser desired retreat rather than escape.[82] Nor do his journals suggest that he believed the purely contemplative author either possible or desirable: 'L'erreur des philosophes ancien en général a été de penser sans vivre ou de penser comme si on ne vivait pas'.[83]

His early works bear witness to a suspicion of any work which claims to be the result of a purely objective vision.[84] In his early journals Althusser called himself 'un petit artisan rural' - a producer of knowledge using rough tools to invent ideas. Here theoretical labour enjoys an equivalent status with manual labour, not a position of dominance within an asymmetrical relationship as suggested by Clarke.[85] In journals written as early as 1937, and thus prior to his joining the *P.C.F.* and possibly entertaining the sordid ambitions outlined by Clarke, Althusser formulated a theory of philosophy with production at its centre.[86] Already the 'story' constructed by the debate to establish the motivation behind the *oeuvre* begins to collapse if one can locate the core of Althusserism - the concept of production - in texts written a decade before Althusser's involvement with the Communist Party.

3.4. Reading Rousseau

It is here that I would like to look at Althusser's reading of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, a reading which will deconstruct the spatial metaphor which is such a feature of the anti-Althusserian critique. Hopefully, the reading will discuss concepts which problematise any debate which would kill the amicable author in order to resurrect a realist. A series of questions must be answered if I seek a response to the criticisms of the debate and I propose to answer the following questions by turning to Althusser's reading of Rousseau:

1: Does Althusser initiate the death of the subject within a dishonest and disinterested theory which leaves no room for humanity?

2: If so, does Althusser (a)void subjectivity in order to conceal a guilty secret? This secret could be ambition, the desire to appease the *P.C.F.* or insanity. Indeed, one could substitute a chain of secrets or crimes to fill the gap that the story demands.

3: Following on from this, we must ask if Althusser's is a specifically dishonest philosophy?

Early on in his writing Althusser exhibited a deep understanding of the dilemmas inherent in any philosophy. A philosophical discourse must partake of ideological elements: 'Le problème de tous les problèmes philosophiques (et politiques et militaires) que de savoir comment on peut bien sortir d'un cercle tout en y restant.'[87]

How can we leave a circle whilst remaining within it? The circle here is the closed space of an ideological empiricism and the question of how to escape it whilst remaining within its confines was to fascinate and trouble Althusser throughout his

life. I will show that his engagement with this question stems from his reading of Rousseau. Althusser refuses to accept structuralism's role in initiating the 'death of Man'. He looks instead to the Renaissance for the birth of a theoretical anti-humanism, stating that it was his early apprenticeship in the texts of the 18th Century and, more specifically, a study of Rousseau, which led to contemporary Althusserism:

> L'homme n'est plus defini en soi dès la Renaissance [...]. La tombe conceptuelle de l'homme est philosophiquement que le jeune Althusser se contente d'arpenter avec la scrupuleuse fidelité des enthousiasmes de jeunesses[88].

Althusser's most sustained discussion of Rousseau appears as an essay on the *Social Contract* entitled "The Discrepancies".[89] Althusser here offers an extremely rigorous reading of the theoretical inconsistencies in Rousseau's text whilst always bearing two points in mind - firstly, that Rousseau was aware of these discrepancies and 'sign-posted' them within an extremely rigorously written text and secondly, that all theory, his own included, functions because of the existence of these necessary discrepancies and, to this extent, all theory is fictional.

The social contract within the *Social Contract* is a verbal construct. It can only allude to the problems inherent in its structure through a series of wordplays which Althusser will call 'arbitrary truths'. For Althusser, social contract theory and all theory functions due to this internal play of discrepancies. These discrepancies are simultaneously concealed and revealed in order to enable the contract to function as theory. For Althusser the theoretical 'gaps' determine subsequent readings and, more importantly these subsequent interpretations -including his own - should give evidence of the 'necessary existence of these discrepancies'.[90]

The *Social Contract* poses the ultimate question for Althusser: 'How can man unite with all and remain free?'[91] 'Free' must here mean independent in the fullest sense -

autonomous, unattached, objective, non-partisan, both inside and outside of society. If, before socialisation, the human animal had no particular self-interest it was because he remained unopposed to other men through necessary social ties but, after socialisation, individuals become trapped in relations as a result of their own activities. Rousseau's text interests Althusser because it turns to theory for its solution rather than looking to solve man's predicament from an 'outside' vantage point. There is no solution possible which might introduce an element external to that field, 'no transcendental solution, no recourse to a third party, be it God or Chance'.[92]

Rousseau's solution is, in fact, an essentially judicial contract which would establish a civil and social state. However, the contract proves to be a highly ambiguous structure because its central clause demands a paradox, it demands the 'total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community'.[93] The people are meant to give, not sell, themselves and their rights to the community. Such total alienation is inconceivable and illegitimate yet, as Althusser notes, it is the 'single clause in Rousseau's *Social Contract*'.[94] The remedy of this problem lies in its very excess - forced alienation will become free and voluntary through the first discrepancy written into the contract.

If there are always two recipient parties (R.P.'s) in any contract - here the individual and the community - the 'mystery' of the mechanism here, in Rousseau's social contract, lies in the unique nature of the second R.P. In normal contract circumstances, both R.P.'s should exist prior to and external to the contract, but here the second R.P. is the product or object of the contract. That is, the community, or second R.P., exists only because of the voluntary alienation of the individual who constitutes the first R.P.. This marks the first discrepancy in Rousseau's text, where

'the very solution of the contract is inscribed in one of its conditions'.[95] Rousseau's language, according to Althusser, both masks and signals the discrepancy. Rousseau says that 'the people only contracts with itself',[96] but he signals the discrepancy as he allows it to function: 'Each individual is making a contract, *so to speak*, with himself.'[97]

For Althusser, the discrepancy is simultaneously admitted and negated in the 'so to speak'. More importantly, Althusser writes that the existence of such discrepancies are necessary to all theory and are acceptable so long as they are signalled to the reader.[98] Rousseau's *Social Contract* then, becomes a text about the impossible possibility of the contract and the fictional status of theory:

> If the 'Social Contract' is not a contract but the (fictional) act of constitution of the second R.P. (that is, the *coup de force* of the solution), in the same way it can be said that the Discrepancy is not what Rousseau says about it (its concept never being anything in Rousseau but the denegation of its *fait accompli*), but the act of constitution of Rousseau's philosophy itself, of its theoretical object and logic.[99]

Close on the heels of this first discrepancy another emerges. Any contract needs an arbitrator- a third man that might negotiate in a conflict between the two R.P.'s. However, the existence of this third man would suppose that such a person could exist outside the civil society of the contractors. Such a possibility immediately collapses the possibility of this society of 'free' men because it allows that a civil society might leave outside itself 'the very condition of its own existence: that third man'.[100] Thus, there can be no third man, especially because for Rousseau, as we have already noted, there is not even a second man, but just one man contracting with himself. Rousseau's contract allows a non-contract to function as a contract because, via another discrepancy, total alienation converts to advantageous exchange. According to Althusser, Rousseau can work this conversion precisely because man is selfish and, in

thinking of the generality, considers only himself. Thus, 'the individual interest (is) forced into the generality of equality'.[101]

This is the site of the second discrepancy. There is a difference between what is termed general or universal interest and what is known as particular or private interest. According to Rousseau it does not and cannot follow that the deliberations of the people are ever general, that is, their actions are never universally motivated.[102] The idea of a general will rests upon the possibility of independent thought:

> If, when the people, being furnished with adequate information, held its deliberations, the citizens had no communications one with another, the grand total of the small differences would always give the general will, and the decision would always be good.[103]

However, any 'enlightenment' of the people depends on the absolute absence of any ideological elements within the information offered: 'There must be no factions or partial associations in the state such as classes, orders, parties or groups [...] otherwise no longer general but partial will.'[104]

Ultimately Rousseau writes that the general will is only able to express itself if each citizen is allowed to think only his own thoughts.[105] Ideology must be eradicated. However, the necessity for a third discrepancy in Rousseau's text reveals the impossibility of realising this disappearance of particular interest. Factions must not exist if man is to be free in thought, but factions do exist. For Althusser, this is an absolute point of resistance, a simple irreducible fact which confronts the *Social Contract* with its first real problem after a series of surmountable obstacles. Here Rousseau's theory encounters a discrepancy with respect to the real when it acknowledges the impossibility of a universal will based on real, objective knowledge.[106] Rousseau reveals the ideological concepts which underpin all the theoretical spaces of his contract. The final phase of the text attempts an avoidance of

this reality. People must be enlightened and factions must be eradicated. He instigates what Althusser calls a 'flight forward in ideology'.[107] This flight forward would ensure a permanent moral reform to restore the purity of individual consciousness. However, this reform depends upon a necessarily impure education. Also, this flight forward is aimed at protecting the individual from the contagion of so called particular interests, and because of this, this flight forward can have no end. We recognise here the same theoretical predicament that Rousseau toyed with throughout *Émile* -see Chapter 2 - when he wondered who might educate the educators when what is at stake is the objectivity of thought? We are caught in a circle. Rousseau knows this and indeed one could say that all his texts only ever write about and around this theoretical circle. On the question of escaping this circle, Althusser believes that the only possible response to such a predicament is a stylistic one:

> If there is one recourse, but one of a different kind [it is] a transfer this time, the transfer of the impossible theoretical solution into the alternative to theory, literature. The admirable 'fictional triumph' of an unprecedented writing (*écriture*) [...and] the admirable failure of an unprecedented theory: the *Social Contract*.[108]

I would argue that Althusser's entire *oeuvre* concerns itself with the issues raised in Rousseau's *Social Contract.* Later on, in his text *Reading Capital*, Althusser hoped that his own theory had, to some extent, paralleled Rousseau's and managed to be triumphant within the theoretical circle:

> If, without leaving it, we 'avoided turning around in this circle', it is because this circle is not the closed circle of ideology, but the circle perpetually opened up by the closures themselves.[109]

There is room within the circle to ask questions and seek answers even if these are not the ultimate question and the ultimate answer. It is not futile that concepts should run side by side with reality, approaching but never meeting. It is the idea of approach which concerns both Rousseau and Althusser; in the oscillation between the

temptation to reject empiricism and the renunciation of that temptation as impossible, writing begins. It is this writing, this approach concerned not with definitions but with developments, which concerns Althusser.

It is right to say that the idea of self was central to Althusser's work and that his lifelong commitment to Catholicism revealed a concern over the authentic nature of the self.[110] To be truly authentic the self must, on all levels, be independent. Very early on in his life Althusser revealed a deep understanding of how all discourses, including philosophical ones, necessarily include ideological elements: 'Le problème de tous problèmes philosophiques [...] que de savoir comment on peut bien sortir d'un circle tout en y restant.'[111]

If the circle is the closed space of an ideological empiricism Althusser, like Rousseau in both his *Émile* and the *Social Contract,* admits that the only possible solution is a stylistic one: to use language to create the illusion of having left this space.[112] However, this must not mean the 'dishonest' disguising of our ideological predicament behind the mask of an objective rhetoric. Althusser is at pains constantly to emphasise the impossibility of theorising - reconstituting the whole - without recourse to ideology. The choice is simple: one can think the totality and ignore the thinker or think the thinker and destroy the totality.[113] Althusser, like Rousseau, would say that the solution lies not in some '*au-delà*' - in some Transcendental Signified - but in thinking the impossible. In thinking both the totality and the thinker behind that totality Althusser espoused a fictional response to the dilemma.

In all his thought we can identify the workings of Rousseau's *Social Contract.* Specifically Althusser's concept of the subject is Rousseauian. The anti-Althusserian debate believes that Althusser uniquely killed the subject in order to kill his own,

guilty subjectivity. Rather, Althusser, in a re-reading of Rousseau, resituates the subject. Althusser writes against the notion of a universal human subject and rejects the transcendental subject characterised by philosophical humanism because the idea of a timeless human subject ignores the distinctions between social classes and any determination by historical and class situations.[114] Importantly, Althusser does not dismiss a moral belief in the importance of human beings but dismisses the notion - central to Western philosophy - that it is possible to isolate a transcendental subject who cannot be identified with the point of view of any concrete, historically and socially defined group but who represents what is common and essential to human beings as such.[115] There cannot be, for either Althusser or Rousseau, a meta-social individual. Thus, human behaviour is discernible, not in terms of intention, but in terms of the practices which involve humans. Whilst anti-humanist in a certain sense, this is not the type of mechanistic determinism against which the debate reacts: Althusser does not reduce human motivation to a pre-social economic self-interest even if he knows it can include the pursuit of economic ends. Even if the driving force of social change in Althusser's marxism is something beyond the individual and their conscious intentions this something can only be accounted for in terms of collective human activity. He does not destroy the individual but recognises its very definite limitations. Humans still make their own history, just not in terms of some 'common humanity'. This understanding of Althusser, in the light of his use of Rousseau, significantly problematises a debate which would cite Althusser as author of the death of the subject and, consequently, as the author of his own death as author.

Indeed it would seem that the entire Althusserian *oeuvre* could be read as a meditation upon, or re-reading of, Rousseau's *oeuvre* and it is to this extent that Althusser's subjectivity disappears within the text. In his autobiography *The Future Lasts a Long*

Time, Althusser wrote extensively about the issue of authorial accountability where he concluded:

> When you are aware that you alone are responsible [...] for your truthfulness as a philosopher [...] surely the least you can do as a sign of that *honesty* is to use language in keeping with the nature of your activity [...], and [to] express yourself in the way which conveys directly what you are thinking and doing?[116]

Althusser clearly states here that language should be used to reveal the philosopher in the work as thinker and 'doer'. Like Rousseau in the *Social Contract*, language must be used to signal the writerliness of theory. Obviously I must here turn to Althusser's concept of practice. For Althusser, Marxist philosophy is the 'theory of the history of the production of knowledge'.[117] Indeed, according to Althusser, all levels of social existence are the sites of distinct practices. These practices are simply processes of transformation of a given raw material into a determinate product effected by a determinate human labour using a means of production.[118] Theory, or science, is a practice which brings together thought power and the means of theoretical production, to produce from concepts, representations and intuitions, a knowledge product.[119] How then can one support critics who would argue that for Althusser theory is autonomous and exterior to social conditions? Althusser's concept of practice clearly states otherwise - the raw material in the knowledge practice is, according to Althusser, already worked upon and therefore, never really raw.[120] The raw material is already a product, an interpretation if you like. For Althusser, the raw material could be said to be the Rousseauian *oeuvre*, so that his theory is no more than a re-working of this material. Althusser's concept of theoretical production openly admits to its implication within a prior ideological discourse as he clearly restates Rousseau's belief, voiced in the *Social Contract*, that one cannot think one's own thoughts. In order to further this interpretation of the Althusserian *oeuvre*, I will now take a closer

look at *Reading Capital*, probably his most famous work, to see how it looks to the *Social Contract* for inspiration.

Reading Capital: re-reading Rousseau

Althusser quite clearly states that his is not an innocent reading and to this extent he and the debate are in agreement. However, his position is further elaborated, his might be a guilty reading, but so are all readings:

> [A] philosophical reading of *Capital* is quite the opposite of an innocent reading. It is a guilty reading, but not one that absolves its crime on confessing it. On the contrary, it takes the responsibility for its crime as a 'justified crime' and defends it by proving its necessity'.[121]

Just as in Rousseau's *Social Contract* we are here up against the philosophical necessity of what we can call a 'guilty' reading if by guilty we mean ideological. And Althusser's *Reading Capital* is ideological, if, by ideological, one is pointing out a discrepancy of theory with respect to the real. But, rather than implicating only himself in this guilt, Althusser, through a reading of Rousseau, would extend this necessary 'guilt' to all philosophy. The debate would have it that only Althusser is guilty and this because of specific biographical episodes in his life. However, the purity of the objective discourse is here written as elusive to all due to an inherent inadequacy of theory with respect to the real. The only truly responsible attitude - and the theme of responsibility recurs throughout this text - is to openly admit to one's engagement in an ideological discourse within the text itself through an 'honest' relationship with the reader. There is no privileged space, no 'outside' where one might secretly write from and where one might write in innocence: there is no third man. Althusser attempts to deconstruct the innocence of every guilty reading which would rely on the 'immediate' reading of essence in existence:

> The yearning for a reading at sight, for Galileo's Great Book of the World, is itself older than all science, [and] is still silently pandering to the religious fantasies of epiphany, parousia,

> and the fascinating myth of the scriptures, in which the body of Truth, dressed in its Words, is the Book: the Bible.[122]

Althusser's texts measure and exhibit a distance (*décollage*) from the real. We should not expect to be able to read the 'truth' in an apparently manifest or clear discourse because the text of history is not simply one in which the *Logos* speaks. Rather, the text is a notation of the effect of a structure of structures and any belief to the contrary is merely an oversight where sighting is concerned. Knowledge is not immediate vision, it is production and thus subject to structural limitations. If science can only pose problems within the terrain of definite conditions of possibility, so that any 'sighting' within this terrain is not the act of an individual subject's 'vision' but rather it is the terrain or field which sees itself in its own definitions, then, similarly, the 'unseen' or unknown within a scientific discourse is just the problematic's non-vision of its non-objects. Importantly, Althusser opposes seductive spatial metaphors which would enable one to think the terrain literally as a space limited by another space outside of it.[123] Here is no theoretical space occupied by an author outside a non-theoretical, which is to say, a 'reader' space. It is, crucially, in this rejection of the possibility of any spatial hierarchy, that we locate resistance to a debate which relies on the fabrication of a story about Althusser's desire to inhabit a purely contemplative or theoretical space estranged from and opposed to collective experience:

> This other space is also in the first space which contains it as its own denegation [...]. In other words, all its limits are internal, it carries its outside inside it.[124]

Because knowledge exists only in thought this does not mean that theory is produced in a vacuum, rather, thought itself is an ideological space.[125] To this extent thought only differs from ideology to the (limited) extent that it recognises itself as ideology. It would be naïve to imagine that Althusser ever believed theory to be the product of a theoretical labour produced outside a class context, there are just different ways of

being within ideology. If the working classes engage in the class struggle through physical labour, then the theoretician engages in it through intellectual labour. But it is crucial to collapse the notion of any specific hierarchy at work here - Althusser does not exalt the mind over the body and so condone an intellectual élitism. Indeed he deconstructs the boundaries separating the two realms to insist that thinking is itself a physical labour and that his contact with Marxism engages the body.[126] It is the body which is capable of thinking and to this extent theoretical and manual labour exist as parallel struggles. As Althusser writes: 'Everyone is not a philosopher spontaneously, but everyone may become one.'[127]

This differs from Gramsci's statement in his *Prison Notebooks*, which is often cited by the debate as evidence of Gramsci's more egalitarian approach to philosophy. For Gramsci all men are unconsciously philosophers.[128] Yet, in truth, ideology has little to do with 'consciousness', even if this term were not highly ambiguous. Ideology is a system of representations imposed upon men but not via their consciousness. The crucial difference for Althusser is time - the working class individual has no time. Even Seidler, who criticises Althusser for leaving the masses ignorant to the workings of ideology, has to describe the proletariat as 'virtual slave[s] to the routine of assembly line production' where it can be 'difficult to give thought to individual wants and needs'.[129] The only difference for Althusser is that the philosopher works with history and not with nature. In this sense all men might become philosophers because philosophers do not exist 'naturally': one is not born a philosopher just as one is not born a coal miner. There is no foundation within Althusser's work for an élitist concept of philosophy. To 'give' Marxist theory to the proletariat is to give them a socially contextualised product just as they too offer products in exchange. And, as I have noted, Althusser does not believe his product (science) to be a 'pure' product.

All sciences, his own included, must necessarily be expressed in the approximations of an ideological, quotidien language and Althusser echoes Rousseau's *Social Contract* when he admits that the raw material in the production of theory is 'already complex',

> a structure which combines together sensuous, technical and ideological elements: knowledge never, as empiricism desperately demands it should, confronts a pure object which is then identical to the real object.[130]

Here again I locate a resistance to the debate which would separate theory from ideology. Althusser clearly writes that theory uses an ideological raw material. In this way, Althusser combats a discourse which would place him, as some sort of autonomous and élitist scientist, on the outside of an ideological and hence, proletarian inside. Citing Pierre Macharey, Althusser stresses that 'every science is a science of the ideology'.[131] There is, of course, a way in which theory is autonomous, but it is not because in its conception theory remains outside societal and ideological conditions, rather it is because theory looks to itself for its criteria of validity. But at no point does Althusser make claims for his theory beyond claims he makes for any theory. Indeed he persistently emphasises the limits of theory and refuses to resort to a spatial metaphor which might enable him to duplicitously 'escape' the confines of any linguistic theory:

> The whole history of the 'theory of knowledge' in Western philosophy [...] shows us that this problem of knowledge is a closed space, that is, a vicious circle (the vicious circle of the mirror relation of ideological recognition). It's high point of consciousness and honesty was reached precisely with the philosophy which was prepared to take theoretical responsibility for the necessary existence of this circle, that is, to think it as essential to its ideological undertaking, however, this did not make it leave the circle, did not deliver it from its ideological captivity, nor could the philosopher who has tried to think in an openness (which seems to be only the ideological non-closure of the closure) [...] leave the circle.[132]

It is as if Althusser knew the terms of the debate which would later surface against his work. Althusser clearly collapses the terms of a debate which would believe that he could ever have adopted a position outside the circle because the outside of the circle -

either in its exterior or in its profundity - is always the outside of that circle and therefore belongs to that circle as its 'repetitions'.[133] Althusser's theory, I stress, always acknowledged these repetitions in its repetition of Rousseau.

3.5. *Non-Lieu*

After the crime of November 1980, the verdict of *non-lieu* - a legal death - opened up a space in which previous criticisms of the author could resurface as personalised, biographical evaluations of the 'author-in-the-work', armed with the 'evidence' of the crime. The crime gave fresh impetus to a debate which sought a story about the author in order to contaminate an entire *oeuvre*. Before the crime stories emerged about the petty ambitions of Althusser; about the violent ego behind the philosophy. Importantly, the myths of violence, ambition, immorality and élitism were not challenged and dispelled by a close reading of the work. Such a close reading would have better understood an *oeuvre* which attempts, according to Rousseau's plan, to establish the writer on a more honest footing with the reader through the production of an openly 'fictional' and writerly philosophy which necessarily partakes of a 'guilty' indulgence in ideological moments. It was an unwillingness to read Althusser closely, - and to read Rousseau at all - which led to the debate, as it stood prior to 1980, remaining profoundly unchallenged.

This unchallenged indictment of the author which criticised his anti-humanism, the death of the subject, his guilt, violence and immorality, his élitism and desire for autonomy- lent credence to the more virulent and worryingly policing anti-Althusserian polemic after November 1980. The strains of speculation intensified and the story of the crime lent an 'air of truth' to any discussion about a possibly sinister

motivation behind the work. Thus it was that the main criticisms levelled against the *oeuvre*, left unchallenged, translated into an attack which could fabricate a story about Althusser's mental illness to damningly terminate the Althusserian discourse. The terms of the earlier debate resurfaced, only now their criticisms of the *oeuvre* were supported by an 'evidence' which could prove, beyond doubt, that both philosopher and philosophy should be banished to the 'no-place' of the *non-lieu*.

This chapter attempts to challenge a reading that would look to the author's life for evidence of textual meaning. If it is true that the work is always more than the work - that it is also the subject who writes that work - should we not seek to complicate that subjectivity rather than attempt to fix that subject within an identity which we will always be able to oppose if only because it is 'other' to our own identity. On a more specific level I have tried to challenge a reading which would reduce the *oeuvre* to a production generated entirely in order to suppress a, somehow, abnormal subjectivity. Where Althusser's itinerary has been variously traced to this concealment of a guilty subjectivity, I have retraced the itinerary to the work of Rousseau, concentrating, in this chapter, on his *Social Contract* as a text which seeks to re-examine the very concept of the guilty text if guilty here means non-objective. Rousseau's, and therefore Althusser's, generalisation of the concept of guilt in a society where no man can be free in thought, complicates and perhaps explains a debate which is intent on distancing itself from an *oeuvre* which would seek to implicate all of us in its construction. I leave the last words to Althusser:

> We must go further than the unmentioned presence of the thoughts of the living author to the presence of his potential thoughts, to his problematic, that is, to the constitutive unity of the effective thoughts that make up the domain of the existing ideological field within which a particular author must settle accounts in his own thought.[134]

[1] See K.S Karol, "The Tragedy of the Althussers", *New Left Review*, No.124, pp.93-95.
[2] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time* ([as *L'Avenir Dure Longtemps, suivi de Les Faits*, 1992] ed. Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang, trans. Richard Veasey, London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), p.xi
[3] ibid., p.xi
[4] Etienne Balibar, "The non-Contemporaneity of Althusser" in *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E Anne Kaplan and Michael Sprinker, (London: Verso, 1993), p.1
[5] ibid., p.1
[6] Most of the material used here was assembled using the Althusser archive established at *L'Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine* (hereafter *L'I.M.E.C.*) in Paris, April 1997.
[7] See *France-Soir*, *Le Monde*, *Le Parisien* articles from around the time of the murder for descriptions of Althusser's "mysterious" nature.
[8] *Minute*, punning on Althusser's position as teacher at the *École Normal Supérieure* called him "*L'anormal supérieure*".
[9] I am obviously referring here to Alice Kaplan's comments on de Man in the previous chapter. For examples of this question being asked see especially the article in *Le Soir*, 22/11/1980 written by François Held and the *France Soir* article by M. Dutourd:

> Pendant 32 ans, plusieurs promotions de normaliens ont eu pour 'maître à penser' un fou attenit de psychose maniaco-dépressive. La plupart de ces normaliens sont devenus profs et ont, sans doute, propagé l'enseignement de leur 'maître à penser' à des milliers d'écoliers et d'étudiants. On peut dire que ceux-ci ont été formé par les disciples d'un fou criminel.

[10] *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 18/11/1980: article by D. Jamet.
[11] *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 18/11/1980: article by D. Jamet. See also Pierre Sambre in the same issue; in *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 19/11/1980, Pierre Daix writes on this subject.
[12] *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 19/11/1980: article by Patrick Resten
[13] 'Ah, il a craqué lui aussi[...] cette vie n'est pas finalement très saine[...]. On constate beaucoup d'internement, surtout du côté de la recherche.' (*Le Quotidien de Paris*, 18/11/1980).
[14] *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 18/11/1980: article by D. Jamet.
[15] *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 19/11/1980: article by Patrick Resten.
[16] Farran, Jean, *Journal de Dimanche* (undated copy in the *L'I.M.E.C.* archive)
[17] *Minute*, 28 Nov.-2 Dec. (newspaper page references not given in the archive)
[18] *Minute*, 28 Nov.-2 Dec.
[19] *Minute*, 28 Nov.-2 Dec.
[20] See also R. Maggiori in *Société*, Pierre Daix in *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 19/11/1980, and D.Jamet in *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 18/11/1980. All the writers here would destroy Althusser's work because of his *comportement privé*.
[21] "Marx and Murder", by Mark Lilla, *T.L.S.* No.4669, Sept.25, 1992, P.3-4. This text is cited by David M. Halperin in *Saint=Foucault; Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.132.
[22] Halperin, David M., *Saint=Foucault*, p.132
[23] "Marx and Murder", by Mark Lilla, *T.L.S.* No.4669, Sept.25, 1992, P.3-4, cited by David M. Halperin in *Saint=Foucault*, p132
[24] ibid.
[25] ibid.
[26] *Saint=Foucault*, p.133.
[27] Finn, Geraldine, *Why Althusser Killed his Wife: Essays on Discourse and Violence* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), pp.5-6
[28] See Simon Clarke's "Introduction" to *One-Dimensional Marxism* (ed. Simon Clarke, London: Allison and Busby, 1980).
[29] Thompson, E.P., *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Penguin, 1978), p.182
[30] ibid., p.152
[31] Geras, "Louis Althusser: an Account and an Assessment", *New Left Review*, No.71, 1972, p.65.
[32] ibid., p.77
[33] ibid., p.80
[34] ibid., p.80, citing Louis Althusser's contribution to *Reading Capital*, Althusser's joint-work with Étienne Balibar (trans. B. Brewster, New York: Random House, 1970), pp.109-110.

[35] ibid., p.81
[36] ibid., p.83
[37] ibid., p.83
[38] ibid., p.83
[39] ibid., p.84
[40] ibid., p.84
[41] ibid., p.85
[42] ibid., p.85
[43] Althusser, Louis, *Reading Capital*, p.79
[44] Althusser, Louis, *Reading Capital*, p.131.
[45] Geras, "Louis Althusser: an Account and an Assessment", *New Left Review*, no.71 (1972), p.86
[46] Glucksmann, Andre, "A Ventriloquist Structuralism", *New Left Review*, no.71, (1972) p.88
[47] ibid., p.68
[48] ibid., p.68
[49] ibid., p.74
[50] ibid., p.80
[51] Seidler, Victor, "Trusting Ourselves: Marxism, Human Needs and Sexual Politics", in *One-Dimensional Marxism* (ed. Simon Clarke, London: Allison and Busby, 1980), p.103
[52] ibid., p.103
[53] ibid., p.107
[54] Gramsci, Antonio, ed. and transl., Hoare, Quintin, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* (London:, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p.323
[55] Seidler, Victor, "Trusting Ourselves: Marxism, Human Needs and Sexual Politics", p.113
[56] ibid., p.114
[57] ibid., p.114
[58] ibid., p.120
[59] ibid., p.128
[60] ibid., p.129
[61] ibid., p.148
[62] ibid., p.152
[63] ibid., p.150
[64] Clarke, Simon, "Introduction" to *One-Dimensional Marxism*, p.13
[65] ibid., p.14
[66] ibid., p.14
[67] ibid., p.14
[68] ibid., p.16
[69] ibid., p.20
[70] ibid., p.28
[71] ibid., p.63
[72] ibid., p.63
[73] ibid., p.34
[74] ibid., p.35
[75] ibid., p.38
[76] ibid., p.63
[77] See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1977).
[78] See Smith, Stephen B., *Reading Althusser: An Essay on Structural Marxism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 23.
[79] ibid., p.36. As Smith points out here, this in itself was a 'redoubtable accomplishment' since Marx's early writings on this subject were, at that time, undiscovered.
[80] Yann Moulier Boutang in *Louis Althusser - une Biographie: La Formation du Mythe (1918-1956)* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1992), p.251, cites Althusser's then-unpublished text: "Du Contenu Dans La Pensée de G.W.F.Hegel".
[81] ibid., p.251
[82] ibid., p.16. Boutang writes of Althusser's 'quête déliberée de l'anonym dans la rétraite du couvent de la pensée'.
[83] Althusser, Louis, *Les Cahiers Journaliers*, iv., Jeudi. 20 Mai, 1937 (stored at L'I.M.E.C.).
[84] Moulier Boutang, Yann, *Louis Althusser - Une Biographie*, p.130.

[85] ibid., p.145
[86] Althusser, Louis, *Les Cahiers Journaliers, 1937-1945*, stored at L'I.M.E.C.
[87] Moulier Boutang, Yann, *Louis Althusser - Une Biographie*, pp.173-174, and Althusser's "The Facts", in *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, pp. 312-3
[88] Moulier Boutang, Yann, *Louis Althusser - Une Biographie,* p.260
[89] "The Discrepancies" is taken from a lecture series delivered at the *École Normale Supérieure* between 1965 and 1966, and is published in Althusser's *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx* (trans. B. Brewster, London: New Left Books, 1972).
[90] Althusser, Louis, "The Discrepancies", p.114
[91] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract* I.vi.p.90
[92] Althusser, "The Discrepancies", p.123
[93] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract* I.vi.p12
[94] Althusser, "The Discrepancies", p.126
[95] ibid., p.123
[96] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile* (Penguin edn.), p.425
[97] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract*, I.vii.pp.13-14
[98] Althusser, "The Discrepancies", p.133. For Althusser it is enough to read Rousseau closely to see that his contract is not a contract.
[99] Althusser, "The Discrepancies", p.133
[100] ibid., p.138
[101] ibid., p.143
[102] See Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract* II.iii.p.22
[103] ibid., II.iii.p.23
[104] Althusser, "The Discrepancies", p.150
[105] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract* II.iii.p.23
[106] Althusser, "The Discrepancies", p.151
[107] ibid., p.151
[108] ibid., p.151
[109] Althusser, Louis, *Reading Capital.* This sentiment closes Althusser's contribution to the text
[110] Moulier Boutang, Yann, (*Louis Althusser - Une Biographie* p.130) writes that this 'souci d'authenticité' marks all his work.
[111] ibid., pp.173-174. See also Althusser's "The Facts", pp.312-3
[112] See letter no.19 in *L'I.M.E.C.* archive.
[113] Moulier Boutang, Yann (*Louis Althusser - Une Biographie*, p.262) recalls Hegel: 'D'un côte nous avons realité sans totalité, de l'autre, totalité sans realité'.
[114] See Althusser, Louis, "An Interview on Lenin and Philosophy", in *New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1971), for his ideas on this and echoes of the *Social Contract.*
[115] See Eric Matthews, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.128.
[116] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.175
[117] See *Reading Capital*, pp. 44,56,75,89,157.
[118] ibid., p.52
[119] ibid., p.27; n.9, p.41.
[120] ibid., pp.45, 59
[121] ibid., p.14
[122] ibid., p.16
[123] ibid., p.25
[124] ibid., *ReadingCapital*, pp.26-27
[125] ibid., p.42
[126] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.213
[127] See *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp.15-25.
[128] See my previous fn.54, citing Gramsci in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p.323
[129] Seidler, Victor, "Trusting Ourselves: Marxism, Human Needs and Sexual Politics", *One-Dimensional Marxism*, p.109
[130] *Reading Capital*, p.43
[131] ibid., p.46, citing Pierre Macharey in *Madness and Civilisation*, (Paris: P.U.F., p.63).

[132] ibid., p.53, Althusser is here obviously referring to Rousseau, especially in the *Social Contract*, where he tries to assume this responsibility for the necessarily circular nature of theory and its ideological make-up.
[133] Althusser, Louis, *Reading Capital*, p.53.
[134]ibid., p.14

CHAPTER FOUR

INTENTION AND RESPONSIBILITY

4.0. Introduction

This chapter attempts two things; firstly, it aims to discuss the contribution that Rousseau, de Man and Derrida have made to the discourse surrounding the concept of *slander.* Both de Man and Derrida wrote on this subject in the year of 1967, tracing their discourse back to the same Rousseauian text: *The Confessions.*[1] Secondly, it will examine the concepts of slander and scandal and their current usage in both legal and literary contexts. Following on from this the chapter will concentrate on the ethical ideas of responsibility and intention at the heart of our legal system, hoping that the implications of my reading will lead to a redefinition of *slander* and *scandal* particularly as it concerns any response to the 'literary scandals' surrounding the authors I am here concerned with.

4.1. Definitions of slander

Any examination of the word *slander* reveals its etymology to be inextricably linked to that of the word *scandal.* Indeed, it would seem that the two words were once

synonymous: both share the same root- the Latin *scandalum*, the Greek *skandalon*, and the French *esclandre*. Both *slander* and *scandal* are given as synonyms in the OED. which defines them as 'defamations by spoken word, look, sign or gesture'.[2] However, in our daily usage we consistently discern a difference between the two concepts where *scandal*, far from equating with *slander*, is rather its product.

A study of criminal law systems reveals an *aporia* at the heart of any consideration of the question of *slander*. French criminal law lacks any solid basis because Roman Law furnished no organised body of doctrine or analysis in this area. It was only by applying doctrines of the natural and inherent 'rights of Man' that any root concepts could be established. What results from this is a very subjective legal ideology which claims to derive social authenticity from the conscious experience of the subject. Interestingly for us, what does seem intractable in French criminal law is the validity of the confession as evidence of intention: 'The confession, though not provided for by any statutory text, is a recognised mode of proof, and almost impossible to impeach on the grounds of fraud or violence.'[3]

Likewise, the Anglo-American legal system is rather ambiguous on the subject of *slander*. If written falsehoods are libels, spoken falsehoods are *slanders*. In America there is no provision under the First Amendment and civil libel seems mainly to be governed by Common Law rules of ambiguous and complicated origin.[4] In the U.K. the general ruling is that action for slander lies if the plaintiff can *prove* that he has suffered special damage as a result of scandal.[5]

What interests us here is the difference that grew up between the two concepts of *slander* and *scandal*. Legal definitions now appear to understand *slander* as verbal utterance or gesture whereas *scandal* is the product of this *slander* - a usage which has

repercussions for literary theory.[6] So that two things are at work here: *slander* and *scandal* obviously no longer mean the same thing to us. The *slander,* as I have noted, is an abstraction (utterance, rumour, gesture) belonging to a past which, in order to be proven, concretised and made available in the present, must *produce* a *scandal.* It is the *scandal* as product which enables the existence of the *slander* to be proven. That is, in our current legal system, the scandal is textual and the *slander* (as gesture, movement, utterance) is outside of the text: *"hors texte".*[7] It would thus seem that it became, at some stage in legal development, necessary to legitimise the possibility of *slander* by making it productive. This necessary production changed *scandal* from its synonymous status with *slander* into something which was "literally" available and which might make the *slander* available by evidencing it.

What this obviously results from is the legal and ethical necessity to make the law potent by sanctioning the possibility of the availability of intention. The law bases itself in the possibility of the *hors texte* and its availability through the confessional or *scandalous* text. This idea will be discussed further, however, I now wish to introduce those writers who, I believe, have attempted to redefine and re-synonymise the concepts of *slander* and *scandal.*

Literary scandals

Rousseau, de Man and Derrida have all written extensively on the subject of *slander* and *scandal* as well as appropriately being its victims. The link that binds these three men is something which I hope to discuss here: it is a textual link commonly known as Rousseau's *Confessions.* In 1762 the *Social Contract* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* were publicly burned in France and Geneva. Rousseau was widely denounced, went

into exile and wrote the *Confessions*. This text, a text written in and about scandalous contexts and where Rousseau scandalises himself, was to prove to be a most influential text for both de Man and Derrida. Their first point of intersection came in 1967 with Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and de Man's "Gauss Seminar". Both papers focused on Rousseau's *Confessions* as the authoritative text when discussing *slander*. Ten years later de Man's *Allegories of Reading* (hereafter *Allegories*) would also re-read Rousseau's *Confessions* and, in 1988, Derrida would re-read de Man's *Allegories*. By then both de Man and Derrida would also have become victims of their own personal "scandals" which, in turn, would become the subject of Derrida's later texts.[8]

Rousseau's *Confessions*, as I have already stated, were written at a time of scandal about scandal. Further texts written at the time of his exile reveal Rousseau's complex thoughts about reputation and the (non)availability of any true knowledge about the nature of another's intentions. To an admirer he wrote:

> In thanking you for thinking well of me, I nevertheless advise you, Sir, no longer to waste your time defending or praising me. All the good and evil one says about a man one does not know means little.[9]

It is perhaps at this stage in Rousseau's discourse on scandal that de Man's interest was awakened. Paul de Man had an obvious interest in the subject throughout his career and in an early (1941) article entitled "Sur les Possibilités de la Critique", de Man defines a certain autonomy of both literary history and the author:

> Literature is an independent domain having a life and laws belonging only to it and which in no way depend on the philosophical or ethical contingencies stirring at its side. The least one can say is that the artistic values governing the world of letters do not merge with those of the Truth and the Good, and that whoever borrows his criteria from this region of human consciousness will be systematically mistaken in his judgements [...]. One does not have the right to condemn Gide as a novelist because his moral life was debatable [...]. A writer can be attacked for the inadequacies in his style, for sins against the laws of a genre he practises, but never for weaknesses or lacks in his moral personality.[10]

Literary critics have a responsibility to the text only. The life of the artist must remain unavailable for comment. Later, in the "Gauss Seminar" of 1967, de Man would return to this subject revealing Rousseau as his precursor. In his lecture, "Rousseau and the Transcendence of Self" de Man discusses his early introduction to Rousseau, concentrating on the perpetuation of a central irony in Rousseau's work; that Rousseau might write a treatise on education and yet, foster out his own children.[11] From his earliest education then, de Man was sensitive to scandals surrounding the author-figure which might, in turn, render their texts scandalous. His interest in this subject continued to associate itself with the figure of Rousseau when de Man wrote about *The Confessions* in his *Allegories of Reading*[12] and it is to this text that we now turn.

Allegories initially examines the concept of the confession. The word *confess*, from the Latin *confessare*, means 'to speak fully'.[13] De Man questions the possibility of a confession if that confession must offer a complete speech which would amount to a statement of the 'truth'. According to de Man, Rousseau is unable merely to offer statements.[14] This is to say that neither Rousseau nor anyone else can state the 'truth' where this 'truth' is understood in relation to the real because speculation is a necessary part of all speech. De Man focuses on a passage at the end of Book II where Rousseau writes of the theft of a small pink and silver ribbon from the head of a household where he worked in his youth.[15] At the time, an investigation was set up to find the ribbon culminating in a type of mock court room scene where Rousseau denied the theft and falsely accused a maidservant, Marion, of having stolen the ribbon to give to him in order to win his affection. This accusation resulted in her dismissal. De Man writes:

> For one thing, to excuse the crime of theft does not suffice to excuse the worse crime of slander which, as both common sense and Rousseau tell us, is much harder to accept.[16]

Indeed, in the fourth of his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, Rousseau stated: 'To lie in order to harm is slander; it is the worst kind of lie.'[17]

Any discussion of the concept of slander must be aware that, legally speaking, slander is totally dependent upon the availability of intention. Slander *is* malicious intent. In a legal context the intention is established by a confession which must be written down and given as evidence. In a literary context the intention is also textual: it is written into the literary work. In Rousseau's case these two contexts merge in an autobiographical text aptly named *The Confessions*. The text then becomes the scandalous product which proves or evidences a prior malicious intention which we here call *slander*. Thus de Man can write that the Jean-Jacques of the *Confessions* stole the ribbon in order that he could be shamefully exposed. This interpretation suggests that the slander was motivated by the desire to produce the scandalous text:

> Marion was destroyed [...] merely in order to provide [Rousseau] with a stage on which to parade his disgrace or, what amounts to the same thing, to furnish him with a good ending for Book Two of his *Confessions*.[18]

Thus, the slander of Marion was motivated by the desire to produce a scandalous text which in turn becomes evidence, because product, of that slander. It seems ludicrous to suggest that a young, eight year old boy would destroy someone merely in order to provide himself with textual material some fifty years later, yet this teleological interpretation of events replays the machinations of our legal system: a system where any intention must be revealed in the textual form of a confession.

What de Man now attempts, using Rousseau's complex and rigorous text, is to subvert this working model and its reliance upon the *hors texte/texte* division. Aiming to negate the possibility of the *hors texte* de Man would reduce both *slander* and *scandal*

to a textual status by reinforcing the very Rousseauian concept of the written element within speech. De Man can then renounce a traditional interpretation of events in favour of another, startling, possibility: that Marion's nominal presence might have been merely coincidental. What this means is that the 'sound' *Marion* was uttered 'truly without conceivable motive'.[19] If *Marion* is merely a sound, part of a universal grammar which, at every turn, resists any possibility of being specifically tailored to our own individual needs, then this sound can be uttered without motive. That is, why should a reiterable sound -a so-called Proper Name which can, however, be shared, a linguistic construct which is available to all - reflect an individual intention? Once subjective intention is removed from the arena of interpretation terms such as desire, shame and guilt become redundant and the subjective basis upon which our legal system operates collapses.[20]

De Man then turns from *The Confessions* and 'reported guilt' to *The Fourth Reverie* and the 'guilt of reporting'.[21] Here the lie, or slander, is specifically connected with the act of writing *The Confessions* (and necessarily with all writing). For de Man the 'random lie'[22] of the Marion episode is a consistent feature of the *Fourth Reverie*. In this text, the performative power of the lie as excuse is specifically tied to an absence of evidence - to an absence of any referential signification, and thus, 'carries, in this literary context, a more familiar and reputable name since it is now called fiction'.[23]

When is a slander not a slander? When it is a fiction. It would seem that the sole determining factor is intention and that intention must be determined by consequence and context: 'To lie without intent and without harm to oneself or others is not to lie - it is not a lie but a fiction.'[24] As I have already noted, legally intention can be determined through its consequences: a slander is only proven when it produces a

scandalous text, a confessional text. But de Man here writes of the 'almost imperceptible crack of the purely gratuitous'.[25] This is what Rousseau calls 'faits oiseux' or facts without consequence.[26] Literally, 'oiseux' describes that which journeys with no specific aim. Fiction is this absence of aim, this lack of any link between utterance and referent and, for de Man, in the *space* created by such a disruption of referential illusion, the 'sound' *Marion* came to be uttered. Thus, the key sentence in the whole of *The Confessions* is, according to de Man: 'Je m'excusai sur le premier objet qui s'offrit.'[27]

It is the grammar itself, the word *Marion*, which is the active agent. Here intention is an objective intention contained in the word itself rather than any subjective intention intended by anyone: especially Rousseau when speaking that word. This unmotivated utterance is really saying nothing at all, least of all someone's name. Yet one would surely object: is there not a huge discrepancy between the fiction of *The Reveries* and the very real denunciation of a girl named Marion?[28] If the former is admittedly without consequence, surely the latter is slanderous: 'Whatever is contrary to truth and hurts justice in any conceivable way is a lie.'[29]

If I understand that the name *Marion* was not intended by Rousseau but by the grammar which inevitably produced it then, according to de Man, the *slander* against Marion is activated as *slander* only because it is not understood as belonging to a fictional (textual) realm. That is, the *slander* becomes a *slander* because the scandalous consequences of the spoken words seemed to infer, logically, that an *hors textual* intention had been made available. It was believed that the name *Marion*, written into our language, managed to rush to the signified it *would* mean, and that language might indicate something non-linguistic: a flesh and blood being. An

economy of shame and guilt was generated because the fictional utterance immediately became trapped in a system of signification and consequence. If the essential non-referentiality of the event had been grasped no such predicament would have arisen because 'not the fiction itself is to blame for the consequences, but its falsely *referential* reading'.[30]

De Man strips the utterance of its 'truth' value and hence of its motivation. As a result the *slander* ceases to exist as *slander* and is neutralised as a fictional and therefore harmless statement. After all,

> it is the misguided reading of the error as theft or slander, the refusal to admit that fiction is fiction, the stubborn resistance to the 'fact', obvious by itself, that language is entirely free with regard to referential meaning and can posit whatever its grammar allows it to say, which leads to the transformation of random error into injustice.[31]

Language is radically irresponsible and it is only in the instance of reading that fiction is erroneously assigned referential (*hors textual*) signification. The moment in which the fiction is free of meaning is immediately lost in its generated context. Yet, for de Man, this impossible moment must exist otherwise the text is unimaginable:

> It seems to be impossible to isolate the moment in which the fiction stands free of any signification; in the very moment at which it is posited, as well as in the context that it generates, it gets at once misinterpreted into a determination which is, *ipso facto*, overdetermined. Yet without this moment, never allowed to exist as such, no such thing as a text is conceivable[32]

For de Man, language consistently works to insert an intention (as *hors texte*) into a text via the "proof" of referentiality, and, for him, this referentiality is a lie. Moreover, the language of intention can never be unique and thus continually escapes the supposed intending subject. De Man's aim here is to question the *hors texte* status of intention through an examination of the irresponsibility of an ultimately 'machinal' language.[33]

This is, of course, a dominant feature of the structuralist and post-structuralist debate. However, what I hope to stress here is a link between the thought of two men, possibly the leading voices in this debate, through a tracing of their thought back to the same Rousseauian text. The question which inevitably arises asks how one might reintroduce responsibility into a world of intention-less subjectivity? If there is a language of intention, of objectives, aims and desires and this structure of objective intentions fools us into believing that it is the subject who reproduces social relations, what might it mean to face up to the possibility of 'intention without anyone to intend it'?[34]

The structure itself, which for de Man is a grammatical 'machine' traced in the texts of Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Reveries* as a properly seductive metaphor, contains an objective intention written into a linguistic schema of thought and expression. This objective intention will always outrun any possibility of conscious intentions. Interestingly, Luke Wilson cites Bourdieu at the point where his thought process intersects de Man's reading of *The Confessions* offering an interpretation of intention which might counter the subjectivism of a legal phenomenology rooted in the authentic and conscious experience of the strategising subject. He writes: 'We must not [...] reduce the objective and constituted significations of actions and works to the conscious and deliberate intentions of their authors.'[35]

The face-to-face

Jacques Derrida's itinerary also included and still includes the task of redefining the concepts of *slander* and *scandal.* His approach - an understanding of the written nature of speech and thus the impossibility of a non-textual event- is also gleaned

from a reading of Rousseau's *Confessions*. Derrida turned to Rousseau and the subject of *slander* at least as early as 1967: the same time as de Man delivered his "Gauss Seminar". Derrida produced *Of Grammatology*, a work which re-reads Rousseau's *Confessions*, hoping to reveal a scepticism about the 'truth' value of any word or sign which must always, necessarily lead to another sign.[36] According to Derrida, knowledge is not merely a systematic tracking down of a 'truth' which lies secreted yet open to finding. Rather, Derrida embarks upon a redefinition of truths as illusions where one has forgotten that they are illusions.[37] Following on from this, if language is a universal construct, and we are always removed from this language through having no part in its creation, any insertion of a subject into language must be fictitious. Of *The Confessions* Derrida writes: 'One cannot abstract from the written text to rush to the signified it would mean, since the signified is here the text itself.'[38]

Thus, the scandalous text - the product of intention - cannot evidence the slander which must exist beyond the text as an *hors texte*. The text cannot point to a some thing which is outside of the text. He continues:

> It is so little a matter of looking for a truth signified by these writings (metaphysical or psychological truth: Jean-Jacques' life *behind* the work) that if the texts that interest us *mean* anything, it is the engagement and the appurtenance that encompass existence and writing in the same tissue, the same text.[39]

Existence and writing are not in opposition, nor are *slander* and *scandal*; or rather, writing is not the product of a non-textual event and so the scandalous text cannot *prove* a slanderous intention. Derrida is saying that there are no facts 'in and of themselves' and that any joy in certainty exhibits a desire to preserve the myth that such a difference between existence and the text does exist. Derrida does not merely mistrust the text as a representative of the past because of the possibility of a forgetfulness, but because of a deeper linguistic predicament. Through Rousseau,

writing is understood as the *gift* of proper names.[40] For example, our own name is a secret which reassures us of our identity. This secret comes to function as the so-called *proper*, where no proper self exists, in a process of delusion where it is believed that speech masters presence. Reading Rousseau one starts to recognise the written within speech, one begins 'to think the lure'.[41] Once I recognise writing in speech I can admit to a universal textualising process.

For a concept of slander to operate as our current legal process demands, a "face-to-face" confrontational situation must be possible. What might this mean? For the American legal theorist Kent Greenawalt, 'defamations can harm and [...] in a face-to-face setting many defamatory comments can amount to fighting words'.[42] *Slander* as utterance, gesture or rumour relies on the possibility of "face-to-face" countenances, on the possibility of self-presence, transparent proximity and the immediate range of the voice. But what if I begin to question the validity of such fundamental guarantees of authenticity? Such a determination of social authenticity has, according to Derrida, been with us since Plato. Through his reading of Rousseau's sceptical text, Derrida questions the possibility of a 'living speech'.[43] In his *Confessions* Rousseau wrote:

> I would love society like others, if I were not sure of showing myself not only at a disadvantage, but as completely different from what I am. The part I have taken of writing and hiding myself is precisely the one that suits me.[44]

If, for Rousseau, speech is defective because it cannot reveal who I believe myself to be, writing is seen to be dangerous. Writing is art, *techné*, image and ruse which wants nothing more than to make a deficient, absenting speech present. It is dangerous because I am liable to believe that written representation is presence rather than proxy and 'there is a fatal necessity, inscribed in the very functioning of the sign, that the substitute make one forget the vicariousness of its own function'.[45]

If speech is blindness and writing merely its supplement, one jumps from one to the other without progression. In this way one goes from *slander* (utterance, speech) which is never present, to its supplement, *scandal* (text, writing) which claims to be present but merely masks its defects: 'One goes from *blindness to the supplement* [...] *Blindness to the supplement* is the law.'[46]

It is necessary that I am blind to the workings of the supplement, but also the legal system relies on such a blindness. Such wordplay reveals the *aporia* at the heart of any legal system, indeed any system, which remains ignorant of this properly seductive property of language. If the face-to-face proximity of authentic presence always already escapes us, then slander, as face-to-face defamation is impossible because a transparent proximity beyond writing is impossible. Once I admit that slander relies upon the possibility of its verification within the scandalous text we can re-synonymise the two terms, eradicate the possibility of an *hors textual* moment, and recognise that both the legal system and literary theory rely upon a Platonistic view of social authenticity. The dangerous supplement, which Rousseau calls a 'fatal advantage', is seductive:

> It leads desire away from the good path [...] guides it towards its loss or fall and therefore it is a sort of lapse or scandal *(scandalon).* It thus destroys Nature. But the scandal of Reason is that nothing seems more natural than this destruction of Nature.[47]

All writing is properly *scandalous* because it constitutes a (necessary) lapse from 'truth'. All slander is scandalous because the spoken is now understood as written, with the power of death (writing) now recognised at the heart of living speech. Through a reading of *The Confessions* Derrida comes to understand that a *scandalous* presence is the only possible presence and should be reinterpreted as non-presence, non-authenticity and, above all, fiction. Derrida and de Man unite in this reading:

> We have tried to show [...] that in what one calls the real life of these existences 'of flesh and bone', beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; [...] what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence.[48]

Writing - the supplement - is not merely a tail added to the positivity of a presence. Rather, this thing, this 'presence' can only fill itself up *as* presence because of the proxy of the supplement: intention only exists through the textual proxy. Somewhere, this *non-lieu*, this no-place that we could call defective Nature, must be filled up (*tient-lieu*) with signs or *scandals*; with fictions that side-track us into believing that we hold *proof* of an *hors texte* which might, ultimately, explain our authentic selves.

Becoming personal: where one stops and the other begins

> If someone calls me vain and mean, I know that he trusts me and has something to confess to me.[49]

As I have noted, both de Man and Derrida shared an interest in the subject of *scandal*, focusing on Rousseau's autobiographical treatment of the subject. Interestingly, both Derrida and de Man - like Rousseau - would be victims of scandal later on in their careers. Obviously, I have discussed the debate which grew up around de Man, but I would like to illustrate how the scandal which touched de Man affected Derrida and, importantly, resurrected links with Rousseau.

In Derrida's *Mémoires for Paul de Man*,[50] we re-enter the realm of *scandal*. This time we are discussing de Man's own fate after the 'revelations' about his wartime journalism. If *scandalous* language seeks familiarity and, above all, to convince that it knows its subject totally, it also seeks, as does familiarity, to breed contempt. Derrida's *Mémoires* conclude with a lengthy final chapter entitled "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War". This text parallels Derrida's

earlier *Of Grammatology* discussion of Rousseau's *Confessions*. Specifically, it relies on a prior understanding of the literal non-availability of the past in the present; of the non-availability of any so-called real life existence beyond the text. Initially, it would seem that Derrida attempts two things in this text, the first, more conventional and less successful, the second, I believe, more loyal to de Man's own philosophy. Both are undertaken in a spirit of defence.

Derrida is anticipating the *trial* of de Man that will ensue in media and academic circles after the revelation of his wartime journalism.[51] His ambition is to complicate such a trial. Firstly, he attempts - with limited success - to justify that early journalism. For example, Derrida suggests that de Man was very young, with a wife and child to support. He also writes that the articles in question were written early in 1940, before the occupation of Belgium. This method works to defend de Man's context. He also, in the same vein, works to defend the content of the *Le Soir* articles, focusing on the one and only article which might ever produce a scandal: "Les Juifs dans la Littérature Actuelle". Derrida, himself a Jew persecuted during the War,[52] begins to defend de Man, *to an extent*, through a complication of the text's meaning. In this article in *Le Soir* de Man actually wrote:

> One sees that a solution of the Jewish problem that would aim at the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe, would not entail, for the literary life of the West, deplorable consequences.[53]

De Man has already stated in previous *Le Soir* articles, that literature is an independent domain, independent, that is, of philosophical or ethical contingencies. The implications of such a colony for the literary life of the West is thus understood by de Man to be a totally separate issue from the moral, ethical and philosophical implications - implications which de Man, within this context, was unable to discuss due to the censorship of non-literary subject matter. One might balk at the use of the

term 'solution' but this would be anachronistic - de Man could not have foreseen the terrible connotations that the very word "solution" would later evoke. Derrida suggests that the above citation insinuates, in its rigid structure, that deplorable consequences would probably result from the establishment of such a colony *in all but* the literary arena. Apart from speculation, what we can agree with, and what Derrida rightly points out, is that the article as a whole is argued from the outset, in print, as an indictment of 'vulgar antisemiticism'.[54] And, since de Man names no other type of antisemiticism, one can *presume* that this article attacks all forms of antisemiticism. Also, by the end of 1942 de Man's contributions to *le Soir* ceased abruptly. These observations - all of them textual - are attempts to defend de Man against the inevitable scandal through the complication of any over-hasty simplification of de Man's writing.[55] De Man, it is also noted wrote for and edited anti-fascist newspapers. One such journal, *Les Cahiers du Libre Examen* was founded in 1937 and edited by de Man.

Indeed, in his attempt to rally against the inevitable anti-deManian debate, Derrida can try to uncover *all* the biographical details of de Man's life like some literary theory private detective. This approach had already been discussed and criticised by Derrida in *Points...Interviews.*[56]

Reading *Points...Interviews* reveals just how much this type of investigative discussion of de Man was linked to events closer to Derrida's own career. In 1987, an article by Derrida entitled "Heidegger, the Philosopher's Hell", was published in *Le Nouvel Observateur.* This publication led to a long battle between Derrida and two academics - Wolin and Sheehan - in what became known as the 'Derrida Affair'. This 'affair' was relayed in the *New York Review of Books* where Derrida found

himself in the position of defending himself against those who would equate Heidegger with fascism, those who would attempt to censor any reading of Heidegger and those who would condemn as fascistic any dialogue (and perpetrator of that dialogue) which engaged in a reading of Heidegger.

Derrida wanted to read Heidegger in a way that would look beyond or complicate the fascist engagement. The dynamic here is similar to that of the debate against de Man. As with de Man, the debate against Derrida moves from the condemnation of fascism as *scandalous* to a condemnation of Derrida's discussion of fascism: his discussion of fascism becomes as *scandalous* as that which it discusses.[57] An engagement with the rhetoric of fascism is seen to be, in and of itself, suspicious, even when that engagement represents an attempt to understand and complicate that rhetoric through rigorous analysis. Fascism is understood as the ultimate *scandalous* text because it puts an end to the need for any further interpretation - it *knows the Truth* - it assumes things to be familiar and it lets them pass. An entire generation of people unquestioningly assumed things to be *true* and let them pass. As such, fascism is dangerous and cannot be tolerated. Yet those involved in both the Derrida 'affair' and the debate surrounding de Man censor discourses which spring from a - critical - engagement with fascism and Nazi rhetoric. To this - limited - extent, these debates, established in opposition to censorship and the *scandalous* text, are, ironically censoring and, therefore, *scandalous:* they assume that they have access to the *truth* - the meaning of the text is reducible to the author's intention - and they can therefore censor any discussions with which they disagree by revealing the supposed intention behind those texts. *Scandal* does not seek to think beyond comfortable schemas, nor does it seek to understand:

> Understand what? Well, that which ensures or does not ensure an immediate passage, according to some mode or other, of "translation", between the Nazi engagement, in whatever form, and what is most essential, acute, and sometimes more difficult in a work that continues and will continue to give cause for thinking.[58]

Derrida understands that a condemnation of Nazism is not a thinking of Nazism but rather, in its methodology and its effects, in its intolerance and censorship, it resembles that "thing" itself. The textual product we can here call the *scandal* is an obstacle to understanding and thought - it seeks to block interpretation by establishing evidence of intention. This evidence terminates any necessity for a continued reading. Such a response acts as if Nazism were isolated from the rest of Europe, from other philosophical, political and religious discourses and, as such, such a response is politically irresponsible and a 'renunciation of thinking'.[59] Such a response when it condemns not only Nazism, but the author, calling for censorship and exile, again acts as if that author were an isolated being who does not share our discourse.

Obviously, this entire episode has strong links with de Man's own fate and the arguments used by Derrida in his own defence are similar to those used by Derrida to defend de Man. However, interestingly, Derrida defends himself only with the second defensive approach alluded to earlier in relation to his *Mémoires*. This approach leads inevitably to a discussion of responsibilities.

For Derrida, scandals must be desired. The anti-de Manian debate could only exist if certain people wanted it, because, after all, de Man is dead.[60] To counter such desire does not require a detective work which might outdo the opponents investigations. Biography cannot come to the rescue. Rather, the approach used by Derrida in *Points...Interviews* and *Mémoires* leads us to Rousseau's *Confessions*. This approach states that all questions about de Man (or anybody) are, ultimately unanswerable, and, therefore, who might have the right to judge, condemn, or absolve? To push this

further, what we encounter here returns us to the fictional dilemma of the Jean-Jacques of the *Confessions*. Scandal leaves undeclared the limitations imposed on any knowledge concerning the truth of a past event. It ignores the fact that one will never be able to understand the motivation behind de Man's work and, ultimately, it ignores the fictionality of de Man as (auto)biographical subject.

Slander's abstraction, its non-availability, is masked in the textual product of the *scandal*. This *scandal* immediately arises to supplement the past *slander*. So, for example, slanders such as Rousseau's slander against Marion, or de Man's against the Jews -*which can only be slanders if motivated by a malicious intention* - are concretised into scandalous texts which evidence this intention. In Rousseau's case he produces that (ironic) text himself, perhaps hoping to complicate later texts such as those produced by the academics and journalists in the contemporary cases we here discuss. In *Mémoires* Derrida alludes to de Man's *Allegories of Reading* [61] in order to stress how de Man's reading of the *Confessions* (similar in almost every way to his own in *Of Grammatology*), should deconstruct such an investigative journalism. People would, no doubt, like to invite both de Man and Derrida to the 'simulacrum of confession',[62] without appreciating the irony by which this desire for the confessional text undermines the very possibility of *slander* once we understand the limitations imposed on the nature of any confession. Confessional language is fictional. Debates which seek to condemn writers due to a perceived private misconduct, are based on what amounts to no more than stories.[63] Confessions are stories but to confess (from the Latin *Confessare*; to speak fully), is currently misunderstood as offering a "full speech". Confessional language must instead be understood in a double epistemological perspective. It functions within a possibility of verifiable referential cognition but also as a statement whose reliability cannot be verified by any empirical

means.[64] The confessional text relies upon this impossibility of knowing and this impossibility, this literal non-presence of the past introduces the purely fictive value of the confessional text. To confess is a discursive process which *might* include a principle of referential verification as extra verbal moment. However, the confessional text must be understood as fictive and this radical fictionality enables any excuse to function. As de Man writes in *Allegories*:

> It is always possible to face up to any experience (to excuse any guilt), because the experience always exists simultaneously as fictional discourse and as empirical event and it is never possible to decide which of the two possibilities is the right one.[65]

This necessary indecision, where crimes become stories about crimes, renders any excuse workable and counteracts any scandal which might attempt a total denunciation based on what *evidence*? It is this impossibility of knowing which guarantees the success of any excuse or alibi and counters the *scandalous* text. Biography cannot incriminate biography. The irreducibility of the 'other' seems to make a responsibility (response) impossible, or, reversely, the only possible responsible response embraces the undecidable and refuses to reach any conclusion.

Scandal is here understood as ultimately irresponsible and insufficient as a response because of its reliance upon a radically irresponsible grammar. De Man called this grammar the textual 'machine', provoking an interpretation that entails the loss of the illusion of meaning and a rethinking of subjectivity. To this extent 'the distinction between fiction and autobiography is undecidable'.[66] The subject is threatened due to the estrangement between the significance and the performance of the text. Any subject must be fictive because, in order to come in to being as text, the referential function had to be suspended.

Used in Derrida's defence this argument has potency. In *Points...Interviews*, Derrida calls upon the same theory of the unknowability of the subject, saying that if the media and the academic press have a duty to 'render an account'[67] such a schema is always already complicated by the need to clearly state that things are always 'still more complicated'.[68]

4.2. Responsibilities

Can we possibly approach a new definition of responsibility?

I have discussed the etymologies of the words *slander* and *scandal* and how I believe them to have developed differing functions. I looked at how certain writers have tried to deconstruct this difference through a rigorous reading of the *hors texte/texte* distinction, aiming to re-synonymise *slander* and *scandal* within the text. I also attempted to reveal the secret at the heart of any scandal - a secret which seeks to hide the fact that any knowledge is merely the supplement to a language which continually attempts to make a non-presence present. I proposed that the intending subject was not available and that fictional scenarios (scandalous texts) were produced in order to supplement and disguise this lack. I also suggested that once all scandalous texts are understood as fictitious, *slander* is rendered impotent and non-consequential.

The question still arises of how one might reintroduce responsibility into this structure of objective intentionality which continually outruns the possibility of an authentic, subjective and conscious intentionality. I would like to turn, finally, to Derrida's recent text, *The Gift of Death*, a text which, I believe, resurrects many of the major

concerns and themes of his *Of Grammatology*. Here again, the discourse focuses on secrets, the face-to-face, *scandal* and responsibilities.[69]

Secrecy, according to Derrida, opposes responsibility. The text, as fervour for fusion, is part of this secret. Derrida wonders what responsibility might mean. Traditionally it belongs to a space where one is called upon to explain oneself, one's actions or one's thoughts before an other. The call to responsibility demands that you account for your intentions. As I have noted, the text is the traditional space where these intentions materialise and, even in the absence of the intending subject - de Man is dead - the debate will produce these texts and assume responsibility for the avowal of intention. And yet there is, at the heart of our history, an 'abyss' that resists totalising summary. Derrida discusses a chain reaction of repressions or secrets about the origins of the myth of the responsible and accountable self; a chain which stretches back through Christianity to Platonism and, ultimately, to orgiastic mystery. Each new structure of responsibility relies upon these suppressed secrets.[70] History itself has conditioned our idea of responsibility through the masking and repression of our non-knowledge and 'this history would need to be acknowledged as if confessed!'.[71]

Thus, the secret of conventional responsibility relies on the preservation of a nucleus of irresponsibility due to this denial of our non-knowledge. As long as responsibility is subordinated to the objectivity of knowledge -to the preservation of a Platonic rationalism - it is essentially irresponsible. To assume responsibility has, traditionally, always meant that one pursue the 'truth' via an objective knowledge. This knowledge, reinterpreted as falsely referential, reveals the irresponsibility at the heart of responsible action. In the case of the debates, their assumed responsibility,

taken in the absence of the 'protagonist', pretended to access authorial intention when all it did was offer one reading of the author's texts and censor all others.

Thus Derrida highlights what has been - outside of the texts of Rousseau, de Man and a few others - an inadequate thematisation of what responsibility is or *must* be and an inadequate thematisation is, of itself, irresponsible:

> For, if it is true that the concept of responsibility has, in the most reliable continuity of its history, always implied involvement in action, doing, praxis, a decision that exceeds simple conscience or simple theoretical understanding, it is also true that the same concept requires a decision or responsible action to answer for itself consciously, that is, with knowledge of a thematics of what is done, of what action signifies, its causes, ends, etc. In debates concerning responsibility one must always take into account this original and irreducible complexity that links theoretical consciousness (which must also be a thetic or thematic consciousness) to a practical conscience (ethical, legal, political) if only to avoid the arrogance of so many 'clean consciences'.[72]

Irresponsibility necessarily insinuates itself everywhere. As it stands, responsibility is now falsely allied to responding to the other before the "law". The legal system and our entire ethical framework would have it that intentionality is the secret of what is human: that I can tell myself. However, (and Derrida here returns to Rousseau and de Man), language deprives me of my singularity.[73]

Responsibility is always unique, always singular, always a response to one event - my event - so how might I ever respond from within a predetermined linguistic system? Moving then, towards a redefinition of responsibility, Derrida approaches *silence*. So far, a strange contract has always bound responsibility to speech. However, it now appears that the absolute responsibility for my actions, if that responsibility is to be singular and unique - not re-iterable in language - must imply silence. This silence is, of course, intolerable to those professing any 'allegiance to morality in general'.[74] This silence is 'both a scandal and a paradox'.[75] De Man's silence, as I noted in the previous chapter, was intolerable to a legion of theorists who desired the *story* of de Man. His silence was paradoxical because contrary to the norm and scandalous

because this silence - of the *non-lieu* - could be filled up as air rushes to fill a vacuum. A scandalous text must, necessarily replace a silence that cannot be tolerated by a society based on the Word.

What must be understood and what consistently refuses understanding, is the simple paradox which structures our current, orthodox interpretation of responsibility: that it demands an accounting *and* an absolute singularity. Speaking, (and writing), involves one in a generality that (a)voids any possibility of singular response and thus, responsibility. How can a universal structure express my individual self? This refusal, this denial of the *aporia* at the heart of responsibility leads to falsely moralistic debates which treat 'as nihilist, relativist, even poststructuralist, and worst still deconstructionist, all those who remain concerned in the face of such a display of good conscience'.[76]

Post-script

As I write this, Radio Four hosts a discussion on the Death of History.[77] Hugh Whitemoor speaks of Deconstruction as an infection spreading through our Universities: 'It was thought that the plague within France had been contained.' At present it is still possible to scandalise entire philosophical movements due to a mistaken belief in the availability of intention. The ability of academics to persistently avow that they, somehow, know the intentions behind deconstruction - as if we might 'know' Derrida or de Man - enables them to attack writers in order to denounce a wider movement which can here, rightly or wrongly, be termed Deconstruction. As I have noted in previous chapters, the *scandal* of specific movements - Rousseauism, Deconstruction, Althusserian Marxist Theory - is only a

scandal once someone has proven that the movement is the product of a malicious intent. The malicious mind must be capable of theft, of killing a wife, or of sending a race of people to the gas chambers. The crime itself differs and is, of itself, not important, it merely serves a function: to reveal that such a criminal is capable only of producing a contaminated thought.

All I hope to illustrate here is the irony by which those who would oppose these writers call upon biography as a weapon in their war. Looking for the 'truth' about someone, one finds only texts and, (mis)taking these texts for 'truth', one becomes 'guilty' of the very irresponsibility that that someone is charged with. Irresponsible in what sense? Well, armed with these properly *scandalous* fictions anyone can call for the censorship of books - the supposed "real" life behind the text can be written unscrupulously by anyone opposed to new possibilities of thought - and the perceived personal short-fallings of men can be used to scandalise entire philosophical movements. I here point out that, rather than attack deconstruction through a rigorous reading of its texts, it can be much easier, much more conventional, and much more gratifying, to attack a thought process via the creation of a defamatory, that is, scandalous, biographical text, which can be (mis)taken for the truth. As Derrida points out, such fictional biographies have been used unscrupulously by the many who felt personally threatened by new types of thought and, with this in mind, Derrida refers us to Jon Weiner's article in *The Nation* which attacks deconstruction *through* de Man by attempting to 'transfer onto deconstruction and its "politics" [...] a stream of calumny or slanderous insinuation'.[78] The author of this article 'has the nerve to speak of de Man as an "academic Waldheim"'.[79]

It goes without saying that, until we attempt to seriously re-define what *slander* and *scandal* might ever mean in our society; until we recognise the paradox at the heart of our present day concept of responsibility - that responsibility is always unique but this uniqueness is denied when I respond for myself and my actions in the generality of language - we will continue to allow ourselves to fall victims of dominant discourses whose sole aim is to *convince* us of their ultimate *correctness.* Other discourses - for example, deconstruction - will be proved *incorrect.* They will be vilified and censored by debates that can reductively (mis)read a critical engagement with the discourse of fascism as, rather, the inspired 'product' of that ultimately scandalous and censoring thought process we know as fascism.

[1] In that year Derrida wrote *Of Grammatology* and de Man delivered 'the Gauss Seminar', transcripts of which appeared in his *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism.*
[2] I here refer to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*; Volume II, edited by C.T.Onions, (Oxford, at the Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press), 1933.
[3] David, Rene, and Henri P. de Vries, *The French Legal System: An Introduction to Civil Law Systems* (New York: Oceana, 1958) pp.56-59.
[4] Greenawalt, *Speech, Crime and the Uses of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p46.
[5] See Carter-Ruck, Peter F., *Libel and Slander* (London: Faber, 1972)
[6] For an in-depth discussion on the persistent contradictions within legal doctrine and the implication of this for literary theory, look to the work of the *Critical Legal Studies Movement* (C.L.S.). See especially Roberto Mangabeira Ungar, *The Critical Legal Studies Movement*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987)
[7]See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.158, for an introduction to the concept of the *'hors texte'* - meaning 'that which is outside the text'.
[8] I refer, in this chapter, to three texts by Derrida; *Mémoires for Paul de Man, Points...Interviews, 1974-1994* (ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf and others (California: Stanford University Press, 1995) and *The Gift of Death.*
[9] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques "letter to D'Offreville at Montmerency", Oct.4th 1761. Found in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, p.31
[10] *Le Soir*, December 1941
[11] de Man, "The Gauss Seminar" (1967), in "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self", *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993),p.23
[12] Published in 1979.
[13] *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Vol.2, ed. C.T. Onions, 1933
[14] de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p.279.
[15] See *The Confessions* (London, Penguin, 1953), pp.86-89
[16] de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading*, pp. 284-285
[17] de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p.285, translating Rousseau's *Fourth Rêverie*, (*Oeuvres Complètes*, p.1029).
[18] de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading*, p.286
[19] ibid., p.289
[20] ibid., p.289
[21] ibid., p.290
[22] ibid., p.291
[23] ibid., p.291
[24] de Man's translation of Rousseau's *Fourth Rêverie* (*Oeuvres Complètes*, p.1029), in *Allegories of Reading*, p.291
[25] *Allegories of Reading*, p.291
[26]de Man's translation of Rousseau's *Fourth Rêverie* (*Oeuvres Complètes*, p.1027), in *Allegories of Reading*, p.291
[27]de Man's citation of Rousseau's *Confessions*, (*Oeuvres Complètes*, vol.1, p.86), in *Allegories of Reading*, p.288
[28] *Allegories of Reading*, p.292
[29] de Man's translation of Rousseau's *Fourth Rêverie* (*Oeuvres Complètes)*, p.1030, in *Allegories of Reading*,p.292
[30] de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p.293
[31] ibid., p.293
[32] ibid., p.293
[33] For an extended discussion of the references to the *machinal* in Rousseau's *Confessions* and in his *Rêveries*, see *Allegories of Reading*, pp.294
[34] See Luke Wilson, *Hamlet and Hales v. Petit* (unpublished article), p.20.
[35]ibid., citing Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1977)

[36]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in the Translator's Preface to Derrida's, *Of Grammatology*, p.xix
[37] ibid., p.xvii
[38] ibid., pp.150
[39] ibid., p.150
[40] ibid., p.112
[41] ibid., p.139
[42] Greenawalt, *Speech, Crime and the Uses of Language*, p.222
[43] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.141
[44] Rousseau, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.116
[45] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, P.144
[46] ibid., p.149
[47] ibid., p.151
[48] ibid., pp.158-159
[49] Kraus, *Half-Truths and One-and-a-Half Truths* [*sic*] (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986), p.33
[50] We concentrate especially on the final chapter added in January of 1988.
[51] See my Chapter 2.
[52] I refer here to Derrida's own remark made in *Mémoires for Paul de Man*: 'as for me, you know, no one can suspect me of anything: I am Jewish, I was persecuted as a child during the war' (p.243).
[53] "Les Juifs dans la Littérature Actuelle", *Le Soir*, March 4th, 1941.
[54] Derrida, Jacques, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, p.205
[55] ibid., p.225, fn.39, where Derrida also recalls the letter written by de Man to Renato Pagglioli on January 25th ,1955. In this letter de Man, then at Harvard, wrote:

> In 1940 and 1941, I wrote some literary articles in *Le Soir*, and I, like most of the other contributors, stopped doing so when Nazi thought-control did no longer allow freedom of statement.

[56] Derrida, Jacques, *Points...Interviews*, p. 182
[57] ibid., p.182
[58] ibid., p.182
[59] ibid., p.186
[60] Derrida, Jacques, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*,p.161
[61] ibid., p.228
[62] ibid.
[63] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of de Man's "story".
[64]de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading*, p.281. Also, it may be noted that in the Catholic confessional one is never called upon to produce evidence - indeed secrecy and privacy are prerequisites.
[65] ibid., p. 293
[66] de Man, Paul, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, p.70
[67] Derrida, Jacques, *Points...Interviews*, p.427
[68] ibid., p.429
[69] Derrida, Jacques, *The Gift of Death*, pp.101-102, where he cites Matthew's Gospel, Ch. 5:27-30: 'And if thy right eye offend (scandalizat/skandalizei): the skandalon is what makes one fall, stumble, sin'.
[70] ibid., p.4
[71] ibid., p.10
[72] ibid., p.25
[73] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Confessions*, (London, Penguin, 1953),pp.114-116
[74] See Derrida, Jacques, *The Gift of Death*, p.64
[75] ibid.
[76] ibid., p.85
[77] Radio Four's "Start The Week", with Melvyn Bragg, October 20th, 1997.
[78] Derrida, Jacques, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, p.255, discussing Jon Weiner's, "Deconstructing de Man", *The Nation*, January 9th, 1988, p.24
[79] ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE ARCHIVE

The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type.
Nietzsche[1]

5.0. Introduction

This chapter examines two histories or archives which appear in 'documents' called *The Confessions,* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and *The Future Lasts a Long Time,* by Louis Althusser. In times when the archive is being given an ever increasing importance[2] by the historian and the literary biographer who seek to establish the validity of an event in order to attack the validity of a theory, we hope to undermine archive theory through the reading of the archive as *copy, reiteration* and *type.* Section one will reveal the striking parallels and repetitions that occur in our two documents through a discussion of similarities of structure, content and analyses. Section two will examine these two texts in the light of Derrida's *Archive Fever; The Gift of Death* and *Of Grammatology* hoping to discuss ideas of archive-responsibility.

5.1. Example or reference

Before Rousseau's *Confessions* there were perhaps two significant autobiographies: St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Santa Teresa's *Life of Herself.* However, unlike our later autobiographies, these were not written in any way to reveal the self, to justify actions or to seek legal respite. Instead they archived a religious event which might illustrate some greater truth:

> In the medieval schema, mystery, the historical, was subordinate to symbol, reserved for transcendent truths beyond history. The service of high truth authorised fictional scenarios since truth value lay in exemplarity, not referentiality. [3]

W.D. Howarth sees Rousseau as an essentially modern writer. According to Howarth, Rousseau divorced himself from a classical style of prose useful only when generalising about universal truths and initiated a literary exploration of individual personality by using a much more colourful vocabulary. To this extent, Howarth attests to the originality of Rousseau's autobiography when he claims that "[o]ne world finishes with Voltaire, another begins with Rousseau".[4] Later autobiographies would prioritise the possibility of referentiality: the possibility that one might move from the text toward the signified it would mean. Rousseau and Althusser both exploit this possibility and claim that their texts are motivated by the desire for justice.[5] I have already noted how the concept of referentiality is linked with the development of the legal justice system and how the possibility of justice depends upon the possibility of a textual reference to the non-textual. The legal system offers the possibility of response and this response or responsibility assumes that the self is an instance of singularity and liberty. Any legal reading of the textual response assumes that it can transgress this text towards something other than it: the real life

"behind" the textual response. Thus, there is a fatal necessity inscribed in the functioning of the legal system, that the sign function as the thing itself.

One needs proof, evidence and testimony and another word for these is *archive.*[6] These autobiographies, *The Confessions* and *Future,* could, then, be described as texts written to evidence in favour of the author by supposedly showing him *as he was* to those who had misunderstood him. The methodology of their archival technique is simple: they will record all the events they have lived through and all their feelings about those events.[7] By bearing witness to the singularity or the originality of these events they will be able to reveal the truth and uniqueness which is, ultimately, themselves: 'In the descriptive, the detail represents truth itself, uninterpreted existence, almost an essence of being, simply because no narrative motivation for it is imaginable.' [8] Rousseau promises to relate 'all that has happened to [him], all that [he has] done, all that [he has] felt'.[9]

There is a common belief that something is truer the more textual space it occupies. Lost in an excess of detail, the archivist would seem to efface himself, allowing the event to present itself spontaneously:

> I endeavour in all cases to explain the prime causes, in order to convey the interrelation of results. I should like, in some way, to make my soul *transparent* to the reader's eye, and for that purpose I am trying to present it from all points of view, [...]and to contrive that none of its movements shall escape his notice.[...] By relating to him in simple detail *all* that has happened to me, [...] I cannot lead him into error. His task is to assemble these elements and to assess the being who is made up of them. The summing up must be his, and if he comes to the wrong conclusion, the fault will be of his own making.[10]

Rousseau as author disappears and only evidence of himself, which *naturally* appears to present himself in all his vast detail, remains. Any responsibility for the archive is shifted onto the reader who then becomes a type of archaeologist who must re-order the archive. Rousseau is erased and the archive, because it contains all the available information, can seem to speak spontaneously in a confusion with the *arkhe* itself.

However, Rousseau immediately qualifies this desire. He deconstructs the archive-machine by stating his one and only fear which is the only real fear: 'that I may not tell everything'.[11] The archivist must admit that some events are lost. Rousseau concedes that he may 'omit or transpose facts or make mistakes in dates'.[12] Rousseau will be true to his feelings but facts will necessarily elude him.[13] Similarly, in Althusser's text, what was initially motivated by the desire to establish a mock legal response to a trial he was not allowed, is redirected. Where the trial demands evidence and fact, Althusser is no longer willing to decide what constitutes a fact, writing: 'I intend to stick closely to the facts throughout this succession of memories by association, but hallucinations are also facts .'[14]

Feelings, desires, the unconscious - all need to be detailed if the archive is to live up to its claims. In the opening pages of both 'documents', the archive appears as increasingly fragile. In order to accomplish this archival feat, a new style of writing must be coined. Indeed, both writers lay claim to writing a unique work and this *must* be the case with any archive as it pertains to individuality. On the first page of Rousseau's autobiography he writes:

> I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent and which, once complete, will have no imitator.[15]

To a great extent, any belief in the originality of an event must lie in its unrelatedness to anything going before or after it. If a work refuses to be copied it is truly unique because surely anything that can be copied can be a copy.[16]

In a movement of (dis)association, Althusser deconstructs Rousseau's claim to originality in *Confessions* and threatens to destabilise the archive-machine. Reiterating Rousseau he writes:

> I did what no one else has either wanted or been able to do before.[17]

This claim, made at the beginning of Althusser's text, challenges the foundation of the claim it reiterates. As if to make the link more obvious, Althusser must utter the name of his predecessor in a moment charged with irony:

> Alas, I am no Rousseau. But in planning to write about myself and the dramatic events I lived through and live with still, I often thought about his unprecedented boldness. Not that I would ever claim as he did at the beginning of his *Confessions*: "I am embarking on something that has never been done before." Certainly not.[18]

Considering what has just been written this remark merely strengthens Althusser's observation: that in writing of himself he looked to another text. Within a strict economy and with rigorous intellect, Althusser at once recalls Rousseau's (problematical) claim to originality through its repetition and simultaneous debunking. Indeed, everything that Althusser writes in the first pages of *Future* recalls Rousseau's own autobiography.

Althusser's claim to originality rests upon the style of *Future*. His text is an "objective" one because he has asked friends to contribute newspaper articles, to lend diaries covering periods of intimacy with the author and, in short, to collate all sorts of information relating to him and 'covering those years of describing events to him which he had partially forgotten'. [19]

Althusser has also collected journals, articles, medical reports and other data to establish what he calls "facts". His book is full of comments, reflections, citations and random remarks from a range of sources which might be personal, psychoanalytical, philosophical or political. His archive would be jointly constructed from these collated texts, 'real memories' and other 'imagined ones'.[20] This approach to archiving - the compilation of diverse source materials added to autobiographical narrative - allied to his written intention to be 'as *objective* as humanly possible' - is the basis of his claim to originality. He hopes to do 'what no one else has either

wanted or been able to do before: [to] gather together and collate[...] all the available "information" as if it related to someone else'. [21]

Once again, Althusser's claim to originality is undermined through his determination to recall Rousseau at every moment within the text specifically as it pertains to the methodology of the archive. Wherever Althusser claims to be the first he recalls that other first, Rousseau, who can no longer be first because he is not the last. Even a superficial reading of *The Confessions* reveals Rousseau's reliance upon "outside" material in the construction of his archive. Rousseau understood that much of the detail of his memories was lost and hoped to replenish the gaps by using letters sent to him at crucial moments in his life. Rousseau also gathered and transcribed diaries and other published articles and wrote: 'If by chance I have used some material embellishment it has only been to fill a void due to a defect of memory.'[22]

But what if, as it seems in Rousseau's *Confessions*, these gaps can not be filled? What does the archive really represent?

> There are some events in my life that are as vivid as if they had just occurred. But there are gaps and blanks that I cannot fill except by means of a narrative as muddled as the memory I preserve of the events.[23]

According to Rousseau, some gaps can only be filled with nonsense, whilst other gaps cannot be filled because letters and other archive materials are lost:

> I have begged M. de Malesherbes to try and procure me a copy of that letter. If I can get hold of it, through him or through anyone else, it will be found in the collection I mean to append to my *Confessions*. [24]

No such letter appears in the text, nor was there an appendix to supplement the text. If the archive is evidential can it tolerate missing links? Later on in his text Rousseau would bemoan the fact that papers collected for this supplement, gathered to 'make good the defects [of] memory' had all 'passed into other hands and will never return'.[25] Letters covering a period of about seven years do remain. Some originals

are in Rousseau's hands and others, transcripts, with the originals are, we read, in the care of a M. du Peyrou. Indeed within the narrative of *The Confessions* Rousseau frequently resorts to using these letters wherever he feels less able to remember.[26]

Althusser's other problematic claim to originality lies in his inclusion of 'imagined' or 'hallucinated' memories. These hallucinations are, according to Althusser, 'also facts'[27] and are thus given equal status with events which might actually have happened, that is, events which the historian might be able to uncover. This psychoanalytical approach, which allows the archive to tap the unconscious, also recalls Rousseau's *Confessions* when he writes, 'my imagination [...] compensates me with sweet memories'.[28]

What unites Rousseau and Althusser, what resonates in the very word "confess", as in any theory of the archive, is this idea of full speech. Both the sacrament of Confession and the theory of the archive presuppose an intention to make something fully present: to evidence some event in its totality.[29] One remembers Althusser's intention to be 'as *objective* as humanly possible'[30] and Rousseau's fear that he may not be able to tell everything. Rousseau, and later Althusser, certainly let it be known that evidence or events, had been lost or stolen and certainly, part of their responsibility as archivists is to reveal this *aporia* at the heart of autobiography. Althusser complicates his own testimony at each stage through his recollection and citation of Rousseau's problematic text. Althusser can only end up offering a 'reasonably clear account of [him]self' by calling upon others to reflect upon his 'concrete case'.[31] As previously noted, this legal terminology is not itself without consequence for archive theory. When the archive is understood as evidence what happens when some part of that testimony is always lost?

(Auto)-biography: Althusser and the "absent father"

Certainly then, in its stated intentions and in its methodology, Althusser's *Future* is a conscious "type" of Rousseau's *Confessions.* Looking at its autobiographical content, where content is considered as something which ought to be specific to the author, one is continually struck by parallels. It is not unusual for an autobiography to start with a *roman familial*, indeed it is almost a prerequisite:

> Habitually speaking, autobiography commences with this retrospection towards the commencement, as if under the sway of a mythic 'once upon a time' which pinpoints the absolute singularity of a departure or birth.[32]

The author narrates his parents' courtship, perhaps his own birth and early childhood, all of which crucially exist as "imported" memories.[33] Any autobiography must start with such a fictional account of origin: with this story borrowed from friends and relatives. What I hope to do now is to highlight striking similarities of autobiographical narrative between the two texts under discussion in an attempt to reveal how Althusser, at every moment of his autobiography, "borrows" or "imports" narrative from Rousseau's *Confessions* in order to establish autobiography as fiction.

Rousseau writes of a birth marked by death and unhappiness as does Althusser.[34] In Rousseau's case his mother died giving birth to him. As for Althusser, his mother's fiancé, Louis, died leaving his brother to marry her in his stead and leaving them to name their son after this dead uncle. Both children are made to compensate for those who are dead: they have to be both themselves and that other who is "behind" them:

> My birth was the first of my misfortunes [...] my father [...] never got over it. He seemed to see her again in me, [...] he would say with a groan; "Give her back to me, console me for her, fill the void she has left in my heart! Should I love you so if you were not more to me than a son?"

and:

> I knew early on [...] that my mother [...] loved someone else through and beyond me, using my physical presence to remind her of a person who was absent, or rather seeing his presence through my absence.[35]

Althusser believed that his very name, 'a dead man's name', testified to the fact that he represented somebody else.[36] Neither author, then, is unique in this experience of living *for* and *as* another. Therefore, experiences which might have defined them merely serve to blur boundaries between them. Where Rousseau or Althusser might have presented themselves to us within the text they are absented: lost in each other's narrative in a reflexive textual movement which denies the singularity and hence the autobiographical 'value' of their childhood predicament.

Althusser constantly refers to an absent father as crucial to his sense of self. This paternal absenteeism is also a defining factor of Rousseau's concept of identity. In a movement of repetition, both authors define their adolescent selves in terms of an enforced isolationism:

> Never once, until I left my father, was I allowed to run out alone into the road with the other children,

and:

> I was forbidden by my mother to play in the streets.[37]

Puritanical and paranoid, Althusser's mother educates her son in a "pure" household away from other children:

> The only excursion I ever made [...] was to the flat of a thin, languid pair who seemed disembodied and otherworldly. They were not husband and wife but brother and sister [...], both unmarried and living together permanently.[38]

Rousseau's own first trip away from home is identical: he goes to lodge at the home of a pastor, M. Lambercier and his sister, Mlle. Lambercier, in order to pursue his education.[39]

Both write of the regenerative effects of country life on their spirits and of the importance of country ways in shaping their morals. Both also believe that their lives would have taken a happier course had they been born into farming families.[40] What is interesting is that the two of them expend a considerable amount of ink writing highly stylised fictional accounts of fulfilling experiences "in Nature". Althusser writes of a day spent threshing his grandfather's wheat succeeded by an evening of celebration: 'What a sense of splendour and communion I felt.'[41] What follows is a passage rich in descriptive detail, where odours, sounds and tastes are all conjured through a hyper-sensitivity to the various natural stimuli surrounding him. Althusser writes that, among these farm hands, he felt like he belonged. This tale of acceptance and harmony within nature is, however, a fraudulent fabrication:

> Faced with the truth, I now have to make a painful confession. I was not inside the kitchen and, therefore, did not experience the wine-drinking and the chaotic singing at first hand...I dreamt it, that is to say, I simply had an intense desire for it to be real. It certainly could have happened, but for the sake of truth I have to accept and present it for what it was in my memory: a sort of hallucination of my intense desire. [42]

Althusser admits that he stood on the outside of the door listening in. His memory is constructed from distorted and muffled sounds and imagined scenarios. Yet we know that for Althusser hallucinations are also facts, which is to say, they are able to archive something about Althusser which is as much a part of his truth as other "real" events. To repress this unconscious archive would, according to Althusser, threaten the stability of the archive.

As for Rousseau, he writes an analogous piece, although he marks it out as fictive or "hallucinatory" through the deliberate disruption of the narrative. Rousseau describes the farmhouse idyll of *Les Charmettes*.[43] It is perhaps significant that both scenes take place in the same type of location and that this location is traditionally found in the realm of fiction.[44] Rousseau's reverie or 'hallucination' begins as he details the dates

when he leased the farmhouse. This dating clearly interrupts the narrative flow of a text ostensibly concerned with portraying a utopian experience. For two pages Rousseau describes a rural perfection based on innocence and joy. Yet Rousseau is surely mistaken. Historical archives reveal that the farm lease was taken two years after Rousseau claimed to have moved in.[45] However, we must not rely solely on the historian to highlight this inconsistency. Rousseau himself provides the opportunity for any vigilant reader to mistrust the authenticity of this archived event and to reread it as a 'virtual' or unconscious archive.

Firstly, the passage in which Rousseau describes his time spent at *Les Charmettes* is markedly out of keeping with the rest of the text in terms of style and sentiment, owing more to the picaresque tradition of contemporary novels. More importantly, it is structurally impossible that this passage should not prove problematic. Throughout his text Rousseau has been very careful to write within the confines of a strict chronology. Thus, Book 1:1 covers the period 1719-1723, Book 1:2 covers the period 1723-28, Book 2 covers 1728-1731 and so on. A problem arises when we realise that there is no room in Rousseau's narrative structure for the period spent at *les Charmettes* to exist because it exists 'elsewhere' within the text. Cohen questions the authenticity of the passage and uses Rousseau's mistake as proof of a mental imbalance.[46] However, Rousseau's Book 6:1, where the idyll is described, covers the period of 1738. This year is written only to be immediately erased by Rousseau in part 2 of that same book which claims to cover the period 1737-41. This second book should then re-elaborate the account of the idyll in a unique example of repetition for repetition's sake. Yet, in its detailed analysis of Rousseau's life in these three years it fails to mention the farmhouse at all. The year of 1738 is differently accounted for. Thus, Rousseau can archive an event and then retract it - as Althusser did - allowing

the event to disappear "behind" its rewriting only a few pages later. Not only does Cohen not offer an account for this stunning piece of editing,[47] indeed, I have never yet read an account of this re-writing, but even if this major structural anomaly did not exist, Rousseau's own Book 6 offers us an honest interpretation of its fictive content:

> Indeed if it all consisted of facts, deeds, and words, I could describe [les Charmettes] and in a sense convey its meaning. But how can I tell what was neither said, nor done, nor even thought[...]. My imagination [...] compensates me.[48]

Where historians might only be able to offer evidence of Rousseau's jealousy, impotence and increasing paranoia it is possible to archive these years differently and positively, allowing for at least two complex and contradictory narratives which effectively destabilise any faith in a traditional concept of the archive. Certainly, Althusser was referring to Rousseau with his own virtual archive. At the height of his reverie, when he loses himself in the one voice of the singing farmhands, he names Rousseau. He looses his identity not to that of a communal body of workers, but instead to Rousseau. The song that the worker's of Althusser's hallucination sing is one of peasant revolt or, more significantly, a 'song of the Jacquerie'.[49] It is, for Althusser, 'reminiscent of the name Jacques I wished had been mine'.[50]

It would seem that the whole point of Althusser's dream archive was to evoke Rousseau's name and his fiction in order to undermine his own, and all other, attempts at archiving. Our name, the reassuring secret of self-identity, comes to function as the so-called-proper. I believe that my proper name presents me even though I really know that my name is constantly copied elsewhere. If the archive is reliant upon proper names, what might it mean for Althusser to copy Rousseau's *Confessions* inserting his own name instead of Rousseau's, whilst writing of how

Louis is the name of another and recognising also that *Louis* is a homophone for the word *lui*, the masculine third person pronoun.

The originality and the non-transmutability of Rousseau's text continues to be undermined throughout Althusser's autobiography as he is seen to *take the place* of Rousseau. Rousseau's text is inserted into Althusser's where it can assume the status of a borrowed fiction. There are identical references to adolescent homosexual encounters[51] and to more serious homosexual commitments in later life:

> We became so intimate that we planned to spend our lives together. I was to go to Ascoytia, after some years, and live with him on his estate. All the details of the scheme were arranged[...]. Subsequent events [...] his marriage [...] have parted us forever.[52]

and:

> I wrote to him from Morocco, [...] begging him never to get married. Though he gave me his word, he did not keep it, and I was left to suffer. [53]

Both writers chronicle the symbolic rape they suffered at the hands of mother figures,[54] narrate their fascination with the monastic life,[55] write of a virginity maintained beyond average years and reveal an obsession not only with this economy of sexuality but also with financial economy. Althusser was miserly, feeling that his need to have money "in reserve" was crucial to any understanding of him. Similarly, Rousseau coveted money.[56] Freedom for both of them, according to their autobiographies, was dependent on financial security and neither was averse to bouts of petty thieving.[57]

In another interesting example of similitude the two authors became convinced beyond all medical and circumstantial evidence - Althusser was still a virgin - that they had V.D. In the process of visiting doctors both men discovered that they had a malformation of the penis which could actually prevent the sufferer from catching

sexually transmitted diseases.[58] Indeed, both texts scrupulously chronicle health details.

A sense of *impotence,* in the fullest sense of that word, pervades much of what we feel we "know" about these men. This does not mean that these authors were incapable of sex: both fathered children. Rather, this feeling of powerlessness is more generally apparent. They claim to desperately want to be in love with a woman, yet feel incapable of this love.[59] Despite spending most of their lives with one woman, their wives, both men maintain that they do not love these women:

> From the moment I saw her till this very day, I have never felt the least glimmering of love for her [...] the woman who has been dearest to me.

and:

> I felt incapable of the least expression of genuine love towards her.[60]

Certainly, while it is wrong to say that these men were sexually impotent - there is no textual evidence for this - both men describe their first sexual encounter in terms of repugnance, shame and a feeling of incestuous guilt:

> I was overcome by feelings of terror and repulsion - I could not bear the smell of her skin which I found disgusting [...]. When she left I was plunged into a profound state of anguish from which I could not escape

and:

> I felt repugnance and fear [...]. The day came[...] Was I happy? No; I tasted the pleasure but I knew not what invincible sadness poisoned its charm.[61]

Both men write of the serious depressions suffered as a consequence of sexual experiences tainted by incestuous feelings.[62] The result of this was a strategic sterility: Rousseau's children were orphaned out and Althusser's wife went to England for an abortion. Indeed, such feelings of artifice and sterility are discussed by both writers when relating all aspects of their lives. Artifice is identified by both as the very foundation of the education system. Both deliberate upon a process of seduction at

the heart of education which reduces it to a system of deception, imitation and flattery. Those who do not seduce through imitation, fail, whilst those who wish to remain in the system to subvert it - Rousseau and Althusser - try to operate at a distance.[63] Rousseau went into retreat and Althusser sought "refuge" in the Rue d'Ulm. This deliberate policy of isolationism became the underlying principle of their behaviours and their philosophies:

> You only have to read my texts to realise that the themes of solitude and responsibility run through them like an obsessive leitmotif. On so many occasions I have repeated that I simply *intervened* [...] alone, against the world - which my adversaries made me aware of for a long time- and at my own risk.[64]

Althusser's constant return to the risks inherent in the choice of isolation and his reliance upon the theme of responsibility, must be read in the light of Rousseau's life spent in isolation, be it at the Hermitage, Neuchâtel or, most obviously, on the little island of Saint-Pierre in the middle of the Lake of Bienne. Here Rousseau deliberately chose a site which would serve as a self-contained prison.[65]

Silence, the enemy

Mutually tied to the 'reputation of being a recluse',[66] a necessary dilemma arises: does a writer seeking anonymity get more attention? Certainly it is not without irony that I note that both men were renowned for their reclusivity. This silence, this distance from other men, carried risks. Both writers paradoxically ally their desire for anonymity to the project of autobiography. The assembling of an archive is intended to compensate the reader for this anonymity by evidencing what this life has consisted of. Each moment then is accounted for in a movement which *makes up for* any prior withholding of information and simultaneously silences any malicious or slanderous

rumour. The archive would replace this lived experience. It is a fear of the repercussions of silence which motivates autobiography:

> Nothing about me must remain hidden or obscure [...]. Indeed, [the reader] must never lose sight of me for a single instant, for if he finds the slightest gap in my story, the smallest hiatus, he may wonder what I was doing at that moment and accuse me of refusing to tell the whole truth. I am laying myself sufficiently open to human malice by telling my story, without rendering myself more vulnerable by any silence.[67]

And Althusser writes:

> In offering this extremely personal record of my life to whoever wishes to read it, I again seek, in a somewhat paradoxical movement, a *definitive state of anonymity*: not the anonymity afforded by the fact that I was declared unfit to plead [...] but by publishing all there is to know about me, thus putting an end to further requests for me to be indiscreet.[68]

Yet, it would seem that Althusser chose to construct an archive which, at every moment, would recall a prior archive belonging to Rousseau. Doubly complicated, this copy copies an already problematic, because self-deconstructive, text. Wherever Althusser identifies key narrative themes, wherever he "reveals" himself, he reveals at least one other person - Rousseau - and one other text. If Althusser's *Future* is a copy of Rousseau's *Confessions*, removed at least one pace from his own life, is it a fiction? If it is, and it must be so, then Rousseau's autobiography must also belong to that genre as it refers to types, substituting an idea of truth for an experience of actuality. Certainly, according to Althusser's biographer, Yann Moulier Boutang, Althusser had always regarded the autobiographical work as a *canular* or hoax.[69]

As Althusser referred to Rousseau at the very beginning of *Future*, so he does, with more insistence, towards the end of the book. Immediately after Althusser writes of his desire to present himself to the reader, (see above) he embarks upon a series of statements whose common theme is their reiteration of the name of Rousseau.[70] Significantly, at the height of his desire for total presence through autobiography, he can only refer to that 'seminal text', to that *other* autobiography:

> I saw the *Confessions* as a unique example of a form of self -analysis, undertaken without the slightest form of complacency, in which Rousseau clearly revealed himself in writing about and reflecting on the key events of his childhood and adult life. But most importantly [...] they dealt with sexuality.[71]

How exactly should one take this attribution of originality after over two hundred pages of text which could be seen as a reiteration of Rousseau's *Confessions*? Can I interpret this unproblematically considering Althusser's *hommage*? Bearing in mind that the introduction to *Future* ridiculed Rousseau for claiming his work as unique, I must acknowledge that wherever Althusser chooses to praise Rousseau's radical independence - his aversion to money and his self- education - he is praising traits which he has constantly written of when defining himself.

Better left unsaid

The end of *Future* concerns the murder of Althusser's wife. It is a time period marked by amnesia, emphasised within the text by Althusser's reliance upon medical archives, diaries, journals and letters. Althusser can no longer pretend to believe in the archive. In the space of a few pages he moves away from his already admittedly problematical suggestion that he might really "lay his cards on the table" and "be defined once and for all" to admitting that this final stage of his life - the murder of his wife at his own hands - 'remains unfathomable'.[72] That event which could perhaps be said to belong uniquely to him is in fact lost.

Indeed it is true to say that both texts oscillate between this desire for absolute definition and the recognition of this desire as unattainable. This event, this murder, resists the archiving process. It is marked by amnesia precisely because it is not a reiteration. Althusser cannot find an intertext where someone else kills his wife, the

closest he can get to this event is through the reiteration of medical and psychoanalytical case studies. However, no text can be found which might explain to him why he, Louis Althusser, killed his wife.[73] Agreeing again with Rousseau, Althusser admits that 'gaps and blanks I cannot fill' must remain.[74]

Responsibility to the reader must be redefined. One must admit that the archive is defective - perhaps not really an archive at all. The archive has been confused with historicity, and the responsibility of the archive has thus been misunderstood.[75] Archival knowledge occludes abysses, naïvely presuming to neutralise them. In fact, readers of the archive lose themselves in the excessive detail and fail to notice the *aporia* at the heart of the archive-machine: that which resists narrative. Certainly, any honest archive admits to its deficiencies and establishes an elaborate contractual arrangement. The archive then comes to be seen in terms of the future. Both writers promise, Althusser in the very title of his work, that their archives are incomplete and open to supplementation, intending that the archiving process always look to the future for its eventual completion. In Book Seven of his *Confessions* Rousseau had promised to add a supplement to the work. Although he never did this, he continued to indicate, within the text, that his was a 'work in progress'. The text only ends in an arbitrary way. At the end of his autobiography we realise that within the text and alongside our reading of the text, he too has been reading the text to an assembled group of friends. This audience within the text is invited to comment on the book and their (lack of) comments form part of that book. We as readers are also invited to comment on the book and to provide additional information or relevant stories where we feel that Rousseau has omitted facts, with the implicit agreement that our comments will form part of his archive.[76]

Althusser's *Future* mimics this structure. We believe the book to be ending when in fact it continues. We discover that this book has also been read before its publication so that the reactions of a private audience can be recorded within the text to provide a part of that text. Althusser's analyst has read the book and is invited to offer a supplement.[77] Both authors undermine the value of the supplement as a psychoanalytical structure by revealing it to be a textual construct. These "supplements" appear within the text, they are not added to the positivity of a presence. Althusser also undermines the psychoanalytic model of truth where an opposition of conscious and unconscious states parallels concepts of appearance and reality. To suppose that the truth about Althusser could be recovered only with the help of an analyst would be to deny the medical establishment's involvement in literary narratives. The contribution of Althusser's doctor cannot complete the book. After his six page long commentary, which achieves no more than the silent reaction of Rousseau's privy audience, Althusser, again reminiscent of Rousseau, appeals to the reader for any contributions: 'One final word: I hope those who think they know more or have more to say will not be afraid to do so. They can only help me live.'[78]

In their structure, both texts resist the very possibility of the final word. More than that, they undermine the value of the word itself by problematising the status of the supplement as addition and opening onto a future where an infinity of words can only offer reiterations, copies and translations: '[T]he indefinite process of supplementary has always already *infiltrated* presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self'.[79]

What escapes the archive; that which cannot be said, is what destabilises traditional archive theory. If what we are is unknowable in any complete sense, then what is

partially recovered is done so within a narrative that becomes conflated with identity itself. Any reiteration of this narrative establishes its truth status through a tautologous pattern which merely fulfils reader expectations. Althusser's narrative cannot be judged true because it corresponds to any external image, it is deemed true because it conforms to a grammar. The truth status of Althusser's autobiography can be corroborated through reference to other intertexts whose grammar it repeats. So it is that wherever historians seek to denounce Althusser or Rousseau, they do so not through reference to the discrepancies between their autobiographies and their "real lives", but through inconsistencies between their autobiographies and other intertexts. So that, for example, Cohen can attack Rousseau's confessional narrative only at the moment when it disagrees with other types of textual evidence, such as the lease papers for *les Charmettes.*[80] Similarly, Elisabeth Bruss and Catherine Beaudry are suspicious of Rousseau because, according to them, two textual givens should add up to an extra-textual truth. With Rousseau, however, discrepancies between texts can lead to accusations of 'bad faith.'[81]

5.2. Coming home, or "home is where the text is"

> The papers that I had collected to make good the defects in my memory and to guide me in this undertaking have all passed into other hands and will never again return to mine.
>
> *Confessions*, pp.261-262

> I was distressed to learn that, urged by the authorities and without consulting or even notifying me, those in charge at the Ecole had moved all my things out of my large flat in the rue d'Ulm, a flat which had meant so much to me in my life [...]. This measure seemed to condemn me [...]. So far as my flat was concerned, my physical surroundings, it was as if I no longer existed.
>
> *Future*, pp.262-263

> The meaning of "archive" comes to it from the Greek *arkheon*: a house, a domicile, an address.
>
> *Archive Fever*, p.2

If, as Derrida states, there is an 'archontic dimension of domiciliation',[82] an archontic function without which no archive, as such, can exist, this function is consignation. The archive properly resides as signs gathered together at one address. The archive is 'written proof',[83] it is a system which promotes the very possibility of proving and so it is of itself and in essence a principle which rejects heterogeneity. So what happens when the archive is divided between many different addresses? Rousseau's letters were stolen, mailed to another's house or destroyed. Similarly, Althusser's possessions were all moved from his house and sent to an apartment that he had never seen. This displacement threatens the possibility of their archives so long as a traditional definition of the archive as a principle of consignation and domiciliation is upheld.

Rousseau and Althusser are both homeless when we meet them in their autobiographies. Certainly, any "proof" of who they are resides apart from these archivists. According to Derrida:

> Wherever secrets and heterogeneity would seem to menace even the possibility of *consignation*, this can only have grave consequences for a theory of the archive, as well as for its institutional implementation.[84]

Yet, despite the obvious problems which should counter the possibility of an Althusserian or Rousseauian archive, these institutions do exist and are influential in shaping our ideas about who Althusser and Rousseau were, are and will be. The archive is a powerful mechanism for the control of memory. As Derrida suggests, those who control the archive and, to a lesser extent, those who have access to it, have the power to determine what the rest of us will know about that archive and know *as if we remember.*[85]

Perhaps, as Derrida suggests, democracy can be measured by access to and participation in the archive. However, even if this were the case, even if it were not impossible to imagine a time when one might always be seen as a threat to archive stability,[86] what can it mean to gain access to an archive that has always already been mutilated and impoverished? If the archive is always the site of a suppression, how can we re-interpret the archival principle of domiciliation and consignation?

What might it mean to us that, once dead and buried, Rousseau's body was exhumed and, contrary to his wishes, reburied in Paris, a city he loathed, next to his arch-rival Voltaire? What might this second burial site archive about Rousseau? Might it better serve in telling us something about those who control his archive and who wish it to be known that Rousseau is welcomed "home" to France, so that the archontic principles of domiciliation and consignation are in effect a blow against democracy? Also, what might it mean that once I gain access to the archive, I see only reprographics and transcripts, whilst supposed "original" material remains beyond sight or touch, secreted in temperature-controlled stacks.

According to Derrida, the archive is a site of law. It is perhaps more specifically a site of memory, of conservation and of suppression which we can understand in terms of the legal system. It is where one can 'accumulate, capitalise, stock a quasi-infinity of layers, of archival strata that are at once superimposed, overprinted and enveloped in each other'.[87]

Certainly, archives encourage a geological or archaeological approach. Excavation, surgery and circumcision are all appropriate metaphors and Derrida discusses the removal of the epidermis of the penis as a pertinent symbol of archival investigation: one cuts through layers until one "arrives". What then do we make of two writers

who suffered from phimosis: a condition where the prepuce resists any investigative surgery, where the glands cannot be uncovered or excavated and where a guarded privacy is maintained. Certainly there can be "hidden" archives and we have called these the archives of the unconscious. What is psychoanalysis if it is not an attempt to attest to a type of archival documentation where the historian might identify nothing. For Freud, as indeed for Rousseau and Althusser, dreams, hallucinations and delusions all form a part of truth so that 'there is a *truth of delusion* [...] analogous to that "historical truth",[...] this truth is repressed or suppressed'.[88]

But this virtual archive is no less problematic than its "real" counterpart and in *Future* and *Confessions* the psychoanalytic model of truth was problematised through its implication in the literary narrative. Above all, Rousseau and Althusser seek to upset this archaeological trope of discovery. Rather, what I want here, is to find the moment proper to the archive and to rid myself of the mistaken belief that memory and the archive might ever be the same thing. Or as Derrida would say, the archival moment cannot be predicated upon a spontaneous memory but is experienced instead as a "prosthetic" memory, 'that re-producible, iterable, and conservative production of memory'.[89]

Here is no sense of any archaeology or excavation, rather it is a sense of knowing as if we remember because of a knowledge production based on tautology: all texts are at least a second reading. Who might the mnemonist be? Who might possess a memory from which nothing is ever erased? The possibility of a remembering of origin and the idea of spontaneous memory are effaced in favour of a concept of the archive as the 'copy of an impression'.[90] At least twice removed from origin, the archive as copy

of a copy reformulates the Rousseauian and Althusserian concept of autobiography as reiteration.

If my "new" concept of the archive still lacks rigour it is perhaps because I am uncertain where this archive belongs. Certainly, if I cannot trust the archive to faithfully record the past, if it always fails in this respect, it must belong to the future and to the promise of an event archiving itself in this future to come. Even if the archive has proved inadequate to the task I still invest hope in the archive to come. Thus, I continue to say that the archive *will* exist. There is a desire, what Derrida here calls a "fever" for the archive and for this future-to-come, this *l'a-venir.* Both Rousseau and Althusser write of this future and of those in the future who will attempt to complete their archives. The last page of their texts could be seen as the foundation of a promise. Certainly, Derrida ties memory to this idea of the promise and removes the area of responsibility for the archive from the subject of the archive to those who make up and determine the future of that archive. Responsibility for the archive is, then, held in trust. According to Derrida, it is the question of a 'response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow'.[91] The question of whether those who make up this future, those with whom this promise is made, ever do assume responsibility for and respond for the control they exert over the archive is not addressed. If the archive must be a collaborative project who is then responsible for the proper names of Rousseau and Althusser?

What Rousseau and Althusser attempted was to redefine this archive-responsibility. Unable to complete their own archives they turned to future writers. However, the status of this inchoate writing was challenged. Their concept of the archive demands that we respond to what the archive is: reliant upon proper names, titles, hierarchies

and classifications. For them, our only responsibility is to a recognition of this typo-nomology or mechanics of the archive. If there can be 'no meta-archive',[92] yet the archive constantly desires to be what it can only ever represent, then the admission of this desire within a text that operates as desire, is the only responsible archivy. Our responsibility, our promise to Rousseau or Althusser, is to oscillate between the text as *parousia* and a recognition of the text as desire for that *parousia.* The only consolation for Rousseau and Althusser is that this future, where they are literally unavailable (because dead) will never be able to make them more than literally available. It is a future of repetitions,[93] so that what will be written they had already written themselves. The future of their archive will contain its past as the living contain the dead: not just Althusser's archive containing Rousseau's, but Rousseau's containing Althusser's and both containing so much of what had gone before.[94] Words, gestures and memories are all shared and all already belong to somebody else where they are all already inadequate as definitions of that somebody. So that no one is ever able to bear witness to the singularity of either an event or a person. No one 'ever responds in an absolutely living and infinitely well-adjusted manner, without the least automatism, without ever having an archival technique overflow the singularity of an event'.[95] There is always some 'answering machine' effect,[96] some spectrality in the response and thus, some dead in the living.

I must, therefore, assume the only form of responsibility, that taken by Rousseau and Althusser, which is to bear witness to this ghostliness of the archive and to oppose all attempts to use the archive as an index of individuality. Certainly, in a world which is, as Derrida claims, 'en mal d'archive',[97] in a world increasingly eager to believe in the truth-value of the archive and increasingly dependant upon this truth status, there is a need to reassess the limitations of the archive and to question its powers to present

the absent. Unquestionably, wherever we face nostalgia, and the archive is always partly driven by nostalgia, it will not be easy. Yet the fact that the uniqueness we search for remains unfindable should not be lamented. The admission of spectrality in the archive does not disallow individuality. Rather, what escapes iteration, the very unfathomable thing, remains unique. Our silence, perhaps greatest at death, is what belongs uniquely to us. This silence is what made Rousseau and Althusser so dangerous, it is what forced them to write their autobiographies and it is ultimately this silence which we read between the lines of those same autobiographies. We should learn to embrace silences which might resist even the most rigorous detective work and respect the uniqueness of our 'unconditional right to secrecy'.[98] Perhaps this secret or silence is not so much a right as a necessity: it is what escapes the archive, even that virtual archive of the unconscious, because it is a secret kept from even ourselves, it is a silence despite our speech. And so, in our nostalgia for the archive, for evidence, proof, or testimony, we must always bow to this lack at the heart of the archive and to that which has 'burned [...] without a name, without the least symptom and without even an ash'.[99]

Something, somewhere, goes free....

[1] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* v.ii.146, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, (New York: Random House, 1968), p.229

[2] When I use the term "increasing importance" here, I refer to the desire for the archive to be the origin, that is, for the archival structure to efface itself. Derrida calls this a 'nostalgia' for the archive, see *Archive Fever*, p.101. For a fuller discussion of the increasing public interest in archives, see Ernst, Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest; Selected Essays*, ed.Ken Munden and introd. By Paul Lewinson, (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1967)

[3] Riffaterre, Michael, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p.x

[4] Howarth, W.D., "French Literature from 1600 to 1750" in *French Literature from 1600 to the Present* with Henri M. Peyre and John Cruickshank (London: Methuen,1974), p.37

[5] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin,1953), p.17, and Althusser, Louis, a Letter to Dominique Lecourt, reproduced in the Editor's Foreword to *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, pp.2-3. Althusser wants to write 'a sort of autobiography which would include [his] explanation of the tragedy, the way [he]had been "treated" by the police, the law and the doctors'.

[6] Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). See Eric Prenowitz's "Translator's Note", p.107. Prenowitz discusses the French edition of Derrida's text where, in a chain of approximations, the words 'proof, mark, clue, testimony[...]archive' are all given as possible translations of the word 'evidence'.

[7] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin,1953), p.88 and pp.169-170 and *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.28

[8] Riffaterre, Michael, *Fictional Truth*, p.59

[9] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.169

[10] ibid., p.169 (my emphases)

[11] ibid., p.170

[12] ibid., pp.169-70

[13] See Nelson Goodman, cited in Riffaterre, Michael, *Fictional Truth*, p.vii:

> The Whole truth would be too much; it would be too vast, too variable, and too dogged with trivia.

[14] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.81

[15] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin,1953), p.17. This claim is immediately qualified by the fact that it is written in the form of an alexandrine. At the point where he claims no forerunners he makes use of countless Classical gestures.

[16] Beaudry, Catherine, *The Role of the Reader in Rousseau's Confessions*, p.59:

> The text's originality and non-transmutability is established once and for all. *The Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau can in no way be imitated. Just as no individual can take the place of another, so no writing can be subject completely to *imitatio* and stand.

[17] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.28

[18] ibid., p.29

[19] ibid., p.3: Editor's Foreword.

[20] ibid., p.7: Editor's Foreword where a letter, dated summer 1976, from Althusser to Sandra Salomon, is reproduced.

[21] ibid., p.28 (original emphasis)

[22] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin,1953), p.17

[23] ibid., p.128

[24] ibid., p.153

[25] ibid., pp.261-262

[26] ibid., p.262, pp.419-421, pp.424-427 and p.442

[27] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.81

[28] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.216

[29] This is also the case in a Court of Law.

[30] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.28

[31] ibid., p.29

[32] Smith, Robert, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995), p.132

[33] In *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, Althusser continuously refers to this type of memory as a "screen" memory: a memory which operates cinematically and fictively.

[34] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.19 and Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.38
[35] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin,1953),p.19, and Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.55
[36] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.54
[37] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.21 and Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.75
[38] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.59
[39] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.23
[40] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953),pp.23-24 and Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, pp.63-81 and p.101
[41] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time,* p.80
[42] ibid.,p.81
[43] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), pp.213-220
[44] See Bakhtin's study of the idyllic chronotope in the novel in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), pp.225-226, for a full expression of this theory and an elaboration of the necessary criteria in any definition of the idyll. It is important here to note that both Rousseau's narrative and Althusser's fulfil these criteria.
[45] Certainly, no paper has been spared in recording the discrepancies between events and Rousseau's or Althusser's autobiographical account of them. Both Cohen, editor of *The Confessions* and Yann Moulier Boutang, editor of *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, refer the reader to texts whose sole purpose is to detail these discrepencies.
[46] See Cohen's introduction to *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953).
[47] Indeed, I have yet to read any account for Rousseau's rewriting of the year 1738.
[48] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.215 and p.216
[49] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.80
[50] ibid., pp.80-81
[51] See Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.83 for a discussion of the relationship between Louis and Paul, and Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.24 for an insight into the relationship between Jean- Jacques and Bernard.
[52] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.308
[53] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.109
[54] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.189; Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.86
[55] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.407 and p.423; Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.96 and p.164
[56] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p 105 and p.116; Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), pp.45-46
[57] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.155; Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.40 and p.46
[58] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.137; Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.298
[59] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.385 and p.397; Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.114, p.138 and p.140
[60] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.385, see also p.395; Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.138
[61] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.122-124; Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.189
[62] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London, Penguin, 1953), p.189; Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, pp.136-8
[63] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*, p.112; Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.89
[64] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.173
[65] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*, p.587
[66] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.210
[67] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*, p.65
[68] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.210

[69] Moulier Boutang, Yann, *Louis Althusser - Une Biographie*, p.51
[70] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts A Long Time*, p.211, p.215, p.219 and p.220
[71] ibid., p.220
[72] ibid., the 'transition' occurs between p. 228 and p.253
[73] One is reminded of a scene at the beginning of *Confessions* when Rousseau can offer no explanation as to how one of Mlle. Lambercier's combs has broken.
[74] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.128
[75] Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever*, p.1
[76] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*(London: Penguin, 1953), pp.605-606
[77] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.280
[78] Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p286
[79] Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*, p 163 (original emphasis)
[80] See my Chapter One, fn.51 and fn.52
[81] See my Chapter One, fn.55 and fn.57
[82] Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever*, p.3
[83] ibid., p.3
[84] ibid., p.4
[85] Riffaterre, Michael, *Fictional Truth*, p.99:

> It is as if the text had returned from the written to the entirely unwritten. Its own interpretation, plus a collection of examples destined to prove the point, plus a system of signs meant to help the readers perceive the work [...] as a unified, harmonious whole - all this that gives the text its identity, and its fullest artistic development is now as though fully committed back to memory, as though the telos of the literary text were to spell out a story only as a rehearsal for an imaginary mnemonic possession of it.

[86] I am thinking here about the enormous amount of bureaucracy which surrounds French archival institutions and, more specifically, about the immense difficulties I experienced gaining access to the Althusserian archive at L'I.M.E.C., Paris, once they had decided that my dissertation topic seemed to oppose the politics of their archive.
[87] Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever*, p.22
[88] ibid., p.87
[89] ibid., p.26
[90] ibid., p.28
[91] ibid., p.36
[92] ibid., p.67
[93] ibid., p.80
[94] Rousseau wrote: 'I can certainly say that I never began to live until I looked upon myself as a dead man'(*The Confessions*, p.218). Similarly, Althusser wrote: 'Death has always been a part of me' (*The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.132). Certainly, these citations must be known to Derrida when he cites Jensen's *Gradiva*: 'I have long grown used to being dead' (*Archive Fever*, p.83).
[95] Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever*, p.62
[96]ibid., p.62
[97] ibid., p.101
[98] ibid., p.101
[99] ibid., p101

CHAPTER SIX

"I CIRCUMFESS" : DERRIDA AND (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY

6.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter I read Althusser's autobiography, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, as a conscious 'type' or copy of Rousseau's *Confessions*, wondering what the consequences might be for truth value of a confession that repeats itself. In this chapter I read three texts by Derrida which concern the confessional text or autobiography. The first of these, *The Post Card,* contains a series of 'autobiographical' *envois* which, in turn, discuss autobiography. The second text, *Circumfessions,* is a 'type' of autobiography and the third, *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin* is a text about cultural identity and the limited possibilities for the historical archives of Nation States. Where Derrida theorises the autobiography in terms of copy or citation I will read the influence of Rousseau, de Man and Althusser. I also hope to compare Derrida's interpretation of confessional language, and the legal context within which it is embedded, to de Man's analysis - in his *Allegories of Reading* - of a "machinal" language at work in the 'trial' scene of Rousseau's *Confessions.*

6.1. *The Post Card*

Possibilities for talking face-to face

> What one calls life - the thing or object of biology or biography - does not stand face-to-face with something that would be its opposable ob-ject: death, the thanatological or thanatographical. This is the first complication.[1]

Derrida's *Post Card*, published in 1987 as an epistolary novel purporting to reveal to the reader a series of postcards written by himself to an "other" or series of "others" during a period of about three years (1977-1979) is, in fact, a vehement diatribe against the truth status of autobiographical writing. Derrida admits to a shameful desire to reveal or 'present' himself to us in these letters. Reminiscent of both Rousseau and Althusser in the opening pages of *The Confessions* and *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, Derrida here yearns for a new and honest language, an ultimately private language, which might be so true and transparent that it must be 'invented at every step'.[2] Later, he writes:

> I would like to erase all the traits of language, coming back to the most simple (you know, like when I breathe [...]) in order to send to you "words" that are "true" enough for me not to recognise them.[3]

However, these archives or 'confessions' are ignoble simply because they demand that we use an everyday language, capable of reiteration, to describe that which is unique and in the absence of any such spontaneous language capable of *presenting* him to another, the post-carded structure of the book at least enables Derrida to '"banalise" the cipher of the unique tragedy'.[4]

That is, this device of the post cards allows Derrida to illustrate the 'iterability' of all discourses. The post card as a reproduction opposes itself to the idea of a "single" and therefore "true" letter and so enacts the tragedy of identity as copy and duplicate. Derrida is discussing the possibility, indeed the necessity, that the same words can be

repeated in different contexts - here the same post-card or discourse can be sent to a different address or context - and this possibility makes any stability of identity of these words impossible and places Derrida, and all of us, 'in relation, without discretion, to tragedy'.[5] Moreover, the possibility of this repetition of words from one context into another context whose intentional field is almost certainly unrelated removes the possibility of discerning authorial intention within the text:

> The disappearance of truth as presence, the withdrawal of the present origin of presence, is the condition of all (manifestations of) truth [...] Différance, the disappearance of any originary presence, is at once the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of truth.[6]

So that the form that this 'novel' assumes has been chosen by Derrida to reveal the particular type of tragedy from which we suffer. The postcard is a copy - it is a multiple capable of mass reproduction and destined for the market place - and our inability to write about ourselves in any unique or truly singular way places us in relation to this structure. Marion Hobson, writing about Derrida's *Dissemination,* notes that for him: 'Both in the movement that is identity, and in the movement of presentation, of appearing, there is a necessary replication.'[7]

Identity can only establish itself through a repetition - I identify something, for example a signature, by referring it to something else - whereas the unique resists knowledge. The 'tragedy', according to Derrida, is that I can not communicate about myself in any unique way. Derrida here repeats Rousseau's sentiments, voiced in his *Confessions,* that 'writing and hiding'[8] - where writing *is* hiding or perhaps, more accurately, disappearance - are our only options: 'I believe that I prefer to write to you (even if you are facing me, or as at the moment [...] just next to me).'[9] Later he writes: 'It is a question [...] of turning my back to them by pretending to address myself to them.'[10]

It is not that identity is replicated, rather that replication constitutes identity. And this replication that is identity arises from the fact that our identities are constituted in language. Derrida - like Rousseau in his *Confessions* - is writing about the absence of a spontaneous language between individuals. Writing lies at the heart of so-called spontaneous speech, and this 'written' language always interrupts the possibility of the face-to-face.

The trial

Because of the post-carded structure of autobiographical writing it is impossible that there might be a 'unique addressee': more than one person can receive the same reproduced card. A linguistic generality as the defining feature of confessional texts renounces the possibility of any authorial responsibility. This impossibility is what Derrida calls 'our tragic lot'.[11] We desire truth and this desire 'has extorted the most terrifying "confessions" from us, after which we were more distant from ourselves than ever, without getting near to any truth at all'.[12]

So that really, all these confessions can only serve a single function, which is to satisfy a certain 'perverse desire to see or to show' petty details, and 'false secrets'.[13] Those who read these texts believing to find a real 'flesh and blood' person beyond or behind the text can only be motivated by some corrupt voyeurism and those who write them by a type of exhibitionism. Later, Derrida similarly describes the desire to read the entire *corpus Platonicum* as the desire to 'settle into it as if into a very refined brothel, with confessionals and peepholes everywhere'.[14]

Derrida is hoping to debunk the truth status of autobiographical writing by showing that confessional texts are desired because of a misplaced faith in the authenticity and the veracity of any biographical narrative. This general misplaced faith, obvious in the trust our society places in biography, stems from the validation of a legal system which relies on the confession as evidence of intention and which, in turn, emanates from the very Christian concept of the availability of intention. De Man considers a similar dilemma in *Allegories* when he writes of Rousseau's slander of Marion over the ribbon theft:

> The more crime there is, the more theft, lie, slander, and stubborn persistence in each of them, the better. The more resistance to exposure, the more satisfying the scene and, especially, the more satisfying and eloquent the belated revelation.[15]

There is, then, behind the need for confessions to be true, a terrible salaciousness, a vulgar voyeurism which feeds off the details which the confessional text, or autobiography, offers. In fact, "memoirs" or confessional texts are merely 'shadows and blanks'[16] and the archivists who insist on attributing some truth status to these "documents" exhibit:

> that fundamental, irreducible imbecility, and that vulgarity, that vulgarity in their imperturbable assurance [...]. They want to authenticate. As if I could not pretend to write fictive letters, with multiple authors and addressees![17]

Derrida opposes the idea of authenticity to that of fiction. For literary critics everywhere who seek authenticity in this genre, Derrida's use of epistles and in particular, his use of postcards, attempts to upset their crusade:

> what above all throws them all off the track in their hunt is that the epistolary simulacrum cannot be stabilised, installed in a certain place, and especially that it is not necessarily, and completely, intentional.[18]

The epistolary model refuses consignation and domiciliation and thus, the archiving process itself. Because this novel is founded upon a post-carded structure, dependant upon the very possibility of repetition, copy and stereotype, it is never properly

determinable in terms of an intention which must rely on the possibility of uniqueness. Thus, this structure of iterability continually defies the call to responsibility demanded by the legal context established in any reading of autobiography. So that, for Derrida, the authenticity of the autobiographical text is always necessarily questionable due to its relation to fiction. For this reason Derrida admires Plato's letters because their authenticity was always 'most suspect'.[19]

For Derrida, autobiographical texts are necessarily guilty in relation to truth-telling and authenticity if only because the addressee, under whose dictation the text is always written - the biographer, the literary critic, the 'private detective' - makes unreasonable demands of the genre by turning all autobiographical writing into a trial or a 'police affair'.[20] Who is judged in autobiography? Derrida wonders whether the accused is Derrida or "Derrida" and this ontological impasse recalls to mind a similar question raised in Rousseau's autobiographical sketch, *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques* in his *Third Reverie.* Derrida's letters, on the other hand, are not written to convince us or to 'plead [his] case'.[21] Since autobiography cannot be read outside of a legal context Derrida writes to plead another case - that autobiography is necessarily fictional. Derrida takes his point of departure from the principle that we can only write and/or receive postcards and that the 'true' letter is always held in 'reserve'.[22] The problem with the autobiographical or confessional narrative is that it is always written in response to an accusation of guilt. For example, without considering the obvious here - Rousseau's *Confessions* or Althusser's *Future* - Plato's letters to Denys were written in response to a demand to tell the truth or, as Derrida puts it, 'as always, in question was a truth *in response* to an accusation, within a trial, the effect of a *cause'.*[23]

In *The Post Card* Derrida is highlighting the fact that autobiographical writing always occurs in response to a demand from the reader. The text then becomes an excuse or apology for a 'crime' where we are forced to believe the author 'without proof, without narrative, [and] without detail',[24] because the postcard relies on a representation without any evidence. As Marion Hobson writes: 'What is repeated can be absent, in the same way as in writing the originating meaning or intention, that is, the life, can be absent.'[25]

For an analogous discussion I can refer back to de Man's interpretation of "evidence" in Rousseau's *Confessions.*[26] Here autobiography is discussed by de Man in relation to Rousseau's 'trial' for stealing a ribbon from the head of a household where he was employed. In this 'trial' Rousseau shamefully lied about the theft and slandered a maidservant, Marion, when he accused her of the theft that he had committed.[27] Within this narrative passage, the courtroom analogy helps to establish the idea of the autobiography as a trial where the author is the defendant and the reader the judge. In Rousseau's case the *Confessions* are supposedly written because of this 'trial' and because of Rousseau's desire to excuse his behaviour, or 'plead his case'.[28] It is then the memory of a crime which instigates Rousseau's text. However Rousseau, in fact, goes on to give us a series of excuses for his behaviour. What de Man writes about - this series of excuses at the heart of Rousseau's confession - reveals the fictive nature of all confessions:

> The first thing established by this edifying narrative is that the *Confessions* are not primarily a confessional text. To confess is to overcome guilt and shame in the name of truth.[29]

Rousseau's *Confessions*, according to de Man, do not unveil a state of being, that is to say, they do not state facts. Rather, there is a discrepancy between Rousseau's *sentiment intérieure* - which prompts the excuse - and the act of theft and slander:

> But the spatial inside/outside metaphor is misleading, for it articulates a differentiation that is not spatial at all. The distinction between the confession stated in the mode of revealed truth and the confession stated in the mode of excuse is that the evidence for the former is referential (the ribbon), whereas the evidence for the latter can only be verbal. Rousseau can convey his inner feelings to us only if we take, as we say, his word for it.[30]

Thus, confessional language, according to de Man, must be considered under this double epistemological perspective: there is a verbal and non-verbal nature of 'evidence' in the confession so that the confession can never be verified by empirical means. To this extent, the confession cannot tell the truth because the apologetic text relies on the impossibility of establishing an *hors texte*. So it is that when Rousseau writes of the theft and slander in a later text, his fourth *Reverie*, de Man can state: 'Clearly the apology has not succeeded [...] the excuse presented in the *Confessions* was unable to satisfy Rousseau as a judge of Jean-Jacques.'[31]

The machine

From the outset, the truth status, or authenticity, of these *envois* is ambiguous - who composes these letters, who receives them and, perhaps above all, do they represent a real correspondence? Derrida persistently complicates the very idea of correspondence:

> Who is writing? To whom? And to send, to destine, to dispatch what? To what address? [...] I owe it to whatever remains of my honesty to say finally that I do not know.[32]

For Derrida, the subjective status of the author of autobiographical texts is indeterminable. Derrida quite openly writes that it is we, the readers who must decide how we want to interpret or edit these postcards. He denounces this necessary selection process at the heart of the archive and - in a movement reminiscent of Rousseau in his *Confessions* and Althusser in *The Future Lasts a Long Time*[33] - shifts any responsibility for interpreting the text onto the reader:

> But it was my *due* to give into it [selection], and it is up to all of you to tell me why. Up to you [*toi*] first: I await only one response and it falls to you. Thus I apostrophise.[34]

Once Derrida has refused to place himself at the centre as author of these *envois* he goes on to ask us to consider these postcards as part of a larger correspondence: 'You might consider them, if you really wish to, as the remainders of a recently destroyed correspondence. Destroyed by fire or by that which figuratively takes its place.'[35] If I wish it to be so, then these cards can be merely a part of something bigger which remains hidden from sight, conversely, I can decide that this correspondence perhaps never even existed. My desire, then, is responsible for my reading. Derrida admits that these *envois* have been edited. As already stated, this editing could be the result of a "recently destroyed correspondence", so that what I am reading here are but the 'remainders'.[36] No matter, somehow, a selection process decided which *envois* were to be archived.

Some passages have "disappeared" - Derrida does not tell us where they have gone - and these passages are, according to Derrida, illustrated within the text. They are 'indicated, at the very place of their incineration, by a blank of 52 signs and a contract insists that this stretch of destroyed surface remain forever indeterminable'.[37]

Throughout these 'postcards' are inscribed a series of blank or 'mute' spaces. These blanks - which represent destroyed archive material - could be said to reveal 'the secret of reproduction'[38] within a text. These spaces represent that which cannot be posted to me or read by me. So that I have that which cannot be read opposed to a post-carded structure which relies upon a stereotyping - a culture of copying which is immanent in all our archives. Derrida is intent upon exposing the sham of the confession by denouncing those who demand that these stories be written. These bibliophiles are consistently described in terms which conjure up police forces,

private detectives or spies who hunt the subject who is necessarily 'on the run' from some terrible secret which must be confessed and exposed within a narrative. Derrida establishes a subplot where he is in hiding from a posse who pursue him determined to discover the "secrets" of his private life:

> I got there by car (always looking in the rearview mirror to make sure no one was following me). [...] I began by tearing them [letters] up on the banks of the Seine but it would have taken me twenty-four hours and the people passing and the fragments that could have been put back together, all those cops always on my path as if obsessed about my private life of which they know nothing.[39]

Parallel to this idea of mute spaces within the text Derrida writes of a "dead letter": a letter sent to the wrong address and returned unopened.[40] This 'forgotten' letter, which Derrida refuses to open, resists the archiving process when Derrida refuses to consign it either to his house or to his person. In refusing domiciliation this 'dead' *envois* thwarts those who seek 'truth' in the circulating word of the 'open' letter. Derrida continues with the theme of detection. 'Private detectives' are hounding him, intent on sniffing out details of his private life: 'The "correspondence" will be destroyed better if we pretend to save several laughable fragments of it, several snapshots good enough to put in everyone's hands.'[41]

Autobiographical writing can then, says Derrida, be used to side-track readers away from the 'truth' about one's identity. For example, one can give false 'evidence' or even confuse readers by bombarding them with an excess of information:

> Not a single trace, an absolute camouflaging by means of too much evidence: cards on the table, they wont see anything else. They will throw themselves onto unintelligible remainders, [...]. The Secret of what we will have destroyed will be even more thoroughly destroyed or, amounting to the same thing, by all the evidence, with all its self-evidence more thoroughly preserved.[42]

Derrida's *Post Card* is a hugely playful text enacting a game where the stakes are high: 'And when I say '*je suis*', with you, I am playing poker.'[43] Derrida beguiles us

with the prospect of a 'hidden' autobiographical text 'behind' this book which merely camouflages this hidden text. If his *Post Card* is merely a collection of "unintelligible remainders" prefacing a book about Freud, then there perhaps exists another book, a secret text which Derrida and his 'friend' within the narrative, have destroyed. Then there is also the unopened 'dead' letter and the 'mute' spaces within the text which point to potential narratives which have been suppressed or secreted by the author but which might afford the opportunity for 'other lines of enquiry'. These secreted stories offer the chance for discovering the 'truth' about Derrida and he persistently lures the reader with this possibility, as if he were in charge of what remains and what is destroyed and as if he was not constantly writing against the possibility of finding any key to identity in the written or spoken word. The process of selection and control is a ruse: 'What will we burn, what will we keep?'[44]

Derrida's game is at least twofold. He is revealing the sham at the heart of any belief in the truth of the archive:

> In several places I will leave all kinds of references, names of persons and of places, authentifiable dates, identifiable events, they will rush in with eyes closed, finally believing to be there and to find us there when by means of a switch point I will send them elsewhere to see if we are there.[45]

I can read this in relation to Rousseau's *Confessions*, when he re-writes the time he spent at *Les Charmettes* and sends the reader 'elsewhere' in an alternative chronology of events, and in relation to Althusser's re-writing of the farmhouse idyll in his *Future*. Derrida reveals that he is not in control of the archive, not in control of the selection process or the language he chooses. This language is controlled instead by a rule that he cannot divulge because it is beyond him. Again, Rousseau is recalled, this time in relation to de Man and the 'discovery' of a '*machinal*' language preceding identity. Copies are all we have with autobiography, not so much because of

Derrrida's choice, but because of the linguistic framework which controls and determines the archive. Language itself selects over Derrida's conscious intentions, or, if you wish, presence to one's self has been preceded by language. Marion Hobson discusses Derrida's attempts to demystify a process of writing which:

> allows the idea of selecting and preserving information through time to be thought without implying intention or purpose, and without separating writer and written-on, or agent and acted-on.[46]

So that Derrida is teasing the reader with the promise of a 'hidden' text, with the secrets of the 'dead' letter and with the 52 'mute' spaces. The only real secret is this machinal language at the heart of avowal. In other words, this text, *The Post Card*, writes in opposition to Derrida's own desire for a living speech, presence, proximity, and all those things that the mediation of language necessarily forbids. He has 'necessarily written upside-down - and in order to surrender to Necessity'.[47]

Hobson, agreeing with Derrida that subjectivity arises out of language, nevertheless refuses to render the language user totally passive. For her, the subject "hovers" between a passivity and an activity in a type of 'textual reflexivity'[48] which I note here in Derrida's intertextual - *sotto voce* - citations of Rousseau, de Man and Althusser. This 'hovering' could perhaps be better seen as an affirmation of play: Derrida, like these other writers, is moving beyond an epoch of humanism defined by a nostalgic search for origin, the 'authentic' and the 'true', towards the formulation of texts which play or oscillate between this desire for origin and the recognition and simultaneous renunciation of this desire.

6.2. *Circumfessions*

Making the truth

Derrida's *Circumfessions* reprises St. Augustine's question: '*Cur confitemur Deo scienti?*' If God knows all things in advance, why do we confess to him? That is, what is the function of the confession? The implications of the title - *circum-fessions* - are manifold. Where the *con*-fession must tell all, the *circum*-fession admits that it speaks around something:

> [..] and for years I have been going around in circles, trying to take as a witness not to see myself being seen but to re-member myself around a single event, I have been accumulating in my attic, my 'sublime', documents, iconography, notes, learned ones and naïve ones, dream narratives or philosophical dissertations [...] about circumcisions[...] with a view to my circumcision alone.[49]

A confession testifies to the singular and to this extent it resembles circumcision: 'One time alone: circumcision takes place but once.'[50] Similarly, a circumcision, despite its claim to uniqueness, repeats this so-called singular event, thus generating a genre and a tradition of ritual. Derrida, then, in the very title of this text, has chosen that his autobiography should openly admit to a place within this tradition of repetition: within a tradition constituted *as* repetition.

In choosing to cite St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Derrida chooses to write in the trace of St. Augustine. Derrida's confession then, has nothing to do with his 'truth', in so far as it belongs to literature and to a tradition of confessional texts. *Circumfessions* also 'traces' other autobiographies. Most interestingly for this thesis, it cites Rousseau's *Confessions*, at the point when Rousseau narrates the theft of the ribbon: 'I have followed the confessions of theft at the heart of autobiography [...] Rousseau's ribbon'.[51]

Similarly, Derrida evokes the 'trace' of Augustine in Rousseau's *Confessions* at the point where Augustine writes of the pleasure of accusing an 'other' of a crime :

> It was a joy to my pride to be set apart from culpability, and, when I had done some evil thing, not to confess that I had done it [...] but I loved rather to excuse myself and accuse some other.[52]

To this extent, Derrida's *Circumfessions* does not confess himself: it repeats other confessions. I recall de Man's discussion of a confession as the repetition of another confession. De Man noted that Rousseau's confession of theft and slander in his *Confessions* is repeated in his *Fourth Reverie.* The same confession, in a different [con]text is, in the *Reveries,* written as fiction. *The Reveries* are a fictional work and therefore, within this literary context, a lie or slander can be a fiction because it is 'without consequence for anyone'.[53]

De Man goes on to reveal the fictional status of Rousseau's first confession:

> It will be objected that the fiction in the *Reveries* and the denunciation of Marion are miles apart in that the former is without consequence whereas the latter results in considerable damage to others.[54]

But it is the falsely referential reading of the first confession in *Confessions* which is at fault. The reader should have understood that the utterance of the name "Marion" as an instance of grammar, was a fiction and, therefore, essentially without significance. If a confession is always this repetition of another confession and hence a reference to another text rather than to a 'flesh and blood' person, the confessional text must be fictional. I here unite Rousseau, de Man, Althusser and Derrida.

Back on trial

I have already placed autobiographical writing within a legal context: a confession always seeks pardon for 'crimes'. But what are the implications for the 'truth' of

autobiographical writing if these crimes are not 'owned' by the accused. This point, made throughout *Circumfessions,* recalls de Man in *Allegories*, especially when he writes:

> In fact, a far-reaching modification of the organising principle of truth occurs [...there is] the truth in whose name the excuse *has to be stated,* [...which is] not structured like the truth principle that governs confessions.[55]

The truth principle governing the confession relies on the possibility of 'presenting' oneself, whereas the truth of the excuse relies on the believability of a fiction: it must convince. The confession, then, is guided by a literary principle. Robert Smith, writing about the impossibility of some individual 'owning' a crime, writes that, in his *Confessions,* St. Augustine does not possess the event which would make him singular:

> Still too much and not enough is owned by St. Augustine. The naughtiness of stealing the pears, for example, for all the delayed shame it brings in confessing it, abides with Augustine himself and no-one else, he feels sure. The shame brands on the face this marque of private ownership. *Mea culpa*: like "my chance": the sin and the story of it are mine and no-one else's. But are they? The prime means of authenticating confession might be to foreground the unique[...]the chanciness, the erroneous and wayward determinism so lefthandedly governing one's life. And the literality of things sets this chanciness simultaneously out of reach of the one who would own it.[56]

In making the crime of theft into a narrative which is then repeatable, the crime is fictionalised and it's name can be shared. The crime of theft belongs not to St. Augustine and the pears, not to Rousseau and the ribbon, nor to Althusser's shoplifting. Far from presenting them to us, these moments of citation absent them. Derrida, rewriting St. Augustine's *Confessions* by re-tracing moments which ought to be unique to Augustine, withdraws the possibility of an originary presence only to replace it with writing: 'Once the assurance of self-presence is disturbed [...] it is writing which will be disclosed.'[57] It is this:

> possibility of extraction and citational grafting which belongs to every mark, spoken or written, which constitutes every mark as writing [...] cut off from its 'original' meaning and from its belonging to a saturable and constraining context. Every sign [...] can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender

> infinitely new contexts. [...] This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly [...] What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way?[58]

To this extent it is impossible to discern authorial intention within a text. As Derrida writes, 'it is impossible to follow my trace' or to 'calculate the itinerary of texts'.[59] Robert Smith, discussing Derrida's *Circumfessions*, writes that 'autobiography is a space of re-reading'.[60] Rousseau re-reads St. Augustine, Althusser re-reads Rousseau, de Man re-reads Rousseau and re-reads Rousseau's re-reading of himself in *The Reveries*. Finally, Derrida re-reads them all understanding that his circum-fession circulates prior confessions and reads around their narratives, enabling a different context to generate new meanings:

> Autobiography would be neither necessary nor possible if the name could be owned. In it's suicidal initiative autobiography - which mourns only through a name [...]-rounds on itself in jealousy for the name under which it is instituted but which name, so as to *let* it be instituted, must be given up into the shared space of a people.[61]

Indeed, as Geoffrey Bennington so rightly points out when he writes on Derrida's *Circumfessions*: 'For another book, J. D.'s "life" would, in the end, have been quite different.'[62] I can think here of the 'different' Althusser's portrayed in his two autobiographies, *The Future Lasts a Long Time* and *The Facts*, I can also think of the differences between the Rousseau's *Confessions* and *The Reveries*.

Avowal

I am left pondering the possibilities for autobiography if it is always constrained by the limited matrix of a grammatical repetition. As Derrida says: 'I wonder what I am looking for with this machine avowal.'[63]

Derrida is looking for the chance to live without needing to write anymore. Like Rousseau and Althusser, who both wrote in response to a public demand for a story about them, Derrida recognises the urgent call to autobiography and the desire to have done with it by writing the definitive statement about who he is.[64] Derrida is compelled to 'seek [himself] in a sentence'.[65] Above all, in a "new" sentence and a new language, in the absence of which, this book will be doomed to failure.[66] Yet he can only ever fail in his attempt to 'gather' himself, to become finally, once and for all 'this cauterized name'[67] through the building of a successful archive in response to a god or law which demands the confession: 'I only know how to deceive, deceive myself, deceive you, and you, and you again.'[68]

The result of his failure, what he calls his "machine" avowal, is due to this inability to invent this new language: a non-grammatical syntax. Instead, he feels as if he is a man trying to explain a long voyage abroad using only the simple tools of a primitive. This description of a "machine" avowal recalls de Man's own description in *Allegories* of the 'machine-like quality of the text of the lie'.[69] Rousseau called this automatic quality of grammar "l'éffet machinal" of words[70] and pointed to a radical irresponsibility at the heart of language which makes it 'free with regard to referential meaning [and able to] posit whatever its grammar allows it to say'.[71]

6.3. Monolingualism: cultural identities

> Our question is still identity.[72]

This text 'presents' Derrida to us in 'parody'.[73] It discusses, beyond Derrida's identity, national identities in a world where one language is meant to work for everybody:

> What happens when someone resorts to describing an allegedly uncommon "situation", mine, for example, by testifying to it in terms that go beyond it, in a language, whose generality takes on a value that is in some way structural, universal, transcendental, or ontological? When anybody who happens by infers the following: "What holds for me, irreplaceably, also applies to all. Substitution is in progress; it has already taken effect. Everyone can say the same thing for themselves and of themselves. It suffices to hear me; I am the universal hostage.[74]

Derrida, denouncing a language which is 'raving mad' joins forces with de man's own indictment of a 'delirious' language.[75] It is, moreover, this radical irresponsibility of language which concerns this thesis. This grammatical structure defines my responsibility - I am called to respond in language - yet this structure is irresponsible. So just how should I interpret a society that depends upon and sustains the re-inscription of the structure of a universal law upon the body of an irreplaceable singularity?

> In its common concept, autobiographical anamnesis presupposes *identification.* And precisely not identity. No, an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures. Whatever the story of a return to oneself or to *one's home* [*chez-soi*], into the "hut" [*casa*]of one's home [*chez is the casa*] no matter what an odyssey or *bildungsroman* it might be, in whatever manner one invents the story of a construction of the self, the *autos*, or the *ipse*, it is always *imagined* that the one who writes should know how to say *I.*[76]

But this *I* can never be independent of language and, moreover, this *I* will be uttered in different ways depending on the language used. So that the self depends upon language and context and is at least twice removed from origin.

6.4.Conclusions

> To be bound better and better but to be read less and less well over almost twenty years.[77]

I have hoped not only to read these three Derrida texts together to stress their interconnectedness, but also to connect these three texts through their strong re-reading of those other texts which I have discussed here in relation to autobiography - namely, Rousseau's *Confessions*, de Man's *Allegories* and Althusser's *Future.* This

[inter]textual "reflexivity", noted by Hobson in her discussion of Derrida's *Dissemination*, is the defining feature of autobiography as re-reading. It is in these re-readings that the possibility of discovering a unique 'trace', a unique 'story' about someone or a unique itinerary is erased. To this extent, all these books have been, on one level at least, written against those who, as I have noted, seek within the text some 'evidence' of the author which might be used, at some point, to denounce that same author's life or thoughts.

In *Circumfessions* Derrida embarks on a discussion of the very 'real' denunciation of his 'name' by a lecturer, Serge Doubrovsky, at a lecture in Montreal. This Doubrovsky was reported to have said: 'Do you know that Jacques Derrida is in analysis?'[78] What, wonders Derrida, gives this man the right to say this, and in the context of a lecture about Derrida's work?

> The big deal here, what truly fascinates me in this story is not the stupefying assurance with which they invent and drag out the sham, it's above all that they do not resist the desire to gain an advantageous effect from it (revelation, denunciation, triumph, enclosing, I don't know, in any event something that suddenly gets bigger from the fact that the other is "inanalysis" [*sic*].[79]

The 'rumour' becomes legitimate only because people desire it to be true: 'One cannot *do* without truth, but it's not the one they think they're confessing, they still haven't understood anything about it.'[80] For some people it is "necessary" that Derrida be in analysis and Derrida asks why this might be so:

> Who am I and what have I done so that this might be the truth of their desire? [...]. This is what we have not finished meditating on, and is what by far goes beyond my own case.[81]

Because Derrida does not believe in the possibility of 'disinterestedness',[82] these 'cases' - his and other unspecified instances - have motivated him to:

> publish under my name things that are inconceivable, and above all unlivable, for *me*, thus abusing the 'editorial' credit that I have been laboriously accumulating for years, with this sole aim in mind.[83]

In an attempt debunk the truth status of autobiography, Derrida has been writing 'autobiographies' which are obviously fictional insofar as he could have not lived the life that theses texts depict. Such an autobiography is a guilty text only in so far as it is guilty of fiction. To this extent, the crime becomes the crime of writing, rather than writing about a crime which might have happened. This type of autobiography can offer evidence of a guilty author only if we are willing to accept that all authors are guilty:

> One always asks for pardon when one writes, so as to leave suspended the question of knowing if one is finally asking pardon in writing for some earlier crime, blasphemy or perjury, or if one is asking pardon for the crime [...] in which consists presently the act of writing, [...].[84]

One could say that Derrida's *oeuvre* has been written, at some level, to vindicate all those victims of literary biographers. Derrida has attempted to reveal to the reader, at every possible moment, through his re-readings of Rousseau, Althusser and de Man, how these three author-victims, and indeed how he himself, have been unfairly judged:

> No longer even the right to make them admit the violence by which they still try to extort writing, to confess to "confess me", pretending to believe in order, in truth, in reconciliation, in repentance or expiation, in short in this justice that is panting and finally appeased by guilt assumed, exposed, shouted out, before them, or before God, "ah, if at least he'd owned up!, as though this economy were not to my eyes the worst, shameless forgetting of the fault [...] as though someone had the right to deliver me [...] through some judgement, *taking* knowledge or *taking* note of my crimes.[85]

In conclusion, throughout this thesis, I have agreed that the desire for a truth or story about some other one is 'natural' and, to this extent, will always exist. What matters, above all, is that this story is recognised by those who read it, not as a truth which might offer some guarantee about the moral character of the person delineated, but as an ever more complex story about what we need to hear or have heard about that person. So that the literary critics who write against Rousseau, de Man, Althusser and Derrida created a truth about these authors and confessed their stories, not in order to

deliver justice but in order to preserve a status quo which they perceived in opposition to the texts of these controversial thinkers.

Whilst it is true that all literary critics must, in the act of reading itself, impose an interpretation on a text and thus, to some extent, involve themselves in concepts of intention and meaning, I feel that the debates that I have located represent a co-ordinated attempt to censor texts. In a perverse type of literary detective work, the determination of authorial intention becomes the sole premise of their criticism rather than a small part of a larger, much more rigorous, textual analysis. For Rousseau, de Man, Althusser and Derrida, language itself is deficient. The critics who have established themselves in opposition to these philosophers have all been keen to transfer the flaws associated with language onto the men themselves in shabby, *ad hominem* attacks which allow them to dismiss an entire *oeuvre* in a media-friendly because scandalous manner.

Hopefully, I have complicated these naïve psycho-biographical approaches by pointing to their failure to account for the graphic aspect of autobiography. I blur the boundaries that traditionally separate autobiography and fiction. Ultimately, the thesis has shared Derrida's constant amazement faced with what seems to be a widespread determination to discredit deconstruction. A hostility towards deconstruction recalls a prior hostility towards the texts of Rousseau and Althusser, in whose work we have traced the major concerns of deconstruction. So that, like Derrida, I have only ever been asking "why?":

> Why the accusation of irrationalism as soon as someone asks a question concerning reason, its forms, its history, its mutations, of anti-humanism as soon as a question is raised concerning the essence of man and the construction of the concept 'man'? I could multiply examples of this sort, be it a matter of language, of literature, of philosophy, of technique, of democracy, of all institutions in general etc.. In short, what are they afraid of? Who are they trying to frighten?[86]

[1] Derrida, Jean-Jacques, *The Ear of the Other - Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, trans. Peggy Kamuf and Avital Rennel, ed. Christine McDonald (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p.6
[2] Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* [1980], trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.11
[3] ibid., p.114
[4] ibid., p.11
[5] ibid., p.5
[6] Derrida, Jacques, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p.168
[7] Hobson, Marion, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.71
[8] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London, Penguin, 1953), p.116
[9] Derrida, Jacques, *The Post Card*, p.174
[10] ibid., p.178
[11] ibid., p.81
[12] ibid., pp.82-83
[13] ibid., p.83
[14] ibid., p.129
[15] de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading* , p.285
[16] Derrida, Jacques, *The Post Card*, p.83
[17] ibid., p.84
[18] ibid., p.89
[19] ibid., p.130
[20] ibid., p.144
[21] ibid., p.170
[22] ibid., p.80
[23] ibid., p.94
[24] ibid., p.76
[25] Hobson, Marion, *Opening Lines*, p.66
[26] de Man, Paul, chapter entitled "Excuses (Confessions)" in *Allegories of Reading*, pp.278-301
[27] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*, (London, Penguin, 1953), p.87
[28] ibid., p.88
[29] de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading, p.279*
[30] ibid., p.280
[31] ibid.,pp.282-283
[32] Derrida, Jacques, *The Post Card*, p.5
[33] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*, p.169, Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.28
[34] Derrida, Jacques, *The Post Card*, p.4
[35] ibid., p.3
[36] ibid., p.3
[37] ibid., p.4.
[38] ibid., p.12
[39] ibid., p.33
[40] ibid., p.76
[41] ibid., p.171
[42] ibid.,pp.175-176
[43] ibid.,p.117
[44] ibid., p.176
[45] ibid.,p.177
[46] Hobson, Marion, *Opening Lines*, p.14
[47] Derrida, Jacques, *Post Card* p194
[48] Hobson, Marion, *Opening Lines*, p.95
[49] Derrida, Jacques, *Circumfessions*, part of Bennington, Geoffrey, and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.59-60
[50] Derrida, Jacques, *Schibboleth: pour Paul Celan* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p.11
[51] Derrida, Jacques, *Circumfessions*, p.160

[52] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, V.x.18 (trans. Vernon J. Bourke, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), cited by Derrida, Jacques, *Circumfessions*, p.131
[53] de Man's translation of Rousseau's *Fourth Rêverie* (*Oeuvres Complètes*, p.1027) in *Allegories of Reading*, p.291
[54] de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading*, p.292
[55] ibid., p.280
[56] Robert Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography*, p.44
[57] ibid., p.77
[58] Derrida, Jacques, *Margins: of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.320-321
[59] Derrida, Jacques, *Circumfessions*, p.199
[60] Smith, Robert, *Derrida and Autobiography*, p.45
[61] Ibid., p.44
[62] Bennington, Geoffrey, in *Jacques Derrida* (Bennington, Geoffrey, and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* [originally published in French as *Jacques Derrida*, 1991], trans. G. Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.320
[63] Derrida, Jacques, *Circumfessions*, p.87
[64] For similar sentiments see Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions* (London, Penguin, 1953), p.169 and Althusser, Louis, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p.28.
[65] Derrida, Jacques, *Circumfessions*, p.13
[66] ibid., p.115
[67] ibid., p.43
[68] ibid., p.102
[69] de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading*, p.294
[70] de Man's citation of Rousseau's *Fourth Rêverie*, (*Oeuvres Complètes*) p.1034, in *Allegories of Reading*, p.294
[71] de Man, Paul, *Allegories of Reading*, p.293
[72] Derrida, Jacques, *Monolingualism of the Other*, p.14
[73] ibid., p.19
[74] ibid., pp.19-20
[75] ibid., p.24 and de Man, Paul, *Allegories*, p.294
[76] Derrida, Jacques, *Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin* [1996], trans. P. Mensah (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.28
[77] Derrida, Jacques, *Circumfessions*, p.154
[78] Derrida, *The Post Card*, p.203
[79] ibid., p.203. Note that Derrida here runs the two words together to create the one term: "inanalysis"
[80] Derrida, *Circumfessions*, p.114
[81] Derrida, *The Post Card*,p.203
[82] ibid.,p.206
[83] ibid.,p.235
[84] Derrida, *Circumfessions*, p.46
[85] ibid., pp.215-216
[86] Derrida, Jacques, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, p.224

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