

**PLUS ÇA CHANGE: A RESPONSE TO TORIL MOI'S
AND CATHERINE MALABOU'S CRITIQUES OF DERRIDA**

Adam Husain (Oxford)

Abstract

This article argues that, despite their differences as thinkers, Toril Moi and Catherine Malabou offer surprisingly similar critiques of Derrida. Both doubt the political utility of Derridean thought. Both have also expressed reservations about the coherence and ongoing interest of his philosophy. By describing the unacknowledged similarities in their arguments, and by contextualizing them, this article tries to uncover what is and is not original in these "new" critiques. Ultimately, grappling with these challenges provides a useful means of rediscovering what remains unthought and exciting about Derrida.

Keywords: Jacques Derrida; Catherine Malabou; Toril Moi, Grammatology; Deconstruction.

Introduction

Two of the best-known critics of Derrida today both developed under his influence. Malabou was a doctoral student of Derrida's who cowrote a book with him (Malabou and Derrida, 2004). Moi can recall being swept up in the enthusiasm for Derrida and "theory" in the 1980s, during which period she produced important theoretical texts (Moi 2009, 2).

Since that time, however, both thinkers have voiced serious reservations about Derrida. Malabou argues for a "transformation" of Derridean thinking in *Plastic at the Dusk of Writing* (2010) and *Changing Difference* (2011), texts which question two of his key terms in their very titles. In *Revolution of the Ordinary* (2017), Moi advocates for a complete repudiation of "theory" and Derrida. Since Malabou represents herself as working within the Derridean tradition, whereas Moi now lies definitely outside of it, their new modes of thinking have not yet been compared or considered together. Nonetheless, these differences make the similarities in their critiques all the more interesting.

In fact, in all three works, Malabou and Moi motivate the requirement for their new philosophical approaches by critiquing Derrida. Both thinkers argue that Derridean theory

has failed to deliver any substantial benefit to oppressed groups. More than this, they contend that this failure is no accident, but related to a *systemic inertia* in Derridean thinking. Both Moi and Malabou ultimately frame Derrida's mode of philosophy as predictable, unproductive, and "without metaphoric adventure" (Moi 2010, 49).

That there has yet to be a full-bodied Derridean riposte to either writer is perhaps indicative of a general appetite, among contemporary critics, to "move on" from Derrida (e.g., Anker and Felski 2017; Di Leo 2016). Certainly, the response to Malabou's new project has been uncommonly positive; her concept of "plasticity" has inspired countless new articles, and many varied applications from education to brain science. Moi's *Revolution*, likewise, has had several positive reviews, although it has made fewer waves as of yet (Vinten 2018; Pippin 2019; Davies 2018).

On the other hand, the lack of Derridean response to their arguments might also be because both analyses seem to ignore well-established readings of Derrida's practice, readings informed by Derrida's own claims. For a card-carrying Derridean, it might be hard to see what is original in Moi's or Malabou's counterarguments, and this article does try to put them in the context of long-running debates around Derrida. Nonetheless, I argue that a sensitive Derridean response should take into account readings of Derrida that the philosopher himself dismissed as inaccurate, and to examine them seriously. In doing so, we uncover, or rediscover, a vein of Derrida's thinking that remains relatively untapped, and differences and contradictions *within* the Derridean corpus that leave space for fresh readings of Derrida.

A Useless Politics?

Vahanian: One of the common charges levied against deconstruction [...] is that by opening texts to infinite interpretations [...] it mires political agency in identity politics and offers no way out the socio-historical and political constructs of textuality. (Malabou and Vahanian 2008, 1)

So writes Vahanian in the introduction to her interview with Malabou, thereby framing Malabou's work as a "timely" response to long-existing concerns about Derrida. Many have wondered if the seemingly endless attempts to "deconstruct" identities have led to any genuine advance in the lives of marginalized people, or if they are ultimately self-defeating (e.g., Michaels 2004; Latour 2004). Since Moi and Malabou are both philosophers with long-term feminist commitments, it is perhaps natural that both choose the concept of "woman" as a particularly important example of the effect, or lack of effect, of Derridean thinking on a political cause.

In *Changing Difference*, Malabou wonders what is the worth of attempting to de-substantialize "woman" if this cannot lead to any *substantial* political change. She asks:

How do you establish an essential difference between women's studies and other fields of research, how do you define an essential identity for the political attitude of women [...] if "woman" or "women" have no essence? (Malabou 2011, 104)

For Malabou, to de-essentialize is one of the basic "moves" of the Derridean playbook. De-essentializing or deconstructing "woman" has been used by feminists as means of refusing any one all-encompassing notion of "womanhood", as well as undoing the man/woman binary that may form a key conceptual linchpin of patriarchy (Cornell 1991, 81–5). However, precisely by undoing any definite notion of "woman", Malabou thinks a deconstructionist approach prevents both feminist theorists from defining their "field of research", and feminist activists from developing a single and clear "political attitude" for themselves. After deconstruction, which constantly undermines the credibility of any definite concept or group, it becomes impossible to "establish" an approach, or to take a stand "for women", either *politically* or *conceptually*.

Malabou is writing with the full awareness that she is scarcely the first feminist to make such claims. Her critique is, in some ways, a repetition of one of the central points of Moi's *What is a woman?* (1999), a text which itself draws on an intricate feminist debate around Derrida that has been developing since the 80s (Spivak, 1983; Rose, 1986).

It is perhaps the presence of this tortured, forty-year debate that encourages both thinkers to write decisively. Thus, in *Revolution*, Moi simply states that "feminist theory has become [...] removed from women's ordinary lives" and "in most cases, radical feminist politics doesn't depend on having the correct anti-essentialist position", referring the reader to her earlier work for evidence (Moi 2017, 90, 25). The straightforward force of these claims marks Moi's style as different from the "rebarbative prose" of Derridean theorists, who can often seem so nuanced that they are evasive or vague on politics (Moi 2017, 90, 160–3). Indeed, this readiness to make substantial, down-to-earth statements gives the *Revolution* much of its force and appeal as a polemic piece of writing.

Malabou has also signaled her distance from postmodern feminist writing that advances its argument by "subver[sion]" and "mim[icry]", preferring the "classical" method of analysis as opposed to that of, say, Irigaray (Malabou 2008, 4; 2009, 24–8). Although her prose style is more Derridean than Moi's, we find Malabou making bold and cutting claims in her texts too. *Changing Difference* opens with the statement that:

The critique of "essentialism" (i.e., there is no specifically feminine essence) by gender theory and deconstruction is but one more twist in the ontological negation of the feminine. (Malabou 2011, Note)

This is a very big thing to say indeed. Malabou here is accusing anti-essentialism and "deconstruction" (the two are amalgamated) of deepening the very patriarchal norms that (as she understands it) they wished to undo. Derrida's attempt to subvert patriarchal ontology by rediscovering "the feminine" as the basic ground for difference – an attempt that has led to reams of spilled ink (see Jagger 1996) – is defined as a political own goal from the very start of Malabou's text.

She defends this claim by examining Levinas' and Derrida's repositioning of the feminine in the book's opening essay (Malabou 2011, 5–40). Her conclusion is that the redefinition of "woman" as originary is still evidently beholden to a pre-ontological or pre-ethical understanding of "woman" as "the one who does not have a phallus" or who "remains in the home" (Malabou 2011, 36). These new ontologies, therefore, are tacitly beholden to the very stereotypes of "woman" with which they wish to do away. The rethinking of "woman" as ontological ground cannot exist without a conception of woman as a subjugated "second sex". In this way, it reinforces the very conception of "woman" that it intends to dissipate.

Although couched in different language, Moi's critique of "deconstruction" or "anti-essentialism" (the two are treated again as synonymous) is substantially the same:

To negate essentialism is not to escape its grip. Whether we deconstruct, undo, critique, or displace the original concept, whether we put it in motion or demonstrate that what appears to be an essence in fact is an effect of performativity, we remain captives of our original picture of concepts. (We can't begin the work of deconstruction unless we have something to deconstruct.) This is why so many contemporary theorists assert that we can only undermine, subvert, or ironically mimic traditional concepts ('woman,' for example). To them, concepts are prison-houses. (Moi 2017, 93–4)

Deconstruction leads to a theoretical dead end as regards to "woman" or any other concept. This is because a deconstructive argument only has an appeal to the reader if she is aware of which (defined) concept the anti-essentialist is presenting as a "performativity". Deconstruction is therefore parasitic on the continued existence of the concept (and the idea of concepts) that it attempts to deconstruct. To return to Malabou, Derrida's reconceptualization of "woman", requires, in order to have sense, some maintenance of a concept of "woman" as "homebound", "hospitable" etc. in order to be a *reconceptualization*. In a broader sense, any anti-essentialism is tacitly reliant upon the doctrine it denies: essentialism. The Derridean is thus perpetually in the humorous, self-defeating position of saying,

"we can't think of them as 'those people'", an injunction which makes us perform the very act it wishes to sanction.

Even if it could break through this paradox, deconstructive thinking leaves the thinker no place to go, argues Moi. Once the concept – "'woman', for example" – has been exposed, the Derridean refuses to build a newer, better one in its place. This is because another concept, or another definition, would reinscribe the practitioner in another oppressive discourse of essentialism, another "prison-house", from which they would have to escape once more.

So it is that Moi uses the example of a political failure with one concept ("woman") to develop a critique of systemic certain inertia in Derridean thought. This is that the Derridean can never, ultimately, "go without" the text or concept (or "picture of concepts") that she wishes to deconstruct, and thus Derridean thought can go nowhere.

An Inert Philosophy?

In much the same vein, Malabou asks: "has anyone ever invented anything whatsoever in deconstruction after Derrida?" (Malabou 2011, 119). In *Changing Difference*, she too moves from a discussion of "woman" in Derrida (in the first chapter) to the argument, later in the book, that the *whole* Derridean system is philosophically inert, remaining too perpetually evasive to allow the newcomer to create anything. Derridean thought leads us to a place that is so absolute in its refusal to substantialize itself that nothing can develop from it:

To elude "essence," the trace makes itself tireless, always elsewhere, always rebelling against its capture, always other. But as a result of this "always," since it denies all plasticity, writing never grows old, writing never changes. (Malabou 2011, 120–1)

This exasperation with "poststructuralist thinking" is somewhat widespread. If language is always "problematic", if any concept can be attacked and exposed as reductive, then it seems as if no substantive position can be advanced, no matter how carefully we phrase it. The trouble is that, typically, we do not wish to use exclusionary or essentializing terms, and yet language seems to require *some* exclusions in order to have any kind of meaning.

As regards to feminism, both Malabou and Moi are particularly aware of the difficulties of theorizing a concept of "woman", yet neither have given up. In fact, both have tried to offer definitions that *are* substantive, without being exclusionary or essentialist in

unacceptable ways (Moi 2017, 100; Malabou 2011, Note; Neuhaus 2023). In contrast, Derrida's resistance to essentialism leads to a redefinition of the "feminine" as radically undefined that can seem like a cop-out to feminists.

To be "always elsewhere" and "always rebelling" is to stand with nobody. It can even seem boring or dull. Indeed, it is the *easiness* and as well as the predictability of Derrida's "move" towards abstraction that both Moi and Malabou sometimes seek to demonstrate. For example, Moi writes:

Derrida easily deconstructs Saussure's concept of language [in] *On Grammatology* [...] conclud[ing] that speech was always a form of writing. (Moi 2017, 68)

"Easily"? What could Moi mean by "easily" here, when Derrida's argument in *Grammatology* is slow, careful, and required "genius", as she herself says (ibid.)?

Perhaps Moi – looking at *Grammatology* from fifty years' distance – characterizes the movement of deconstruction as easy because it is "easily" reproducible. Once achieved, Derrida repeats this reading over and over throughout years, after the reading of which deconstruction and anti-essentialism may begin to take on some "characteristic", or one might even say "essential", features. Moi describes them on the same page:

A characteristic deconstructive analysis begins by showing that a key conceptual opposition breaks down under pressure, [...] [then] brings out the incoherence, or self-contradiction, of the original concepts. (Ibid.)

Derrida (or anyone else) can "easily" find that any concept contains a certain degree of unavoidable ambiguity, "self-contradiction", or "incoherence". For him, this is enough to assert that the concept is reliant upon ambiguity (or "*différance*" or "*écriture*") for its functioning – and the "deconstruction" is "complete". Once one sees this "move" "completed" in *Grammatology*, one can claim that it is repeated in the subsequent essays on Plato or Mallarmé or Hegel. One can see it in the repositioning of "woman" as the name for the same ontological indefiniteness that was termed "*écriture*" in *Grammatology*. One might even see it in the later works – in those studies of "the Gift", or "hospitality", or language – which always seem to end up in irresolvable *aporias* of much the same ilk.

Both Malabou and Moi claim that Derrida leads us "always" to the same place. To some extent, they hoist Derrida with his own petard, for they cite passages where Derrida himself appears to insist on this "always": on ambiguity as a rigid necessity, and of anti-essentialism as the essence of language. So it is that, in the debate with Searle, Moi quotes Derrida stating that: "'a possibility—a possible risk—is *always* possible [in language], and is in some sense a necessary possibility' (Derrida 1988, 15)" (Moi 2017, 69). Similarly,

Malabou twice cites a passage where Derrida appears to present "all thought of form" as *always* in error because form (*always*) suggests an essentialist philosophy that is (*always*) wrong. This extract is from *Plasticity*, but she quotes precisely the same Derrida passage in "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity", an article we will subsequently investigate (Malabou 2007, 438).

In "Form and Meaning," Derrida claims that all thought of form, even that which believes it is criticizing the traditional concepts of *eidos* or *morphè*, is forever prisoner to metaphysics.

How could it be otherwise? As soon as we utilize the concept of form—even if to criticize *another* concept of form—we inevitably have recourse to the self-evidence of a kernel of meaning. And the medium of this [...] can be nothing other than the language of metaphysics. [...] The system of oppositions in which something like form, the formality of form, can be thought, is a finite system. [...] This concept cannot be, and never could be, dissociated from the concept of appearing, of meaning, of self-evidence, of essence. [...] This is an assured point. (Derrida, 1982, 157–158)

But without form, isn't the journey of writing also reduced to a type of phoronomy, to displacement without metamorphic adventure? In the end, isn't writing confused with its own force of inertia? (Malabou 2010, 48–9; original italics)

There is an important irony to be observed in this line of critique. After all, was it not with an argument such as this that Derrida attacked "ultra-structuralist" or "ultra-essentialist" readings in one of his first essays (Derrida 1978, 3–30)?

In "Force and Signification", Rousset is singled out as a critic whose assertion that "the work is a totality and always gains from being experienced as such" means that his readings become boring and phoronomous in precisely this sort of way (Ibid., 13). Rousset assumes that a work must *always* have an essence, and therefore he always finds this essence. Derrida appears to assume that a text can *never* have an essence, and thus his readings always seem to prove this, no matter what the text or concept. And, just as "phoronomous bodies" follow the rigid rules of physics (Stan, 2022), Derrida appears to lay down his own laws (and Malabou quotes one) regarding how to read texts. Form, or structural reading, is *always* wrong for him: "This is an assured point." Deconstruction has one purpose or mission, which is to demonstrate the underlying anti-essentialist assumption of his ontology: to unveil the plurality that all "essences" or "unities" "really" are; to show that beneath form is always and inevitably a sustaining formlessness.

The deconstruction of philosophy as thought by Derrida assumes the destabilising of all the apparent unity of tradition, or any type of gathering in general. [...] It is therefore a question of breaking with unity: Greek and Christian unity in Hegel and unity

of meaning in Heidegger. Derrida calls these unities *monolingualisms* and suggests they must be transformed into what they are, that is, differentiated multiplicities. (Malabou 2010, 20; original italics)

For such a reading of Derrida, *Grammatology* is in many ways the crucial text. In the eyes of Moi (and Malabou, as we shall see) the rest of Derrida's project can be effectively understood as an *exemplification* of the basic ontological system – the philosophy of founding all meaning on an irreducible ambivalence named "*écriture*"— for which he argued there. Everything else follows "easily" once that fundamental ontological move has been made. The subsequent discovery that any *given* text or corpus or concept is really a "multiplicity" is only another example of a mathematical principle whose proof has already been given elsewhere.

Moi is keen to make the further claim that this philosophical system itself is incoherent (Malabou, as we will see, agrees). That is, again, because a thorough anti-essentialism is self-defeating. If *no* text has any essence, if all sense relies upon ambiguous heterogeneity, then how could this theory, itself a text, have any definite meaning? "The negation still preserves the assertion or, in other words, the very act of negating it implies that the assertion itself is meaningful" (Moi 2017, 80).

A Simple Rebuttal

These are pretty audacious readings of Derrida. Indeed, one reason I have tried to reconstruct Moi's and Malabou's arguments together is to show how, once the positive doctrine of each thinker is bracketed, quite how closely their counterarguments resemble not only each other, but old-fashioned critiques of Derrida. What would Ellis, Searle, or Fischer say if they were to read *Revolution* or *Changing*? Would there not be some irony for them that some of the very things that they found outrageous about Derrida in the 80s – the self-defeating nature of his position; the quasi-mechanical easiness of applying his method (Ellis 1989, 13–4; Fischer 1985, 40–1) – are indeed the very things that, forty years later, those once swept up in the promises of "deconstruction" have begun to gainsay themselves? Fischer, as it happens, did read and review Moi's book, and was "buoyed [...] and encouraged" by it (Fischer 2018, 375)!

The difference with these new critiques is that Moi and Malabou are writing with an awareness of the Derridean response. For example, in *Revolution*, Moi rejects Derrida's response to Searle's critique (Moi 2017, 67–70). Malabou, likewise, dismisses Derrida's own claims regarding *Grammatology*, as we shall consider later. Yet, it is worth reiterating what

a simple response to these readings of "deconstruction" would be. One could simply state that deconstruction has no purpose and, *a fortiori*, does not attempt to perform "easily" reproducible destructions of "prison-house" concepts.

In *Letter to a Japanese Friend*, in one of his most quoted passages, Derrida explains why this is with exceptional clarity:

Deconstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique. [...] It is not an analysis in particular because the dismantling of a structure is not a regression toward a simple element, toward an indissoluble origin. These values, like that of analysis, are themselves philosophemes subject to deconstruction [...] It must also be made clear that deconstruction is not even an act or an operation [...] Not only because it does not return to an individual or collective subject who would take the initiative and apply it to an object, a text, a theme, etc. (Derrida 2022, 283–5)

If deconstruction *were* a rule-bound, phoronomous method for transforming text "into what they are, that is, differentiated multiplicities" then it *would* indeed only be a particularly frustrating repetition of the type of ontology that it attempts to disrupt. It would replace one philosopheme with another: "anti-essentialism", since it assigns an essence to *all* language, is only another type of "essentialism". And, from its first uses in *Grammatology*, Derrida was adamant that "deconstruction" was something other than a classical "demolition" or refutation of a concept (Derrida 1997, 11).

Likewise, deconstruction, for Derrida, cannot be "an act or an operation [...] appl[ie]d to an object, a text". This would reinscribe deconstruction within the notion of an Enlightenment subject completing a particular goal or *telos* for the sake of Progress, an essential element of traditional metaphysics for Derrida (e.g. Derrida 1981a, 49). But it would also fail, for the very reasons Moi has given, if it were "applied" in that way. As she puts it: the "theory of the absence of a theory" is still a theory (Moi 2017, 80). Thus, "*écriture*", if it really *were* established as an ontological ground in *Grammatology*, would keep us in the realm of metaphysics.

Derrida entirely agrees! A deconstruction of "woman" could not do away with and replace the concept of "woman" that it would rely upon to operate, nor our *idea* of what concepts are or might be (Derrida and McDonald 1982, 72). But it would not intend to – firstly, because deconstruction, like Heideggerian "destruction", bears with the concept that it deconstructs; secondly, because deconstruction does not intend to do anything. That might be why Derrida claimed that "for me deconstruction is certainly not feminist", insofar as feminism is an "operation" in which female subjects, construed in Enlightenment terms, demand "truth, science, objectivity" (Derrida et al. 1985, 30).

These points are frequently reiterated by Derrida (e.g., 1989, 22). Maclachlan has called them "common currency" in discussions of his work (Maclachlan 2012, 23). As O'Keeffe puts it, in a more critical review of Moi: "Derrida says it time and again: *différance*, trace, mark, cinder aren't concepts. Deconstruction isn't a method, it's not a theory, it's not quite a philosophy either" (O'Keeffe 2018, 375). Yet, I suspect, simply to reiterate that "deconstruction" has no intentions, and that Derrida is not an anti-essentialist, would not convince Moi or Malabou in the least.

Both of these writers are cognizant of these responses, and seem deliberately to brush aside Derrida's own descriptions of his texts as *irrelevant* compared to what they observe for themselves in his writing. Malabou, for example, even quotes from the *Letter*, noting that "It is far easier to say what deconstruction *is not*" (Malabou 2010, 19), before nevertheless going on to give a definition of "deconstruction". Malabou is also deliberately setting herself against the Derridean narrative when she suggests that when she writes of "the exit of metaphysics", and claims that "destruction and deconstruction have taken place" (Malabou 2009, 67; 2010, 52). After all, to say this is to ignore famous Derridean comments about why an "end" of metaphysics could never be accomplished (e.g., Derrida 1981a, 12). Or again, when she asks, "has anyone ever invented anything whatsoever in deconstruction after Derrida?" (Malabou 2011, 119), it seems that the desire to invent, to create, to develop, and transform, is something that, for her, cannot be overridden by any qualms that the Derridean might have about "invention" itself being imbued with the problematic spirit of *telos* (as in Derrida 1989).

The authoritative voice of "the master", Derrida, when speaking of his *own* texts, is questioned by Moi and Malabou, and surely this questioning is something Derrideans ought to welcome. Besides, even an ardent Derridean might be able to detect some degree of truth what they have to say, if she is being honest. In 1979, de Man defined deconstruction as a targeted operation with a purpose almost exactly similar to that given by Malabou in *Plasticity*: "A deconstruction always has for its target to reveal the existence of hidden [...] fragmentations within assumedly monadic totalities" (de Man 1979, 249). Likewise, Norris writes that "to deconstruct a text [...] is to arrive at a limit point or deadlocked aporia of meaning" (Norris 1982, 80).

It is not only analytic philosophers like Ellis and Fischer, but canonical (if one can use that term) Derrideans like Gasché who complained of a "mechanical" "*application of the results*" of deconstruction to literary texts (Gasché 1979, 178–9). Culler also responds to the idea that there may be a kind of "mechanical repetition" going-on in deconstructive readings (Culler 1983, 228). Of course: Gasché's argument is that such readings are not

authentically Derridean; Culler's argument is that the accusation is overblown; and de Man and Norris' claims have been criticized by still other poststructuralists (Nealon 1992). Nevertheless, the fact that these debates are going-on in the heart of "deconstruction", and from its very beginnings, throws doubt on Derrida's apparently authoritative claim that "deconstruction could not be reduced to some methodological instrumentality or to a set of rules and transposable procedures" in the *Letter* (Derrida 2022, 284).

Worse than this, Derrida himself, some years before the writing of that letter, gives in *Positions* a description of the "*general strategy of deconstruction*" that he developed in *Dissemination*, and here deconstruction does seem to be a two-step, repeatable operation:

To deconstruct opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. [...] [...] The necessity of this phase is structural. [...]

On the other hand [...] we must also mark the interval between [this] inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new "concept" [of writing] that can [...] never could be, included in the previous regime. [...] Henceforth, in order better to mark this interval [...] it has been necessary to analyse, to set to work, *within* the text [...] certain marks [...] that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition. (Derrida 1981a, 41–3)

A similar outlining of this "two-step" deconstruction can be found in *Dissemination* and *Margins* (Derrida, 1981b 6; 1982 329).

Throughout *Positions* there also seem to be moments where Derrida runs the thoroughgoing anti-essentialist line that Moi and Malabou impute to him. He appears to insist *no* text is homogeneous, not once but on several occasions: "Heidegger's text which, no more than any other, is not homogeneous"; "Saussure's text, like any other, is not homogeneous" (Derrida 1981a, 10, 52). Freud, Marx, or Engel's texts are, likewise, not homogeneous, and: "the motif of homogeneity, the theological motif *par excellence*, is decidedly the one to be destroyed" (Derrida 1981a, 61). In short, you can see where Malabou, or de Man, might get their basis for thinking of deconstruction as the "destabilizing of all [...] unity". If this is the case for *all* texts – if this answer, that is to say, is always waiting for us at the end of every analysis – then Malabou is quite right: where is the "metaphoric adventure" of a Derridean reading?

Comparing such passages, it really does seem as if Derrida is, at best, unwittingly contradicting himself, and, at worst, retrospectively covering his own back by denying earlier characterizations of his own concepts and texts. That is, surely, the implication of Malabou's reading of Derrida's reading of *Grammatology*, in her chapter "Grammatology and plasticity" (Malabou 2011, 41–66). The essay is developed from her earlier article, "The

End of Writing? Grammarology and Plasticity" (Malabou 2007). I believe that confronting that argument is the best way to give a more convincing response not only to Malabou's, but also to Moi's, critique of Derrida.

Reading *Écriture*

The question that intrigues Malabou is why *Grammarology* failed. For she believes Derrida wished to develop "Grammarology" a new "science or philosophy of writing" in that text (Derrida 1997, 93; Malabou 2007, 432). With fifty years' hindsight, Malabou states that it is now evident that *Grammarology* was not "a treatise of universal reach, susceptible of generating—like linguistics, for example—a scientific posterity" (Ibid.). Her question is: "Why has the 'science of writing', in the new sense that it has to have, never been constituted?" (Ibid.).

There is, Malabou knows, a simple answer to the question. It is the answer that Derrida himself gave some years after the work, and answer which insists that his earlier work never "failed" because it never attempted to "achieve" anything, much like his description of "deconstruction" in the *Letter*. In the "The End of Writing?", Malabou quotes this passage from Derrida:

Of Grammarology [...] – this is one of the numerous mistakes or misrecognitions made by Lacan and so many others – it never proposed a grammarology, some positive science or discipline bearing that name; on the contrary, [it] went to great lengths to demonstrate the impossibility, the conditions of impossibility, the absurdity [of such a project]. (Derrida 1998, 52)

This is the "aporetic" explanation (Malabou 2007, 432). Derrida was only interested in constructing a science of Grammarology as means of "demonstrat[ing] the impossibility" of such a science. Therefore, whenever he writes in *Grammarology* that "the concept of writing should define the field of a science, a full-fledged 'positive science'" (Derrida 1997, 27), or gives section titles like "Of Grammarology as a Positive Science", we should understand these as ironies, introduced only to mark how far *Grammarology* lies from a scientific project.

But, after having briefly acknowledged Derrida's answer (Malabou 2007, 432), Malabou spends the rest of her article offering quite a different explanation of this "failure". She dwells on the passages in *Grammarology* where Derrida proposes his new concept of *écriture* ("writing") – *écriture* understood as more than just the "the technique of the nota-

tion of speech" but rather that which makes speech or communication *possible*: the ontological ground on which depends "the entire field of linguistic signs" (Derrida 1997, 44). Her belief is that Derrida really did transform and extend the meaning of "*écriture*" in these pages (and he does, after all, appear to redefine "writing"). Such a "modification" of the meaning of "*écriture*" could not itself have been "the work of writing", because it is everything to which "*écriture*", in the *new* sense, is opposed: a formal change, a redefinition, an event. The *change* that Derrida wreaked on the concept of "writing", in short – his establishing of a new theory or system, and philosophical "epoch", with this concept – undermines and compromises the widened notion of *écriture* as a grounding ontology, because this very change "*is not necessarily, or not uniquely, a graphic gesture*" (Malabou 2007, 435; original italics). Inscribed into the creation of "*écriture*" as ontological ground is, therefore, a tacit reliance on form; this is "*the threat to which the form subjects the trace*" (Ibid.; original italics). It is this contradiction in the conditions of its possibility that prevents *écriture* ever becoming a stable and developed science. This is why *Grammatology* fails. It is incoherent, in much the same way that Moi finds Derrida to be: the redefinition of "*écriture*" as *beyond definition* remains a definition, just as the "absence of theory is still a theory", as Moi writes (Moi 2017, 80).

Now, Malabou never definitely states that Derrida's explanation is incorrect. But we can see that her explanation is incompatible with his, and the implication is that Derrida's reading of his own texts is not, or no longer, compelling. To be clear on the differences: Derrida states (in 1998) that *Grammatology* "never proposed a grammatology", nor a new ontology based upon a formal modification of the definition of "*écriture*". Malabou, on the other hand, thinks Derrida *did* begin a new ontological "epoch" with a redefinition of "*écriture*", but that this very *achievement* rendered "*écriture*" an unstable concept, tacitly dependent on a concept of form that it rejects. This incoherence is why "[no-one] has ever invented anything whatsoever in deconstruction after Derrida" and why the trace is "always elsewhere" (Malabou 2011, 119, 120). To invent and develop *Grammatology* would require one to come to terms with the "trace's" own incoherent creation, and its tacit reliance upon the very concept of "form" that it supposedly undoes. To do so would be, in fact, to make the move that *Malabou* suggests in the article, and replace "grammatology" with her form-inspired concept of "plasticity".

For her, Derrida's "*écriture*" is quite clearly an "invention" – an act that occurred "at a certain time" – indeed, a "historic necessity" (Malabou 2007, 435–6). For Malabou, to be able to realize that Derrida really did (despite his claims) *modify* "*écriture*" is a privilege of where we are at the current moment, looking back on his work from within a new epoch

(Malabou 2007, 438). Similarly, Moi will talk of the "creat[ion]" of a "new concept" of "*écriture*" in *Grammatology*, a concept had the "structural function as a concept capable of generating (subsuming under itself) *both* speech and writing" (Moi 2017, 69–70).

Both think of Derrida as having attempted to create a new ontology, or new theory of meaning, in *Grammatology*. It is the discovery of this *act* of Derrida's that forms the basis for their different critiques. Indeed, this substantializing of Derridean thinking is what gives them *something* to critique in the first place.

A Better Response

This is the dilemma that the Derridean seems to face: either she must accept that Derrida was establishing a new theory of language in *Grammatology*, in which case the project would be incoherent, *or* she supposes that *Grammatology* and "deconstruction" "never proposed" anything (Derrida 1998, 52). However, if she argues that, she seems again to lose, for then Derrida does seem to be once more inert politically and philosophically. That is to say, Derrida's own later explanations of *Grammatology* and "deconstruction" not only seem to contradict statements made in those texts, but they would leave his project entirely ineffectual, predictable, and uninteresting – nothing more than a sort of "trolling" of metaphysics.

Now we have, perhaps, a better idea of the "conditions of impossibility" under which Derrida "operates" (Ibid.). It is a "hopeless double-bind" (Moi 2017, 100). Yet Derrida does have a response that remedies not only the *conceptual*, but the *political* inertia that Moi and Malabou attribute to "deconstruction". This response is a simple one: rather than attempting to resolve the contradiction, Derrida embraces it.

Let us return to Derrida's claims about a new "epoch of writing" at the start of *Grammatology*. Derrida does appear to define "epoch of logos" as one that marginalizes, "debase[s] or subordinate[s]" writing (Derrida 1997, 24–26). He then writes of "the necessity of passing [...] between two epochs" (a passage of which Hegel, "first thinker of writing" is apparently the standard-bearer) and the coming of a new epoch of writing (Ibid.). To write like this is surely to claim – impossibly – some *essential* characteristics for "*écriture*", to set it up in a binary *against* speech, and to think of the redefinition of "*écriture*" as a punctual temporal event. Since all of these things are contradictory to Derrida's own definition of "*écriture*", we might be tempted, therefore, to think of all of this as one elaborate sarcasm.

But such a wholly ironic reading would be to ignore an even earlier indication that Derrida gives of what he means by the word "epoch":

The word [...] "epoch" [...] I should mention that I have concerned myself with a *structural figure* as much as a *historical totality*. ["Epoch"] *is* in fact constituted in every respect as a *text*. As such [it] disturbs the time [...] of the line or the line of time. (Ibid. xc; original italics)

Such a sentence modifies how we ought to think of Derrida's creation of a new "epoch of writing" in *Grammatology*. It suggests that when Derrida writes of the "epoch of logos" coming to an end, he is speaking of a definite moment of time ("historical totality") that can be defined by its privileging of "speech" over "writing." Yet he is also speaking of "epoch" as a "text" that has no present moment, no beginning or determining "end", either in terms of linear time or linear *telos*. These two deliberately opposed notions of "epoch" are intended to be heard in the word *together* (Critchley 1992, 77). Thus, when he writes of an "epoch" of "writing", he is referring both to an definable "epoch" that emerged, or is emerging, in linear time (perhaps with Hegel) *and* to an indefinable, transhistorical "text".

This is Derrida's characteristic response to the "double bind" that haunts much of contemporary debate. He does *not* try the hopeless gesture of replacing "essentialism" with the doctrine of "anti-essentialism". Rather, he tries to think "essentialism" and "anti-essentialism" together.

To think like this is to think against the law of non-contradiction, which assumes we must have *either* one or the other – definable concepts or "no theory of language [and] no determinate meanings", as Moi claims of Derrida (Moi 2017, 80). The law of non-contradiction has long been taken as the firmest condition for the possibility of discourse, since if a given proposition does not rule out its negation – if it does not exclude – then it has long been argued it can have no meaning (e.g., Aristotle 2016, IV 3).

Yet, if the reader can *hear* both contradictory senses in Derrida's employment of the word "epoch", and can hear how those senses create a mood indicative of a particular approach towards the world – a new kind of *Stimmung* – then the text *has* a meaning, and a meaning (crucially) that cannot be substantialized or essentialized. This is why style is so important for Derrida. His texts themselves furnish examples of how language might develop a particular kind of meaning not despite, but through, contradiction. This kind of language is seen most clearly in the famous "writing under erasure" in *Grammatology*, where "~~is~~" is supposed to be understood simultaneously as "is" and "is not" (Derrida 1997, 61–2).

Once this has been understood, we can see why Derridean readings are not "act[s] or operation[s]" that attempt to refute or contradict texts (Johnson 1980, x–xi). Rather, the discovery of contradiction within the functioning of a work looks like a "demolition" of that

work *only* to those who take the principle of non-contradiction as a precondition for meaningful discourse. If one relaxes that assumption, then an exciting new range of approaches to texts, philosophy, and politics, opens up. Derrida's readings might begin to be seen as acts of appreciation, intended to respond to more traditional critics who dismiss disunity in texts (e.g., Derrida 1981b, 63–4). Johnson is clear on this point:

Consider the following passage from Derrida's *Dissemination*: "It is thus not simply false to say that Mallarmé is a Platonist or a Hegelian. But it is above all not true. And vice versa." Instead of a simple either/or structure, deconstruction attempts to elaborate a discourse that says neither "either/or", nor "both/and" nor even "neither/nor", while at the same time not totally abandoning these logics either. (Johnson 2020, 329)

Malabou and Moi exhibit little ear for this crucial mode of language in Derrida. As we have seen, Moi calls the prose of theorists like him "rebarbative"; Malabou favours an argumentation that proceeds in "the classical way" (Moi 2017, 90, 160–3; Malabou 2008, 4).

Nevertheless, this mood, which Johnson first noticed in Derrida (Johnson 2020), is present even in the passages that both thinkers use to support their key claims. One example is particularly telling. In the passage of *Margins* that Malabou often quotes, it certainly can seem as if Derrida believes that "all thought of form [...] is forever prisoner to metaphysics" (Malabou 2011, 48–9). Here is that quotation again:

How could it be otherwise? As soon as we utilize the concept of form—even if to criticize *another* concept of form—we inevitably have recourse to the self-evidence of a kernel of meaning. And the medium of this [...] can be nothing other than the language of metaphysics. [...] The system of oppositions in which something like form, the formality of form, can be thought, is a finite system. [...] This concept cannot be, and never could be, dissociated from the concept of appearing, of meaning, of self-evidence, of essence. [...] This is an assured point. (Derrida, 1982, 157–158)

After this, it may well seem that the "the journey of writing", since it lacks form, must inevitably become phoronomous, ineffectual, and boring (Malabou 2010, 48–9). But if we recall that Derrida did not think "the language of metaphysics" could ever be entirely destroyed, then, in this approbation of "form" (for it *is* an approbation) we might hear an invitation to *think* "form" again.

"A finite system" suggests an unbounded space beyond its "enclosure". An "assured point" – which reduces "form" to an "essence" – repeats the very discourse of a *punctual* philosophy of present moments that Derrida, allegedly, is attempting to pin down and refute. Rather than abandoning "form", the text thereby draws our attention, by the very reductivity of its polemic, to the necessity of "form" for language to function.

Indeed, as the text continues (for the quotation above comes only from the very beginning of "Form and Meaning") Derrida stealthily develops just this possibility of "form" beyond this deliberately limiting definition of it that is given at the start of the essay. "Form" is *always* tethered to metaphysics, and yet, at the same time, it may not be – just as Mallarmé may be a Platonist, and may not be one. Ultimately, Derrida suggests not only that metaphysical Being might be untethered from "form", but also that "form" can go "beyond the thinking of Being" and traditional ontologies.

One might think then that the *sense of Being* has been limited by the imposition of the *form* which [...] seems to have assigned to Being, along with the authority of the *is*, the closure of presence, the form-of-presence, presence-in-form, form-presence. [16] One might think, on the other hand, that formality—or formalization—is limited by the sense of Being [...]; and that henceforth the thinking of form has the power to extend itself beyond the thinking of Being. (Derrida 1982, 172; original italics)

Far from discouraging "all thought of form", or stating that form is "forever prisoner to metaphysics" (Malabou 2011, 48–9), "Form and Meaning" is an essay that encourages us to think *the other* of "form", to think of "form" as "trace" and "trace" as "form", and to think of the very *closing* of metaphysics, which has been accomplished by form, as that which opens and "fissures" it. Such is the import of the footnote for the above quotation:

[16] In a sense—or a non-sense – that metaphysics would have excluded from its field, while nevertheless remaining in secret and incessant relation with this sense, form in itself already would be the *trace* (*ikhnos*) of a certain non-presence, the vestige of the un-formed, which announces-recalls its other. [...] Henceforth, the closure of metaphysics [...] would not occur *around* a homogenous and continuous field of metaphysics. Rather, it would fissure the structure and history of metaphysics, *organically* inscribing and systematically *articulating* the traces *of the before* and the *after* both from within and without metaphysics. Thereby proposing an infinite, and infinitely surprising, reading. An irreducible rupture and excess can always be produced within an epoch. (Derrida 1982, 172 n. 16; original italics)

A great irony here is that this new concept of form that Derrida is advancing, form as fluidity, "which announces-recalls its other", is redolent of Malabou's "new" concept of "plasticity". "Plasticity" is the name for Malabou's attempt to re-form form. Her particular claim is that plasticity can treat of form *without* slouching back towards metaphysical or essentialist language, nor an old "thinking of Being" (Malabou 2010, 47). That Derrida would doubt this (for he does not think metaphysics can be so easily elided) does not mean, *simultaneously*, that he would not encourage her rethinking of "form" beyond metaphysics. Indeed, in the very essay that Malabou uses to "prove" Derrida's one-sided disdain of "form", we

can see that he is already sketching the very move that she claims to be radically unthought and "missing" in Derrida!

Malabou writes that "[Derridean] *writing will never abolish form. The trace will never pierce the figure*" (Ibid., 49; original italics). But, in *Margins* itself, Derrida is already imagining language as a "a play of traces" *and* "a play of forms" (Derrida 1982, 15). In such a space, "form in itself already would be the *trace*" (Ibid., 172 n.16; original italics). After all, banning "form" would be simply another formal critique of "form", leading nowhere. As Maclachlan puts it:

Contraposing the temporal against the spatial, or *force* against *form*, is a strategic move that cannot be the last word, since to remain at that stage would simply be to produce a mirror-image in the thrall of the very same metaphysical oppositions as the system under analysis. (Maclachlan 2012, 21; my italics)

So it is that classic Derridean critics have emphasised that "difference" itself must have an embodied or physical aspect: difference is "spatial and temporal" (Johnson 1980, xi) and "operates temporally as well as spatially" (Bennington and Young 1987, 1). It may well have a formal element.

Reading Contradiction

This is just one example, but it motivates Malabou's calls to begin a new "epoch of plasticity" after Derrida. Her misreading not only underestimates the place of "form" in Derridean thinking, but ignores Derrida's powerful (and deeply relevant) considerations regarding the perennial pervasiveness of metaphysics. Derrida, it is true, doubts the possibility of thinking "form" without metaphysics. What he advocates instead is the more difficult project of thinking of "form" *within* and *without* metaphysics simultaneously: "neither 'either/or', nor 'both/and' nor even 'neither/nor'" (Johnson 2020, 329). From this angle, a Derridean could well mount a challenge to Malabou's "plasticity" as too univocal of a concept.

In the same manner, one of Moi's principal complaints with Derrida – that he makes a theory out of the absence of theory – might be turned on Moi as well. For Moi's embracing of Wittgenstein may quickly take on the appearance of a general theory, bolstered by statements about *all* of language – that "the meaning of a word is its use", for example – as has already been suggested (O'Keeffe 2018, 378). Derrida, in short, has good reasons for proposing a theory that is and is not a theory simultaneously. It appears to him the only way to

avoid problems that might still hover in the background of Moi's and Malabou's new proposals for thinking after Derrida. This is the reason for his taking of this difficult, obscure path of thinking – this difficult path of writing as well.

From such a perspective, we can better appreciate some of Derrida's contradictions regarding his own texts. For example, when, in *Positions*, Derrida claims that "the motif of homogeneity, the theological motif *par excellence*, is decidedly the one to be destroyed" (Derrida 1981a, 61), this would seem to agree with Malabou's characterization of his work as wishing to "break with unity" (Malabou 2010, 20). Nevertheless, such a claim in Derrida is typically balanced by the directly opposing suggestion. Only a few lines away is the reminder that the discovery of a text, or history, as heterogeneous should lead us to a rethinking – and not an *abandoning* – of the question of its essence (ibid., 80–1). The insistence of an "always" – for example, that texts are *always* ambivalent – can also be thought of as a "strategic move", like a figure of rhetoric, intended to push the reader away from an unthinking advocacy of essentialism, *rather* than to advocate the whole-hearted adoption of the opposite theory of texts (MacLachlan 2012, 21).

However, if this is a rhetorical move, it is, admittedly, one that sometimes fails in Derrida. Critics like Moi and Malabou, as we have seen, tend to take *only* the positive side of the doctrine (the establishment of "*écriture*" in *Grammatology*), or *only* the negative side (the "refutations" afforded by deconstruction) and not the ambivalence of a gesture that is both positive and negative. Derrida sometimes expressed irritation at readers' inability to interpret his texts in this complicated sense.

While it may seem unfair of him to express annoyance at Searle, or "Lacan and so many others", without apparently imputing the fault to the clarity of his own writing (Derrida 1998, 52), it is interesting to note that, occasionally, we see him expressing regret for being too clear as well. This goes for "two-step" definition of "deconstruction" that we saw him offering in *Positions* and other 1970s texts. In the *Choreographies* interview a decade later, Derrida appears to regret that misinformed concession to clarity, or perhaps to have changed his mind on "deconstruction" altogether:

I am not sure that "phase two" marks a split with "phase one". [...] I spoke of two distinct phases [of deconstruction] for the sake of clarity, but the relationship of one phase to another is marked less by conceptual determinations (that is, where a new concept follows an archaic one) than by a transformation or general deformation of logic. (Derrida and McDonald 1982, 72)

The first step, "overturn the [textual] hierarchy" is typically understood (Derrida 1981a, 41–3; quoted above). Yet the second step – moving beyond "philosophical (binary) opposition" – is considered less often. This might be because such a thinking *beyond* philosophical binaries (including the law of non-contradiction) cannot readily be conceived as part of a two-step "operation".

Of course, one could argue that for Derrida to describe "deconstruction" in this way was ironic. One could say that, in the same way that he uses "epoch" in *Grammatology*, this was a way for him to indicate in what ways deconstruction cannot be a method. Yet the careful mood of those pages in *Grammatology* is not present in these descriptions of deconstruction and the way that "epoch" is carefully introduced as a contradictory term has not been recreated. The purpose of these definitions does seem to be "clarity", rather than to create a constructive ambivalence, and so it could be equally fair to read these earlier characterizations of "deconstruction" as a rhetorical error. Perhaps it was this *lack* of ambiguity, in fact, that leads to the misreadings of "deconstruction" that we have seen from de Man, Malabou, Moi, Norris, and so many others.

This is, in itself, an important result. For we must be able to discern the possibility of successes and failures – "wrinkles", in Malabou's terms – in the Derridean corpus if the reading of Derrida is to continue to excite and engage us. If ambivalence were not a *mood*, traceable and constructed in his texts, then to speak of Derrida refusing the principle of non-contradiction would become only another "phoronomous", catch-all solution to any criticism of his work: "He meant the opposite of what he said."

Johnson's initial description of this aspect of Derrida as a new "logic", therefore, may have done it a disservice, for a "logic" would seem to underwrite a whole text or body of work, turning the Derridean corpus itself into a homogeneity (Johnson 2020, 329). If, on the other hand, we conceive of this vein of Derridean writing as a carefully constructed mood, then we might trace its creation as well as its failures in Derridean texts.

Plus ça change

The purpose of this article has been to show that Derrida anticipated many of the problems that Moi or Malabou have found in concepts such as "deconstruction." Rather than proposing anti-essentialism, Derrida tries to show that essentialism and anti-essentialism may be had together, and that subtle effects of meaning can occur through contradiction itself. In this sense, the mood that Derrida explores and creates in his writings is not far from the kind of ambiguity that Empson enjoyed in poetry, where lines can communicate two

opposite meanings simultaneously, and this ambiguity is part of the pleasure of the text (see Niall, 2001).

I hope also to have shown how Moi's and Malabou's critiques may be taken, in one sense, to be repetitions (with differences) of earlier misreadings of Derrida. The reading of Derrida that I advocate, which is derived from Johnson's work, exculpates Derrida from the charge of being self-defeating, both philosophically and politically.

Rather than laying down phoronomous exegetical laws, Derrida often encourages his readers to develop or rethink concepts, such as "form", *beyond* his own texts. Nonetheless, Moi's and Malabou's habit of doubting Derrida's own authoritative pronouncements on his work is a fruitful one. If we are to pay more careful attention to the shifting moods of Derridean prose, we should be able to perceive the texts' fault lines as well as their occasional rhetorical excesses.

To return to our initial example regarding politics, if one relaxes one's belief in the necessity of a principle of non-contradiction, then this poses an exciting avenue of development for a feminist. "Woman" might be defined and remain undefined. Thus, the Derridean could stand with women, and leave the concept of "woman" open *simultaneously*. Some feminist texts have tried to work in that direction, and leave much open-ended (e.g., Deutscher, 1997; Johnson, 1987). This position also suggests an interesting avenue of exegesis for feminist literary critics, for it allows them to recognize that texts "which are the most phallogocentric or phallogocentric in their themes [...] can also be [...] the most deconstructive" (Derrida 1992, 58).

Moi's and Malabou's critiques of Derrida's political inertness lose their sting when seen from this perspective. That Derrida's reinterpretation of "woman" includes within it the *opposing* conception of "woman" as one who "remains in the home" is not an error or a parasitism (Malabou 2011, 36). Rather, the only credible means of conceptual advance (for him) would be by handling the term in such a way that both *opposed* aspects can be heard within it, and in their contradictory connection to one another. He does this with "epoch"; he hopes it can be done with "form"; we see it most obviously in *Grammatology's* "is".

Above all, we must stress that the Derridean need not think that conceptual work, or political work, must stop on the encounter with an aporia. That "woman" or "epoch" or "form" can be shown to exhibit these qualities certainly does not mean that we ought to sweep such concepts off the writing desk.

To continue to think from this position (or non-position) is exceedingly difficult. It is to work with and without hope of answers and to write with a language that always suggests the opposite of "what" is being said. Nevertheless, for those who wish to take it today, this Derridean adventure remains open and exciting, both polit

Adam Husain, PhD Cand.,
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages,
University of Oxford, adam.husain[at]chch.ox.ac.uk

References

- Aristotle. 2016. *Metaphysics*. Translated by David Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Bennington, Geoff, and Robert Young. 1987. "Introduction: Posing the Question." In *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, edited by Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington, and Robert Young, 1–9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cornell, Drucilla. 1991. *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law*. New York: Routledge.
- Critchley, Simon. 1992. *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Davies, Byron. 2018. "Revolution of the Ordinary Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell by Toril Moi (review)." *MLN, Modern Language Notes* 133 (5): 1416–19.
- De Man, Paul. 1979. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1981a. *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: Athlone Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1981b. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1982. *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. Brighton: Harvester.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1988. "Signature Event Context." In *Limited Inc*, 1–23. Translated by Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1989. "Psyche: Inventions of the Other." Translated by Catherine Porter. In *Reading De Man Reading*, edited by Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, 25–65. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1992. "This Strange Institution Called Literature." Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. In *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge, 33–75. London: Routledge.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1998. *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Derrida, Jacques. 2022. "Letter to a Japanese Friend." Translated by David Wood and Andrew Benjamin. In *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*, edited by Julian Wolfreys, 282–87. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Christie V. McDonald. 1982. "Interview: Choreographies: Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald." Translated by Christie V. McDonald. *Diacritics* 12 (2): 66–76.
- Derrida, Jacques, James Creech, Peggy Kamuf, and Jane Todd. 1985. "Deconstruction in America: An Interview with Jacques Derrida." Translated by James Creech. *Critical Exchange* 17: 1–32.
- Deutscher, Penelope. 1997. *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Di Leo, Jeffrey, ed. 2016. *Dead Theory: Derrida, Death, and the Afterlife of Theory*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Ellis, John. 1989. *Against Deconstruction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fischer, Michael. 1985. *Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference? Poststructuralism and the Defense of Poetry in Modern Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fischer, Michael. 2018. "MOI, TORIL. Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. Book Reviews." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76 (3): 371–75.
- Gasché, Rodolphe. 1979. "Deconstruction as Criticism." *Glyph* 6: 177–215.
- Jagger, Gill. 1996. "Dancing with Derrida: Anti-essentialism and the politics of female subjectivity." *Journal of Gender Studies* 5 (2): 191–99.
- Johnson, Barbara. 1980. *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Johnson, Barbara. 1987. *A World of Difference*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Johnson, Barbara. 2020. "Nothing Fails Like Success." In *The Barbara Johnson Reader*, edited by Melissa Feuerstein, Bill González, Lili Porten, and Keja Valens, 327–33. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2): 225–48.
- MacLachlan, Ian. 2012. *Marking Time: Derrida, Blanchot, Beckett, des Forêts, Klossowski, Laporte*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Malabou, Catherine. 2007. "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity." *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 12 (4): 431–41.
- Malabou, Catherine. 2010. *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*. Translated by Carolyn Shread. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Malabou, Catherine. 2011. *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*. Translated by Carolyn Shread. Cambridge: Polity.
- Malabou, Catherine, and Jacques Derrida. 2004. *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida*. Translated by David Wills. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Malabou, Catherine, and Noëlle Vahanian. 2008. "A Conversation with Catherine Malabou." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9 (1): 1–13.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. 2004. *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Moi, Toril. 1999. *What is a Woman? And Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moi, Toril. 2009. "Barbara Johnson from a Distance." <http://torilmoi.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Barbara-Johnson-from-a-distance.pdf>.
- Moi, Toril. 2017. *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

- Nealon, Jeffrey. 1992. "The Discipline of Deconstruction." *PMLA, Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America* 107 (5): 1266–79.
- Neuhann, Esther. 2023. "Toril Moi's Phenomenological Account of 'Woman' and Questions of Trans Inclusivity." *Hypatia* 38 (2): 251–74.
- Niall, Lucy. 2001. "Derivations: From Derrida to Empson." In *Beyond Semiotics: Text, Culture, and Technology*, 97–115. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Norris, Christopher. 1982. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. London: Methuen.
- O'Keeffe, Brian. 2018. "Revolution of the Ordinary. Literary Studies After Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell by Toril Moi (review)." *The Comparatist* 42 (1): 368–84.
- Pippin, Robert. 2019. "Toril Moi. Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell." *Critical Inquiry* 45 (2): 567–69.
- Rose, Jacqueline. 1986. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*. London: Verso.
- Spivak, Gayatri. 1983. "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman." In *Displacement: Derrida and After*, edited by Mark Krupnick, 169–75. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Stan, Marius. 2022. "Phoronomy: Space, Construction, and Mathematizing Motion." In *Kant's Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science: A Critical Guide*, edited by Michael McNulty, 80–97. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Vinten, Robert. 2018. "Review of Revolution of the Ordinary by Toril Moi." *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 6 (2): 99–103.