

TAMING VIOLENCE:¹

RICOEUR AND DERRIDA

Discussions of violence have recently taken a central role in postmodern conversations of philosophy/nonphilosophy. According to the usual script of deconstruction, the violence of philosophy and of ontology and, indeed, of logos in general and of all meaning formation is a power play that must be subverted by the deconstructive process. Within this general postmodern conversation, Paul Ricoeur, in his own way, addresses the phenomena that deconstruction indicates as violent, taking them in a more positive way. In spite of this fundamental difference, Ricoeur considers violence and language as contraries to occupy the totality of the human field. In addition, for Ricoeur, violence has a central role in the transition within ethics from the teleological to the deontological, for the evaluative ethics of the Aristotelian tradition is critiqued as not being able to deal adequately with violence and evil.²

Within this broad context, we will focus first on postmodern deconstruction's opposition to the violence of philosophy and logocentrism; then we will consider the very violence latent within the deconstructive process, beginning with that in relation to a basic will to believe, contrasting this interpretation of violence with the surplus of meaning considered not as violence, but rather as an attempt to render account of an excess or fullness

¹In the present treatise, violence will be taken in its broadest sense, including two extremes: the violence one does to another person, such as murder; and the violence of nature, such as in hurricanes, avalanches or epidemics. This follows the breadth of violence that Ricoeur notes in the beginning of his article, "Violence and Language," in *Political and Social Essays by Paul Ricoeur* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1974), p. 88-89, [See above pp. 32 and 33].

²Although the place of violence in his ethics is central, it will not be considered as such in this article, since our scope is more general. For Ricoeur, violence and evil are what require the move from the Aristotelian teleological ethics to the normative moral philosophy of Kant. And in this context it is precisely the violence that one does to another.

of sense. Second, the violence within deconstruction's diacritical view of language and within its view of the living present will be considered, clarifying the fundamental nature of the violence of deconstruction. Finally, the role of violence in Ricoeur's philosophy will be considered, beginning with the surplus of meaning and violence, and taking into account the role of violence in the living present and in language as discourse.

Thus, our thesis has emerged: that deconstruction misinterprets the relation between violence and language due to its view of the living present and sign, and that, with a revision in this view of language (sign, word, and discourse) and the living present, the dialectic between violence and language can be reread and replaced in a context that makes sense out of making sense.

Deconstruction opposes not only the so called violence of metaphysics, but also that of the pre-metaphysical.³ A violence is already detected in the logistic prejudice of Husserl in giving the priority to the theoretical, and, in this context, would be carried forward to the later work on the pre-predicative. This leads to the violence within the whole tradition that follows, giving the priority to presence as in Heidegger's focus on the presence of Being. Although Heidegger overcomes the theoretical priority of Husserl, his fixation on presence, according to the standard recent script, is a violence which replaces the former. As far as Levinas is concerned, according to Derrida's interpretation, Heidegger, in affirming the priority of Being over the existent and thereby deciding the essence of philosophy, constitutes a kind of violence to philosophy, due to the subordination of the personal relation with someone, and of the existent in a possible ethical relation, "to a relation with the Being of the existent, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing),..."⁴ And Derrida interprets this

³Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 87.

⁴Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 45: quoted in "Violence and Metaphysics" of Derrida, 97.

consideration of ontology to be first philosophy as a power play, a philosophy of power.

Consistent with these considerations of violence is deconstruction's conviction that violence is done to the exception, to those who do not fit the scheme of communally accepted rationality and law, or the "rationalized community"⁵. As Derrida puts this: "Man *calls himself* man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementary: the purity of nature, of animality, primitivism, childhood, madness, divinity."⁶

Ultimately, one of the most general contexts of violence according to deconstruction is found in language, which is the focus of this article. In referring to the relation between violence and writing, Drucilla Cornell, reflecting on a basic point of Derrida, puts it well in pointing out that there is violence even in the writing which attempts, in institutions, to overcome violence. The very institutions which aim to prevent violence do so by enforcing a more subtle and basic expression of violence, that of the institutionalization process itself and that of writing itself, and that of any organization of meaning, thought or value into a network of any kind or into any systemic view. Thus, writing and violence are associated. "Writing and other forms of 'representational' systems, whether they be kinship systems or political institutions, are an attempt to defend against human violence. But to the degree that the establishment

⁵Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of Limit* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 49.

⁶Jacque Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 244-245. This last and most important kind of violence, that of one person against another, is not the focus of this paper, and thus will not be further discussed. Yet opposition to it plays an essential role in deconstruction and in Ricoeur's works. In this context, in the account of the interrelation among sight (*le regard*), sound and desire, any neutralization of desire in favor of mere sight is a violence, the violence of the "abstraction of seeing." For respect, not only sight, but also desire must be present, but a desire which does not consume, and a desire which goes beyond satisfaction and is a true turning the other way of desire, to transcendence, which does not ever get satisfied. Thus, this desire does not seek to consume as do Hegelian desire and need, for it is beyond need and satisfaction.

of systems for ethical political 'representation' identifies the norm and rigidly circumscribes the definition of right behavior, such establishments carry within them their own violence. The very power to name is for Derrida 'the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying....To think the unique *within* the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of arche-writing: arche-violence.' For Derrida, Rousseau's ethic of speech is a 'delusion of presence mastered,' a delusion that is dangerous because it conceals or effaces the violence of language's classifying power."⁷

Continuous with this basic violence of language, Derrida pinpoints two kinds of violence in a rather clear text commenting on Benjamin, that of the founding or the setting up of a law, institution, meaning, text, etc., and that of conserving the same.⁸ This likewise applies to language, to setting up a meaning or text, and conserving it in interpretations and traditions. Deconstruction is supposed to expose such violence passing under the guise of law, meaning, systems, institutions, etc. The very process of deconstructive reading itself exposes, and at once undoes this violence in the process of moving from one reading to the other. It thus opens up possibilities beyond the fixity which does violence. And it is precisely this process

⁷Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of Limit*, p. 51, quoting Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 112

⁸"For beyond Benjamin's explicit purpose, I shall propose the interpretation according to which the very violence of the foundation or position of law (*Rechtsetzende Gewalt*) must envelop the violence of conservation (*Rechtserhaltende Gewalt*) and cannot break with it. It belongs to the structure of fundamental violence that it calls for the repetition of itself and founds what ought to be conserved, conservable, promised to heritage and tradition, to be shared. A foundation is a promise. Every position (*Setzung*) permits and promises (*permet et pro-met*), it positions *en mettant et en promettrant*. And even if a promises not kept in fact, iterability inscribes the promise as the guard in the most irruptive instant of foundation.Position is already iterability, a call for self-conserving repetition." Jacques Derrida, "Force of law: The 'Mystical Foundations of Authority,'" in *Cardozo Law Review*, vol. 11. Nos.5-6. This reference is simply to p. 997. Quoted by Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of Limit*, p. 162.

that makes sense out of the claim that "deconstruction is justice."⁹ For, according to deconstruction, justice is a sort of limit concept or, more precisely in Derrida's sense, is at the limit as something set in motion in the deconstructive process, and not some closed up ideal or absolutely definable concept. This is the way in which justice is first freed from its union with law, thus taking away its violence, and put in play at the deconstructive level, preventing the violence of the law which is set up and prolonged in violence.¹⁰ And again the same applies to meanings in a text.

The double reading of deconstruction, or recognizing the "double gesture" of deconstruction, does not exonerate deconstruction from the accusation that it itself is guilty of violence, as Drucilla Cornell contends.¹¹ For one violence perpetrated by deconstruction, although quite subtle, is contained in the absolute claim that there necessarily is the double reading, double gesture, ellipsis, and in the attitude toward not merely the failed systematization, but also toward meaning itself, texts, and any instance of knowledge. And this violence is radically rooted in their initial stance, as will become apparent in the following analysis, proceeding in a Jamesian way.¹²

⁹Derrida, "Force of Law," p. 945, quoted in Cornell, *Philosophy of Limit*, p.157

¹⁰These two kinds of violence are included in Caputo's attempt at an ethics of obligation without or against ethics: "Ethics contains obligation, but that is its undoing (deconstruction). Ethics harbors within itself what it cannot maintain, what it must expel, expectorate, exclude. Ethics, one might say, cannot contain what it contains." John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.5. For Levinas, the face is the limit of all power and of all violence, since it is not in the world and since it opens and goes beyond the totality.

¹¹Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of Limit*, p. 155.

¹²William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings*, Edited by H.S. Thayer (New York: New American Library 1970), pp. 186-209.

Deconstruction can be seen to contain a latent and subtle affirmation in common with Logocentrism especially in the latter's philosophical and scientific expressions. It can be seen that all expression of meaning, even of systems, all discovery in knowledge and thinking, and all value, spring from *a will to believe* or a certain faith that we can arrive at a logos, knowledge, and unconcealment that make sense, and that values can be grasped and sought. At this point, deconstruction and its opponents are within the same commitment of belief and are on the same level of discourse, for both affirm this coming to logos.¹³ It is here on this common ground that deconstructionists have come to what might be called a quasi conversion, a complete change-about in their way of looking at the whole enterprise of emerging meanings and values, so that the post Copernican revolution now becomes a post critical conversion.¹⁴ At this point, following the faith in the sense of logos, there is a complete about-face or transformation in attitude, giving rise to a further interpretation of the logos according to which it is incapable of doing justice to the unfathomable abyss and is rather prone toward an inauthentic power domination. It entails a closure of sense, an effect which looses its fluidity. It is at this point that deconstruction attempts to dismantle the status of the logos and knowledge within the initial will to believe in the process of making sense, viewing the process of coming to sense as a violence of closure.

Deconstructionists, then, entails more than cognition in their will to believe in cognition. There is a further commitment

¹³In fact the critical philosophy of modernity arose in the attempt to check and limit reason's self-assurance, especially in the context of the success of science. When once these have been attained to some degree of sophistication [e.g., in science, in philosophy], we can be thrown back to reflect on the precognitive and prephilosophical level, and need to discover and to account more explicitly for that very level within the scope of the enlightening process itself.

¹⁴It might be worth recalling the role, for Kant, of the *Critique of Judgment* in establishing a strictly limited basis of the Critical philosophy in reflective judgment in purposiveness and all to which that leads – all outside any knowledge claims. And this is the presupposed element for all empirical science, the transcendental conditions of which have been established in the *First Critique*.

to the belief in closure intrinsic to such logos, to the priority of this closure over sense, and to the priority of the flux. Thus, deconstruction brings excess baggage to the will to believe in logos and cognition, constituting a priority of the nonlogocentric, and thus introducing a negative violence into the process. The ultimate issue, then, is that the will to believe of deconstruction, while affirming first the logos through which one must pass, reveals a commitment to the priority of a concomitant closure, to its absolute status in relation to the abyss, and therefore to a nonlogocentrism in opposition to a so-called violence of logocentrism. This can be seen to be a misplaced violence. Protesting that its opponents have not grasped their thinking, it is clear that their very protestations reveal an underlying prejudice, as absolute in its claim as it is illusive and unattainable: a belief in the undecidable, the inexpressible, the abyss. And to this it is best to reply with an alternate belief, one which makes sense out of sense, while at once seeing and admitting its limits, but with an openness beyond the initial limit. This limit, then, while initially a certain kind of closure entailed in the coming to light of logos, is likewise an openness to its own very source for constant and ongoing renewal in a process of interpretation. Thus, its openness consists both in bringing to light, and, at once, openness toward renewal in its rich source, thus, in its own way, taking into account the closure of limit. In this light, the deconstructive sense of the primacy of closure can be seen to do violence, from the outside, to the tendency to light, meaning, truth, and values. If, indeed, there is a violence in this process, it is positive, resting precisely in the capture of meaning, rather than in the emergence and closure as negative.

We must now turn our attention toward the two pivotal points relevant to the difference between Ricoeur's view of the relation between violence and language and that of deconstruction: the treatment of time and that of sign. For, on the one hand, deconstruction is committed to the discreteness of time, arising out of its interpretation of the living present as violent, and to a diacritical view of signs in language where sense is already a manifestation of violence, while Ricoeur, by

contrast, and in a different will to believe, accepts a phenomenological priority of time and a semantic priority in language that requires a place for the word and not just for signs in diacritical relations. Ricoeur thus puts the dialectic between language and violence in a different realm of discourse. We must pursue further these two points, first, the living present and then sign, revealing two differing views of violence in relation to language.

Derrida puts the nonperception and nonpresence of retention on the same side as that of reproduction, thus placing an alterity within the living present and constituting the living present as violent.¹⁵ "The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace."¹⁶ Thus deconstruction has wedged a separation into the center of the living present, making two alien and discrete parts out of the duration of the "thick now." This view of the broken and violent living present, resulting in a discreteness of time, underlies a view of sign which reinforces this critique of Ricoeur's so called closure, and thus making it possible for Ricoeur to come under fire for attempting a so called "taming of time."

For deconstruction, the meaning of the sign emerges from its difference from other signs, and the signified can itself become a signifier, thus showing the collapse of the radical

¹⁵Jacque Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," p. 133: "In the last analysis, if one wishes to determine violence as the necessity that the other not appear as what it is, that it not be respected except in, for, and by the same, that it be dissimulated by the same in the very freeing of its phenomenon, then time is violence. This movement of freeing absolute alterity in the absolute same is the movement of temporalization in its most absolute unconditioned universal form: the living present. If the living present, the absolute form of the opening of time to the other in itself, is the absolute form of egological life, and if egoity is the absolute form of experience, then the present, the presence of the present, and the present of presence, are all originally and forever violent. The living present is originally marked by death. Presence as violence is the meaning of finitude, the meaning of meaning as history."

¹⁶Jacque Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And other Essays of Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison and Newton Garver (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 85.

distinction made by de Saussure between signifier... signified. The meaning of a sign, rather than immediately present as Husserl and de Saussure thought, is constituted by a 'tissue of differences,' a network of referrals, and every so called simple term is marked by the trace of another term. Hence a sign already differs from itself before any act of expression. Thus, no particular sign can be considered to refer to any particular signified, a sign cannot have a unique meaning (it is undecidable), and the system of signifiers cannot be escaped. That we cannot escape the system of signifiers and that no particular sign can be considered to refer to any particular signified leads to the conclusion that there is no presence to meaning in the usual sense within language; no presence to consciousness or to things. Rather, meaning transpires in the "play that is the web of language."¹⁷ Thus, deconstruction (Derrida) can be seen to deny the accessibility of the present and of presence. For everything transpires within language constituted by the network or system of signifiers. There is no escape from the system of signifiers. This entails a view of language from which meaning, in a different sense from that of any usual semantics, emerges. For, deconstruction begins with the subordination of semantics in the traditional sense to syntax, and the development of a view of syntax quite different from its usual sense. From such a syntax, as the root of the formal dimension of language, the semantic dimension emerges. Therefore, Derrida subscribes to a new and far more radical sense of syntax than that of syntax as form in contrast to content. Rather, for him, syntax is the condition making meaningful language possible and, at once, is itself productive of the semantic dimension of language. This has been referred to as a "syntax of syntax" from which the "formal syntactic properties can be syntactically composed and decomposed."¹⁸

¹⁷Jacques Derrida, *Positions* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 19.

¹⁸Rodolphe Gasche "Infrastructures and Systematicity," in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. by John Sallis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 11-12.

This reduction to syntax liberates the signifier from the "oppressive regime"¹⁹ of the violence of presence as immediacy and at once ties it to the time flux over against structure or meaning. For, if syntax is prior to semantics and there is a "syntax of syntax,"²⁰ then the flux of syntax, the diachronic, is in no way tied to or subordinated to semantics or to meaning, or to the structure of the system of language. Rather, it generates a kind of meaning in the very positioning of such words as "green is or," thus moving away from structuralism in favor of the flux underlying meaning and language. It has lost, however, the continuity and depth of lived time. While disavowing the living present and the word as doing violence to the instant and to sign as diacritical, deconstruction itself does violence to language and to the living present, as will become ever more clear. Before turning to Ricoeur's view of the language and the living present as the context for the dialectic of violence and language, a brief account of deconstruction's critique of Ricoeur is necessary to fully grasp his position in response.

Ricoeur's view of interpretation, of meaning, and of language have been critiqued for interpretive closure, and thus violence, in texts. An interpretation can be considered closure because it helps conserve the meaning set up. However, Ricoeur recognizes the richness of the concrete and existential to the extent of emphasizing the conflict of interpreting the same symbolic texts or narratives. Deconstruction (here, especially David Wood²¹) challenges Ricoeur's attempts to address time and narrative, proposing that there might be other ways in which language resolves the aporias of time if the closure of language and of time is interpreted differently or is

¹⁹John Caputo, "The Economy of Signs in Husserl and Derrida: From Uselessness to Full Employment," in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, p. 105.

²⁰Rodolphe Gasche, "Infrastructures and Systematicity," p. 12.

²¹Cf. "Introduction: Interpreting narrative," David Wood, in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, edited by David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1991)

deconstructed. It is clear that deconstruction has opted for a view of metaphor, and, indeed, of language as such, which calls for an interruption, rather than a synthesis, within a view of language as a system of signs. Wood asks: "Is not Ricoeur putting a brave face on time's reassertion of its power to disrupt all attempts at conceptual domestication?"²² Wood wants to interpret Ricoeur's attempt as one in which the "presumption of synthesizing thought is confronted by a power that exceeds it,"²³ and thus runs up against the limits of the power of narrative to tame time. As he says: "might it not be that narrative is committed to the possibility of a certain closure of meaning, which will inexorably be breached."²⁴ And Wood proposes that phenomenological and cosmic time are two *discrete and autonomous* dimensions of the real, and not two partial models of the real. By extension, the same critique, in a more general way, could be made of Ricoeur especially in the context of his ethicomoral position in that he operates within the closure of language, tradition, institutions, etc. He is in need of being deconstructed in terms of the ellipsis to be found necessarily, according to the deconstructionist conviction, in his texts, by means of the double reading. At this point, in the attempt to respond to this critique, we must turn to Ricoeur's richer and more viable account of language and time, the possibility of whose account rests on a completely opposed view of sign and the living present.

The relation between language and violence is quite different for Ricoeur than that of deconstruction seen above. For Ricoeur, it is in discourse that violence has its contrary, and it is the spoken word that bears the dialectic of meaning and violence. "Language [*Le langage*] is innocent — language meaning the tool, the code — because it does not speak, it is spoken. It is discourse that bears the problem that we are

²² Wood, *On Paul Ricoeur*, p. 5.

²³ Wood, *On Paul Ricoeur*, p. 5-6.

²⁴ Wood, *On Paul Ricoeur*, p. 6.

considering.”²⁵ It would seem that deconstruction, in contrast, puts violence in language not merely as spoken, but also and especially in writing, and in any coming to meaning. We must see the precise difference of focus here. While for deconstruction violence is intrinsic to the process of coming to meaning and to the so-called closure entailed in this process, in contrast, for Ricoeur, violence is opposed by spoken discourse. Ricoeur, however, seems to come close to deconstruction in saying that “The poet is the violent man who forces things to speak. It is poetic *abduction*.”²⁶ Yet, this is not at all the closure of deconstruction, but, rather, the force of bringing something to openness. Poetic and coherent speech, arising from the desire for meaning, allows being and meaning to emerge. In contrast, the collapse of language into a diacritical system of signs does not advance us even one step in the direction of rational meaning, but rather, does violence to that very process. For what Ricoeur considers to be in question is the “meaning of discourse, not the structure of the keyboard on which it plays.”²⁷ And in the same vein, deconstruction becomes an accomplice of violence in its move against semantics and meaning, and in its subversion of the role of the subject.

Ricoeur could be considered to critique deconstruction's initial move into language in the same way as he did that of structuralism: that the project of linguistics which leads to structuralism and deconstruction is misdirected inasmuch as language as discourse, the saying of something to someone, is lost and thus is violated. Further, it often overlooks the fact that semiotics as sign theory cannot move to the sentence as the

²⁵Ricoeur, “Violence and Language,” p. 91. (above p. 34.)

²⁶Ricoeur, “Violence and Language,” p. 95. (above p. 37).

²⁷Ricoeur, “Violence and Language,” P. 98 [above, 39]. Ricoeur goes on: “The problem of language in confrontation with violence is not the problem of structure, but rather the problem of meaning, of rational meaning, that is to say, of the effort to integrate in an inclusive understanding the relationship of man to nature, of man to man, of existence and meaning, and, finally, this very relation of language and violence.”

basic unity of meaning. As Ricoeur says: "The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words but the words are something other than short sentences. A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum or its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of its words. A sentence is made up of signs, but is not itself a sign."²⁸ Each stage - word, sentence, and text - is a new stage requiring a new structure and description.

Ricoeur's insistence on taking language as discourse is based on a radical disagreement with Ferdinand de Saussure's fundamental distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*, which does not leave room for language as discourse. Ricoeur's disagreement with this distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*, more radical than the critique of de Saussure by Derrida regarding signifier and signified, emerges in his attempt to go beyond the opposition between semeiology and the phenomenology of language. He considers the unity of language (*le langage*) fundamental to both, unifying them in a hierarchy of levels: "To think language (*le langage*) should be to think the unity of that very reality which de Saussure has disjoined - the unity of language (*la langue*) and speech (*la parole*)."²⁹ Thus, in order to overcome the opposition by an interarticulation in language, Ricoeur bases his view on a unity of language which does justice to both the semeiology that takes *la langue* as an object, as well as to a phenomenology of speech. His intent is to avoid that initial separation between language (*la langue*) and speech (*la parole*) as a false dichotomy. The new unity must at the same time allow for the possibility of viewing language as an object of science and, at once, also allow for the event of communication. And the unity which he has mentioned surpasses the opposition between these aspects of language, thereby making possible a way of interarticulating them.

The new unity of language on the side of semantics gives

²⁸Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976, p. 7.

²⁹Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 80.

the primordial role in language theory to semantics rather than semeiology and syntax, especially in the restricted sense of deconstruction. There are several reasons for understanding this unity to be on the side of discourse, function, and semantics. First, all roads lead from semantics in the sense that all sciences of language presuppose, at least implicitly, the semantic function. Further, by putting the unity on the side of semantics in the sentence, both sides of the antinomy or opposition can be articulated; and finally, by putting the unity in the sentence, an articulation of the hierarchical levels of language is seen to make sense. And this hierarchy of levels, in spite of a break within them, makes possible the interarticulation of various approaches. This break, constituted by the system of signs of semeiology (including that of deconstruction), reflects the different ways of considering the sign and the transition from semeiology to semantics.³⁰

The same signs can be considered from two distinctively different points of view: one focusing on the relation of the sign to the system of signs, and the other focusing on its function in the sentence. To oppose sign to sign is the *semiological* function, and to represent the real by signs is the *semantic* function. And the first function serves the second. The sign is "meaningless" in the semeiology of structuralism and deconstruction. On the other hand, the sign is word in semantics. "Words are the point of articulation of the semiological and the semantic in each event of speech."³¹ We

³⁰This break and the transition are discussed in the following text: Moreover, these two sciences are not just distinct, but also reflect a hierarchical order. The object of semiotics - the sign - is merely virtual. Only the sentence is actual as the very event of speaking. This is why there is no way of passing from the word as a lexical sign to the sentence by mere extension of the same methodology to a more complex entity. The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words, but the words are something other than short sentences. A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of words. A sentence is made up of signs, but it is not itself a sign." Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 7.

³¹Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretation*, p. 93. We will now turn to Ricoeur's view of time underlying signs and words.

will now turn to Ricoeur's view of time underlying signs and words.³²

Ricoeur picks up on two central points of Husserl's inner time - consciousness overlooked in deconstructive interpretations: first, Husserl's inner time - consciousness is a continuum containing continuance, a fact which Ricoeur quite correctly makes central; and second, the overall problem which is addressed and which retention solves is that of duration as such. Ricoeur insists that the "now" for Husserl cannot be considered a point-like instant, which is precisely what deconstruction wants to do. Ricoeur considers Derrida to stress the "subversive aspect of this solidarity between the living present and retention as regards the primacy of the *Augenblick*, hence the point - like present, identical to itself."³³ While Ricoeur takes into account Husserl's "strong sense" given to the distinction between the present and the instant, he is firmly opposed to placing the nonperception of retention on the same side of otherness as that of recollection since retention is seen in phenomenological description to be essentially different from recollection. Retention is continuous with perception, while recollection in the "strong sense" of the word is a nonperception. A similar critique could be levied against Derrida's interpretation of retention as nonpresence. For Ricoeur's interpretation agrees that the non presence of retention is not to be equated with the nonpresence of second memory or recollection.

Thus, Derrida, in picking up on the wrong side of the tension between the living present and the instant in Husserl's ambiguous treatment, has focused on the flux of time as discrete and represented or repeated. For Derrida "signification is formed only within the hollow of differance: of discontinuity and of discreteness, of the diversion and the reserve of what

³²For Ricoeur's turning to ethics from his critique of Heidegger's sense of time, see: Thomas P. Hohler, "From Being to Ethics: The Time of Narration," *International Studies in Philosophy*, XXVII, pp. 21-43.

³³Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. III, p. 283, note 12.

does not appear."³⁴ Differance can thus be seen to make signification possible because of the interval which separates the present from alterity. In this way nothing precedes *differance*.³⁵ What becomes clear is that if one begins with discreteness, the only alternatives are either pure identity or dire alterity. If one rejects, as Derrida rightly does, the alternative of pure identity, then his deconstructive stance is the logical conclusion. What has been lost in favor of this superimposed discrete time is the lived time as a sense of human concrete existence, which, as such, is continuous, has duration, and moves as a whole. Further, one must realize that the instant as such does not exist since it is an abstraction from the continuum or, at best, as Husserl uses the term, merely the occasion within the continuum for the beginning or starting point of something in an experience. In addition Ricoeur's account of the temporal context for understanding language undercuts Derrida's pseudo alternatives of signs or presence, for the temporal span of the present is neither pure identity nor pure alterity. The very present, as thickened by retentions and protensions, "intends" the future in light of the past. Since the very function of the present is to mean and the very nature of presence requires signs, language and signs are inseparably intertwined with time.

Thus, it is clear that the critique by deconstruction of Ricoeur's so called closure makes sense only if one ignores or disagrees with Ricoeur's view of the semantic priority in language and continuity in time. Ricoeur does not allow for an ellipsis, which absolutely presupposes a priority of the flux and a dethroning of semantics and is thus itself violent, but, rather, only for a sort of imbalance due to the fullness of meaning in experience and existence. His belief, however, and admittedly only a belief like that of deconstruction, favors making sense in making sense; values in evaluating; and responding to the face

³⁴Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), p. 69.

³⁵Jacques Derrida, *Position*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 28.

of the other responsibly and personally. And in the process, his view of these does not do violence to them as does deconstruction, and, at once, he reads the relation of violence and language in a way that does justice to them without violating them.

The fundamental point at issue here is whether the deconstructive turn in moving against such elements provides a view of time and sign in language able to sustain anything about saying something to someone. Further, it seems that obligation and responsibility, even as taking place in the collapse of reason, and without why, must be constituted in lived experience, just as any meaningful communication involving language must have continuity to sustain a viable view of language to which trace is so important, and must presuppose a semantic dimension able to carry, even indirectly, the message of the discourse. It is precisely the priority of the semantic and the continuity of time which allow a meaningful sense of philosophy of limit. It is not merely a delimiting of sense as closure but a reaching through sense, taking account of the tension between the fullness of sense and its various levels of articulation, which does not succumb to the closure in a reduction to the virtual and empty sign.

We have seen that, instead of considering violence to be intrinsic to sense, to the living present, to presence and to anything established, it becomes necessary to see the violence intrinsic to the very deconstructive process itself, to clotal reading, in its priority given to the closures of sense, time, sign, presence: i.e. in the view that anything that is produced by the flux other than the undecidable is violent. Thus, we have seen that violence is intrinsic to the whole deconstructive process at a basic level. In contrast to deconstruction, Ricoeur's priorities, as seen, do allow for saying something to someone and for a viable semantic and ethical framework for reflection today.

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