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# THE SIMULCARUM, THE STRANGER, THE CATASTROPHE<sup>1\*</sup>

## Simulacrum

I would like to begin with a question, regarding the interrogative initiation of the lesson held by Derrida in 2003 January 22 at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, and now published in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. The initiation is a question: “Does solitude *distance* one from others?”<sup>2</sup>

We know that Derrida had read and reread the pages of the adventures of *Robinson Crusoe*, the novel that had continually suggested to him a rich sample of considerations. The question of the incipit indeed constitutes the first point of the analogic path for Derrida’s analysis. If we would summarize the other concatenate and non-hierarchical levels, we directly may indicate the focuses that lead to some connected directions (the target is the strategy of the sense). The points, the levels of sense are arranged in this order: solitude, ipseity, isolation, firing, wheel, reign, automaton, self-destruction, sovereignty.

In the plot of the novel, for a long time solitude belongs to the sovereign Robinson in his island, who asserts the principle of his sovereignty when he forces himself to face nature, erects walls, find shelters, bores huts and hutches, explores caverns, invents machineries, carries gears as automata and humans or beasts like automata. In Defoe’s descriptions, the itinerary, always around the island, starts from the condition of a bad son of British Kingdom, who subsequently becomes swashbuckling, slave and slave owning, shipwrecked, and finally sovereign.

Pay attention to the specific circumstance: the island is explored all round, considered a full possession, and at a later time becomes a dangerous possession (surprised the naked cannibals, dangerous enemies to be executed in the name of the white prisoners), the circumference of the lurking danger, which does not reduce Robinson’s sovereignty because, indeed, it pushes him to fight against external threats (curious paradox: the cannibals, who came from the sea, are considered, they, as invaders while they were the natives).

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1 \* <https://doi.org/10.24361/Performa.2020.12.2>

2 Jacques Derrida: *Séminaire La bête et le souverain*. Vol. I (2001-2002), Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2008. Vol. II, *ibid*, 2010. From this moment I will indicate in my text the following English translation: *The Beast & the Sovereign*. Edited by M. Lisse, M-L. Mallet, G. Michaud, translated by G. Bennington, vol. I. Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2009. Vol. II, *ibid*, 2011. II, 62.

Robinson's mind slowly shapes for itself the simulacrum of sovereignty, partly depending on cultural origin, partly from the concrete daily experiences. They form the tiles of a puzzle, the scraps of a dress, because King Robinson's new clothes are a simulacrum.

Simulacrum is the appearance of King Robinson in the images profiled by Defoe: the strange hat, the parrot, the pipe, the jacket, the pants, the unseen umbrella, the dog and the cats (the surviving cats, because Robinson has killed the disobedient ones). Derrida emphasizes this peculiarity: "he declared more and more often that he was reigning as a sovereign, like a sovereign, even if it was full of dangers, or mortal threats"<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, in the tenth session of *The Beast & the Sovereign* (2003 March 26) he returns to the peculiarity: «the relation to savages as well as to women and beasts was the condescending, descending, vertical relation of a superior master to his slaves, other sovereign to his submissive subjects- submissive or submissible, mastered or to be mastered, by violence if need be- subjected»<sup>4</sup>.

Robinson's sovereignty is a simulacrum that demands attention in all its details. Derrida touches on the problem but he does not delve into it. It shifts the focus from the statement of an identification, "I am alone"<sup>5</sup>; a construction that, from mental aspiration, must become real factor. Derrida asks himself: "What if this statement were a strategy, the measure of a fiction, a simulacrum, would it be designed to bring the other closer or to distance him or her, to tie or untie what they call the social bond?"<sup>6</sup>. Behind the enunciation lies an effect that goes beyond the attention of Derrida: it is the progressive formation of the whole simulacrum, not as a simulation in itself, but as an implementation of a reality that corresponds to the will, the desire, and the perception of the subject. Derrida indirectly contributes to define the first characteristic of the simulacrum in general: simulacrum, as concrete invention, progressively becomes estranged to his/its corresponding model.

The adventure of Robinson is explained also like hypothesis, desire, and necessity, concretely tested in the difficult life of solitude in the island. In the end of his adventure, Robinson becomes the simulacrum of himself, after several attempts of cancellations and substitutions.

The false autobiography written by Daniel Defoe, like says Derrida, "can be read as a confession book, as *Confessions*, in the tradition of Augustine or Rousseau"<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, we can suppose that the *Circumfession*<sup>8</sup> of Derrida belongs to this tradition. Specifically, in *The Beast and the Sovereign* he suggests that "*Robinson Crusoe* is not so much an autobiographical fiction as the fiction of an autobiography"<sup>9</sup>.

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3 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 64.

4 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 278.

5 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 99.

6 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 99.

7 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 80.

8 Cfr. *Jacques Derrida par Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1991.

9 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 88.

In the false autobiography of Defoe, King Robinson needs marionettes and automatons for remarking his sovereignty. For this reason, the poor Friday, submissive and faithful to his sovereign, has been designed halfway between a marionette and an automata-android.

With his camouflage Robinson represents the simulacrum of a sovereign, equally ridiculous and dangerous. May be that the marionettes resemble automatons or mechanisms, gear, wheels, machineries, or in a word: objects designed to obey. In the Defoe's novel they never are human simulacra but dependent parts of the simulacrum, and necessary to his sovereignty. But the camouflage of King Robinson is necessary for him also to exorcise the fear of the failure, and other kind of fears.

Robinson Crusoe for Derrida "is someone who stands between belief and non-belief [...], paradoxically, and his belief [...] in phantoms and fantasies, his belief remaining invincible by good sense"<sup>10</sup>. So, Robinson lies when confesses: "I do not believe in ghosts, or specters, or revenants, or apparitions". According to Derrida, he processes "the great phantasm, the fundamental phantasm"<sup>11</sup>, and at the same time draws from "the phantasmatic resources of his strange terror, this singular desire: to be swallowed alive, to be buried alive"<sup>12</sup>.

Hamlet, of Shakespeare, would have said: why should a sovereign be afraid of a phantasm? In this context we interpret the footprint on the sand like a sign of the phantasm, the phantasm of another human presence who would threaten the absolute solitude of the sovereign and the simulacrum of sovereignty.

Correcting Jacques Lacan's doubts, today we easier recognize that the footprint on the sand is an authentic sign inscribed into the grammar of interferences, of foreign presences or of native cannibals, and above all the footprint is a sign in opposition to the solitude of the sovereign. The solitude is necessary to him for creating his simulacrum of sovereignty.

Now we can complete the definition of Simulacrum: invention produced by the fragility, by the lack of reference, and invention produced by the absence of a referent. The simulacrum is an invention (key-word for Derrida) and may be also a creation, similar to the Viennese doll of Oskar Kokoschka, which would replace Alma Mahler (there is an instructive short novel of Andrea Camilleri about this case), or today simulacrum is the automaton, also the android. Robinson simply invents the simulacrum of himself, his own simulacrum.

The solitude of sovereign risks being cracked by the disturbing footprint on the sand. And the Sovereign of the island runs another kind of risk. Writes Derrida: "He risks taking, as says to himself, the footprint for that of another when it is perhaps his own and he perhaps went that way already himself, like another whose revenant he would be at the moment he is worrying about that footprint"<sup>13</sup> (II, 74). In

10 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign, Fifth session*, II, 136.

11 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 77.

12 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 77.

13 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 74.

this case the phantasm, the re-venant, suspends the invention of the simulacrum. From my point of view, the phantasm threatens the simulacrum and it is his antithesis, also breaking the reassuring metaphor of repetition and the certitude of sovereignty.

Derrida emphasizes that “the invention would always be a repetition, a reinvention, on the island, a second origin, a second genesis of the world itself, and of technology”<sup>14</sup>.

The reinvention of objects, the reproduction of mechanisms, the repetition of religious beliefs and practices, are manually created by King Robinson. This is the reason because the simulacrum bends puppets, prosthesis, gears, beasts, and finally the poor Friday. We can conceive this derivation like consequence of the concept of *Ipseity* attributed by Derrida to Sovereignty.

I think that Robinson is a sovereign without being populist, because he does not need the consent of his people, which is fully obedient and completely enslaved. It's easy to understand that the anonymous footprint constitutes a catastrophe for the sovereign in the same way that, for *Of Grammatology*,<sup>15</sup> the text constitutes a catastrophe for the knowledge: on the one hand it can call into question the sovereign solitude, on the other hand the meanings of the world can be questioned.

The course of analogical focuses of Derrida ends with the suspicion that every autobiographical fiction corresponds to “the auto-appellation, the auto-interpellation [which] comes to him from outside, from the world”.<sup>16</sup> And he includes in this register “every written confession through which the author calls and names himself”<sup>17</sup>. When the subject reinvents himself, he enters a self-destructive mechanism. In his false confession and false autobiography, Defoe makes us understand in many ways that Robinson is not a free man, he doesn't know how to be free, until he finally identifies himself in the relationship with his marionettes, automatons, slaves, faithful subjects, because, through them, he hold off himself the marionette and the slave which live in himself.

Derrida thinks that “Robinson is often invaded by the feeling that a self-destructive power is mechanically, automatically, of itself, at work within him”; and that “Robinson Crusoe does not believe that this drive, this self-destructive compulsion and this neurosis of destiny [...] are a thing of consciousness: consciousness, reason and judgment are here impotent, incapable of resisting this self-destructive compulsion that works on its own, mechanically”<sup>18</sup>. By derivation, the autobiographical fiction of Defoe tells the story of an extinction and self-destruction, first avoided with the shipwreck, and then with the departure from the island.

In fact, Robinson's continuous failures, followed by fortuitous or provident returns of good fortune, make him the prototype of the coexistence between predictability and unpredictability. Therefore,

14 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 78.

15 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*. Translated by G. Chakravorty Spivak. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1997. 158.

16 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 86.

17 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 86.

18 Jacques Derrida: *The Beast & the Sovereign*, II, 84.

he does not become the hero of a constructive novel published in 1719, universally considered the prototype of the modern novel.

It's true that here Robinson reigns but, I have already said it, he reigns among ghosts, marionettes, beasts, automata and appearances. Going through Defoe's novel, Derrida narrates the sovereign, the sovereignism, the sovereignty, of that man who is, at any time, as ridiculous and laughable as dangerous and destructive.

King Robinson reinvents himself and interprets for himself the figure of sovereign. The fiction of Robinson Crusoe's autobiography, written by Daniel Defoe, is the story of this simulacrum. And Derrida has explained us the consistency of this simulacrum.

## Stranger

Any kind of research can be considered the response to a call, and any research assumes a request of hospitality: such process maintains that the stranger, who is part of yourself, interacts with a series of friendly, familiar stimulations and what results from the complementary action is the final configuration of your identity, of your being-yourself. Since you are primarily a Stranger, you can impersonate your own interlocutor, the persona who will strive to be heard as he or she is asking for hospitality, and also when he or she will talk in public.

The same theatrical and tragic conditions can be detected in Jacques Derrida as he imagines the position of a Stranger in front of his hosts in two Dialogues by Plato. In the first dialogue, from the *Sophist* (chapter one), Socrates speaks as a Stranger who knows how to exploit his vintage point, talking like someone from somewhere else, someone who is not familiar with the language spoken in Athens. In Derrida's opinion Socrates, the Stranger, is «someone who doesn't speak like the rest, someone who speaks an odd sort of language»<sup>19</sup>. Instead of being suspicious and preventing him from talking, the Athenians give him hospitality and let him settle in the polis, adopt the Socratic method for grappling with the problem of Sophists, and eventually accuse the immobility of traditional culture. The *Xenos* plays a crucial role in discussing the condition of other strangers: but (and in this case Derrida doesn't provide us with an answer to the problem) the question of hospitality places us in front of a sandglass. For how long will the Stranger be our guest? If he will stay with us for long, will he continue to enjoy the status of host, or will he cease to be the Stranger?

The second reference of Derrida to Plato regards the position of Socrates in *Apology of Socrates*, at the beginning of his defense in front of the Athenians. In this case the philosopher is an outsider, and

19 Jacques Derrida: *Of Hospitality*. Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond. Translated by R. Bowlby. Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2000. 5. Original edition: *De l'hospitalité: Anne Dufourmantelle invite Jacques Derrida à répondre*. Paris, Calman-Lévy, 1997.

he behaves as an outsider because for the first time in his life he is entering a Court, at the age of Seventy, and confesses that he feels dazzled and confused. Therefore, he apologizes for not being capable of understanding and using the legal code, and he will accordingly resort to his mother language, the only idiom he is familiar with. Derrida interprets the episode as an example of Socrates' extraordinary skill in exploiting the conditions he is facing; and claims that "Socrates turns the situation on its head: he asks them to treat him like a foreigner for whom marks of respect can be demanded, a foreigner because of his age and foreigner because of his language, the only language he is used to; it is either that of philosophy, or everyday language, popular language"<sup>20</sup> .

So, for Derrida Socrates reverses the situation in asking to be considered a Foreigner, someone who deserves special attention: Stranger for his age, and for the language he speaks, a philosophical but also a demotic idiom, a form of communication which, in any case, has nothing in common with the elitist jargon used by the Judges or by the Sophists with their empty rhetoric.

Socrates asks for himself to maintain the double role, the Derridian double bind, of the Stranger for his being-himself a Philosopher: "Socrates himself has the characteristics of the foreigner, he represents, he figures the foreigner, he *plays* the foreigner he is not"<sup>21</sup>. Parenthesis: in the *Apology* Socrates reminds that once upon a time the Delphian oracle answered to Cherontes that the best sage was Socrates himself<sup>22</sup>. So, this is the more excellent and no stranger part of the Wise Man who wanted to feel like a Stranger.

Derrida closes the lectures he gives in 1996 with another quotation which deserves our attention. In this case Derrida quotes the episode of *Genesis* (the entire chapter XIX) concerning the story of Lot who in Sodom hosts two angels, protecting them from the Sodomites who want to abuse them. "In order to protect the guests he is putting up *at any prize*, as family head and all-powerful father, he offers the men of Sodom his two virgin daughters"<sup>23</sup> . It should be remembered that the same daughters, after they manage to flee, using a trick will copulate with their father, unaware and drunken, for assuring to themselves a progeny<sup>24</sup>.

Derrida concentrates his interpretation on the short story of Lot, regarding the Jewish principle of hospitality, and comments the episode asking some questions. Two of these questions are, in my opinion, of the utmost importance: "Are we the heirs of this tradition of hospitality? Up to what point?"<sup>25</sup> .

The hospitality of the Athenians and that one of Lot represent for the host the problem of the limit, the threshold that the foreigner will cross; and at the same time the hospitality represents a problem for Socrates and for the angels, the stranger who comes from outside, but behaves like someone who simply

20 Jacques Derrida: *Of Hospitality...* 17.

21 Jacques Derrida: *Of Hospitality...*13.

22 Cfr. Franco Trabattoni: *Platone*. Carocci, Roma 2005. 45–46, 252–256.

23 Jacques Derrida: *Of Hospitality...*151.

24 *Genesis*, XX.

25 Jacques Derrida: *Of Hospitality...*155.

thinks that his presence inside is legitimate. Crossing the threshold, the circle, entering a private space means for the host and for the guest, for the Stranger and for no-Stranger, to ponder on what he is not or he thinks to be, and to act within an ambivalent situation, facing a double bind. To be inhospitable means to close the other, silent, part of yourself, the characteristics of the Foreigner who you were in one of the circle of the History or of the Memory.

In another lecture, held in Istanbul in May 1997, Derrida insists on the opportunity of considering the paradox Hospitality/Hostility, and the figure of the Stranger. On this specific occasion he repeats many times: “We do not know what hospitality is”<sup>26</sup>. And today we ask to ourselves: «What kind of hospitality is?». The immediate answer of Derrida would be: “What we call hospitality maintains an essential relation with the opening of what I called to come (*à venir*)”<sup>27</sup>. This reasoning leads us nowhere: if we accept to open the door to someone which is considered stranger, it means that we condemn him to be a stranger forever.

Moreover, second Derrida, “if we do not know what hospitality is, it is because this thing which is not something is not an object of knowledge, nor in the mode of being-present”<sup>28</sup>. We always face only two options: on one side who opens the door, on the other side who might enter without being known/recognized. This double position prevents to the Stranger to have access to the Hospitality. He is considered faceless, anonymous, like the metaphysic dummies of Giorgio De Chirico, or the invisible man of the eponym novel of H. G. Wells. In this manner the anonymous Stranger, different from Socrates who declares himself an ignorant-sage-wise man, risks to become a number, something like a figure multiplied for millions of faces and thousand languages.

Fortunately, the Stranger who is in ourselves has not died out, and sometimes he is still capable of talking with the other, like a dialogue between persons from different languages and cultures who are bilingual. In this perspective I would like to interpret Derrida’s statement: “The question of hospitality is also the question of ipseity”<sup>29</sup>. Ipseity (self-being) of whom stays at home and Ipseity of whom stays out of the house. Without giving (recognizing) a face to the Ipseity, like nose, mouth, eyes, language, thought, of the other, the Stranger, will be impossible any kind of Hospitality. Today, for the first time in our history, we have, according to Zygmunt Bauman, “a double residence, we live in two different worlds: *online* and *offline*”<sup>30</sup>. Bauman has stressed that we consider the Stranger, and, above all, the contemporary migrant as stranger, as a guilty messenger who brings us the indictment of our historical responsibility.

Myth and Literature show scores of heterogeneous strangers. Jacques Derrida, for example, ment-

26 Jacques Derrida: *Hostipitality*. *Angelaki*. vol.5, n. 3, December 2000 3–17. Translated by B. Stocker and F. Morlock, Original edition: *Hostipitalité*. *Cogito*, n. 85, 1999. 17–44. 6,8,10.

27 Jacques Derrida: *Hostipitality*, 11.

28 Jacques Derrida: *Hostipitality*, 10.

29 Jacques Derrida: *Hostipitality*, 15.

30 Zygmunt Bauman: *Strangers at Our Door*. Cambridge, Polity Press Ltd, 2016. 16.

ions Oedipus, the *anomon* of Sophocles, who is an outlaw as he enters Colonus (H, 35), because he doesn't know the place and its name; and because he breaks a maternal taboo, and the contemporary role of father-brother and son-husband, and the parricide. The Foreigner is also *the undesirable*, someone who oversteps my privacy, my Ipseity, the boundary of my familiar space, and spies my life when I don't feel his presence, or he is someone who makes public my private life. This other kind of the typological space for the stranger without face regards the activity of police, spy and controller. But, points out Derrida, "these phone tapings are practiced not only by police forces or State security service", "but also e-mail, but also my fax, by also my access to Internet" (H, 51). The activity of a controller, as very well has demonstrated Imre Kertész<sup>31</sup> in his short story, makes you stranger to yourself. Out of the door there is someone who knows my Ipseity but I don't know his anonymous identity.

More interesting perhaps and no so abject are other characters of strangers in the ancient and modern epics, surely no less *anomon* than the Super-heroes of contemporary epics. For example: the Homeric Ulysses with his Protean nature, Virgil's Aeneas, a Trojan stranger in the italic peninsula, and Dante, who is the stranger par excellence, the man in the flesh, in his impossible journey, contacting immaterial presences, phantoms, souls.

At the end of this promiscuous sequence, I would like to mention the Super-heroes to whom our children offer hospitality in our homes, well aware that these super heroes have a public and a private face. Superman, Ironman, Batman, Spiderman, and the like are global celebrities, and yet they live often incognito, like strangers and outlaw, sometimes down by law, *anomon* heroes with musk and disguises, perfectly in tune with the imagination of the very young and the-not –so- young -any -more.

There is an amazing hero, born in 1977, a disquieting stranger named Deadpool, an interesting case of modified ipseity, who desires that "the heroes cease to exist" (so confesses in a Marvel comic of some years ago)<sup>32</sup>. Deadpool is the first comic character who declares his virtual nature, his life within a fictional space, but constantly on the move with the final goal to destroy a world of ossified and conventional habits, an empty and meaningless world.

From Socrates to Deadpool we find the same indications about the interpretative field of stranger, foreigner, guest, host, extraneous, hospitality, hostility.

At the very end some useful questions can be asked, questions useful for recognizing the stranger who is in ourselves: is he or she really extraneous to our anxiety of reinventing the World as the cynical, arrogant, sorrowful Deadpool? Extraneous to our European anti-conformism? To our longing for new frontiers, beyond everyday's fears and phobias?

31 Imre Kertész: *Jegyzőkönyv*. Budapest, Magvető, 1993.

32 *Deadpool killed the Marvel Universe*, in "Deadpool Illustrated", n.1, 2013: "The fabric of the cosmos is fragile...even more so when reality is layered on top of another. Everything happening at once...every concept birthing another... every idea spawning like salmon...The "characters" in this ideaverse...in all likelihood served as inspirational building blocks for the heroes and villains you seek to destroy"; " ...and if we kill the inspiration...the "heroes" cease to exist».



# Catastrophe

Last year I participated in a round table in Turin<sup>33</sup> for discussing a track extrapolated from a broader and more articulate context, a track that Maurizio Ferraris had rightly brought to the critical attention of the participants. The context was, specifically, the second chapter of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967), and more in detail the statement summarized by approximation with the expression: *nothing exists outside the text*. In light of what I have written in the first two parts of this essay, Derrida's statement deserves an updated reflection.

We are in the part of the chapter in which Derrida comes to prop up his reflections on the auto-biography-confession of Rousseau, regarding a particularity that seems to me very dangerous and that he defines "absence of the referent or the transcendental signified"<sup>34</sup>. And he makes a statement as swift and concise as it is deflating: "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte"<sup>35</sup>. There is nothing outside the text<sup>36</sup>; and in the Italian version very laconically and ambiguously: "Non c'è fuori-testo"<sup>37</sup>. Maurizio Ferraris has long pointed out, with impeccable, ontological and epistemological acumen, that the enunciation was an exaggeration, and that it would be true that nothing exists outside the text, as long as it admits that text is a social object, placed in the world next to physical objects and ideal objects<sup>38</sup>. So, the statement for Ferraris could be changed to "nothing *social* exists outside the text"<sup>39</sup>. This failure to distribute among the objects of the world would be the real mistake of Derrida, a dangerous omission that has generated a disruptive domino effect for many interpreters fascinated by the philosopher's writing.

If the text of Rousseau's *Confessions* (topic of the specific chapter in *Of Grammatology*), it is true that nothing exists outside the text, in the sense that the book unilaterally configures the properties relating to the experience and history of the philosopher, even around and outside the text. There are other witnesses and other texts, outside the book, which contradict or expose the facts told and the interpretations of the person directly concerned. Precisely for this reason the text of the *Confessions* exists as an object socially shared by its readers (however they are gullible or skeptical, naive or aware), and because the out-of-text is somewhere else. The text anyway exists, as inside the text, in a different way

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33 Title of the conference: *Law and Culture. International Chair of Philosophy Jacques Derrida, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Thinking Nature, A Philosophy of Nature Today?*, University of Turin, 2019 October 15-16.

34 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*. Translated by G. Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London, The John Hopkins University Press. 1997. 158.

35 Jacques Derrida: *De la grammatologie*. Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1967. 220 .

36 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*...158.

37 Jacques Derrida: *Della grammatologia*. Translated by G. Dalmasso. Milano, Jaca Book, (1969), 2012. 219.

38 Maurizio Ferraris: *Jackie Derrida. Ritratto a memoria*. Torino, Bollati Boringhieri editore, 2006. 56.

39 Maurizio Ferraris: *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*. Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2012. 71.

than outside, exist and have existed the facts related to the life of a philosopher who tells himself in such a fascinating book.

The layered discourse on Rousseau is the valuable test for Derrida's philosophy, regarding considerations about what is inside the text, in general, and what is outside the text, report that in the word *catastrophe*, as I will try to explain, meets a moment of osmosis: the inside as the outside.

The text is *catastrophe* (now I am quoting by approximation the key-word), if it breaks a linearity, a convention, a custom, and upsets as soon as it was peaceful, quiescent, even hidden. A text, therefore, is catastrophic if it has this semiotic quality, equal to the famous flapping of the butterfly's wings, which can generate a very distant cyclone from itself.

In the second chapter in *Of Grammatology*, Rousseau is quoted about the art of writing, considered as a mediated representation of thought, and here we meet a dangerous track that interests us very much: "Writing is dangerous from the moment that representation there claims to be presence, and the sign of the thing itself"<sup>40</sup>. The danger lies in this unforgivable confusion between sign and referent, which naturally occupy two different spaces, except in exceptional and questionable cases of self-referentiality of the sign, of the word, of the text.

In our case, it is the supplement that makes up<sup>41</sup> by placing itself in place of a void, so, according to Derrida, "the sign is always the supplement of the thing itself"<sup>42</sup>; and "that the scandal is that the sign, the image, or the representer, become forces and make the world move"<sup>43</sup>. From the scandal we come to the real catastrophe of the world backwards: «then Nature becomes the supplement of art and society. It is the moment when evil seems incurable»; "That botany becomes the supplement of society is more than a catastrophe. It is the catastrophe of the catastrophe"<sup>44</sup>.

Scandal, catastrophe, blindness, difference, produce a movement inverse to reason ("Such is the scandal, such the catastrophe. The supplement is what neither Nature nor Reason can tolerate"<sup>45</sup>), become in Derrida's interpretation of Rousseau's text a kind of chained "regulated substitution of signs for things"<sup>46</sup>. Especially about the genre of confession and autobiography, says Derrida: "one cannot abstract from the written text to rush to the signified it *would mean*, since the signified is here the text itself"<sup>47</sup>.

The text is catastrophe because it deceives nature, it destroys it, as if the writing, the supplement, the text, introduce unnaturalness into life, in a narratively autobiographical key. In short, according to Derrida, the autobiographical writing of the *Confessions* fills a void, comparing to an act of onanism,

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40 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 144.

41 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 145.

42 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 144.

43 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 147.

44 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 148.

45 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 148.

46 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 149.

47 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 150.

not directly according to nature (and the focus will not change in the *Circumfession* of Derrida<sup>48</sup>). The writing does not close the circle of seduction, producing a text that is enough for itself, because the text needs the other, however, the other one who is outside the text, and who gives him the license of social, shared, existing object. Both Rousseau's *Confessions* and Derrida's *Circumfession* need the other.

Moreover, the catastrophe goes in a different direction: the narrative of one's life would not replace life itself just as the verbal sign could not replace the thing, as both provoke a different contextual horizon, belong to different codes, act in spaces of different languages. So, writing as supplement plays a double role, in this choice of autobiographical writing, of the text that represents life and perhaps re-invents, destroys or replaces the life itself: "The supplement transgresses and at the same time respects the interdict. This is what also permits writing as the supplement of speech; but already also the spoken word as writing in general"<sup>49</sup>.

The vicious circle of *there is nothing outside the text*, thanks to the onanism confessed by Rousseau, risks tilting the elementary system of self-telling through its own text. But it can provoke another type of catastrophe: the separation between sign and referent, the dementia of language, where, as a contemporary poet, Leonardo Sinisgalli, has written, the names disconnect from things (*Nomi e cose*)<sup>50</sup>. For Derrida, on the other hand, "that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence"<sup>51</sup>. The excess of Derrida's proposal certainly does not consider that the text, every kind of text, can intervene in the world because it produces meaning at various levels, up to the extreme of possibilities not experienced before. So, in this key the text produces a catastrophe in the order of our knowledge, in the order of things. In the meantime, we continue to note that, at the end of the chapter concerning the supplement, we meet the image of the *text chain*: "it tells us in a text what a text is, it tells us in writing what writing it, in Rousseau's writing it tells us Jean-Jacques's desire"<sup>52</sup>.

There is always something out of the text if the text produces the break of the predictable and pre-packaged meaning; and there would be nothing outside the text if this catastrophe remained implored in the text. We know that outside the text chains or mental documentary, cultural and social circuits are organized (Ferraris would say, *documerial* circuits, that are texts) and we discover that outside the text the explosion produces even unexpected, unpredictable sense, however concretely shared, acted, in the re-reading, in our discussions, in the way of inscribing ourselves in nature. All these events happen outside the text and starting from the text. There are, of course, various types of text and various aspects of catastrophe. If, for example, you read the poems of a great Italian poet, Giacomo Leopardi, you realize that the catastrophe of the text can be said by the text of the catastrophe, the text that tells the

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48 Jacques Derrida par Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1991.

49 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 155.

50 Leonardo Sinisgalli: *Nomi e cose*. In ID.: *Dimenticatoio*. Milan, Mondadori, 1978. 111.

51 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 159.

52 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, 163.

catastrophe.<sup>53</sup>

So let us go back to where we started, and we do it now considering that even Rousseau's *Confessions* confess first of all the catastrophe of their own text, they become the text of the catastrophe, because the autobiography contextualizes itself within the circle of Rousseau's thought, grafting into it the perspective of the philosopher which we have caught (Derrida would say) in his own Ipseity. In the same manner it happens, but with arguments and autobiographical withdrawals of different tones, in the *Circumfession* of Derrida.

It is no surprise that in the seminars of *The Beast & the Sovereign* (II, 105-107), Rousseau's *Confessions* are ascribed to the same genre as the diary that Defoe invents for his narrative character, Robinson Crusoe. In fact, Jean-Jacques in the text is also a narrative character and he is not really Rousseau, or at least he is himself in a narrative dimension that is different from the truth he proclaims at the beginning of his *Confessions*, because life is narrated by itself in the less thinkable forms. In both cases, for Robinson and for Jean-Jacques, it is not true that there is nothing out of the text, outside of the text that produces a double effect in the catastrophe of meaning.

What is out of the text continuously communicates with all that stays inside the text. But in this osmosis there is a remarkable difference: the text remains, the life passes.

(2016-2020)

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<sup>53</sup> See *The Broom or the Flower of the Desert*, in Giacomo Leopardi: *Canti*, translated by J. Tusiani, Fasano, Schena, 1998. 124–132.

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