

## DERRIDA'S QUASI-TRANSCENDENTAL INTERWEAVING OF INVENTION AND INTERPRETATION

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### *Abstract — Résumé*

In both »Psyche: Inventions of the Other,« which stresses the »paradoxical predicaments« in which the concept »invention« remains tied up, and »Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce,« which focuses on the related aporetics of interpretation, Derrida's multiple deconstructive performances uncover the aporias that beset the traditional and seemingly obvious relationship of priority between invention and interpretation that governs, for example, Kant's analysis of the relationship between taste and genius. As I hope to show in what follows, Derrida demonstrates both that invention strictly speaking is ruined by interpretation, just as interpretation strictly speaking, is ruined by invention. One cannot demarcate a domain for the one that is not always already contaminated by the other, and this mutual contamination means that both »invention« and »interpretation« cannot become entirely true to their concepts. That is, both invention and interpretation *strictu sensu* are impossible. Derrida's way of

thinking, therefore, demonstrates that there is no logically coherent basis for the invention/convention distinction that is all too often used to support the traditional belief that a musicologist's sole task is merely the second-level analytical interpretation of musical compositions already so inventively brought into being by artists. This is an attitude that neatly excludes musicology from the domain of cultural production, which, it is often supposed, absolves the discipline of the responsibility for cultural critique at the coalface, as it were. In my view, then, the importance of Derrida's pattern of thinking for critical musicology has to do with its power to address the dangers of ideological blindness that are the result of placing musicologists and/or artists strictly on opposite sides of the invention-convention coin.

**Key Words:** Derrida; deconstruction; quasi-transcendental logic; economic/anecconomic invention; interpretation.

It seems natural enough to say that the many interpretations of artworks come after the works themselves, and remain parasitic upon them. This order of priority

depends on the apparently clear distinction between an essentially conventional hermeneutic process and an essentially inventive creative process, marked, for example, by Kant's distinction between taste and genius. In his terms (1987:311):<sup>1</sup> »Judging beautiful objects to be such requires *taste*; but fine art itself, i.e., *production* of such objects, requires genius.« This distinction, which divides interpretation from invention along seemingly clear, intuitively correct, and rather obvious lines of demarcation, in fact shelters a complex network of highly suspect (Derrida would say »deconstructible«) oppositions.<sup>2</sup> Without opening the Pandora's box of Kant's aesthetics too wide, I wish only to suggest here (and implicitly to anticipate the relevance of Derrida's deconstruction of it) that it is still predominantly this distinction that orders the relations between so-called »creative« artists and musicologists.<sup>3</sup>

I should add that Kant's distinction between taste and genius applies only in the domain of aesthetics. For him, theoretical (determinative) and aesthetic (reflective or teleological) judgments are not of the same order, since it is the rational faculty of understanding that legislates in the *a priori* construction of theoretical knowledge, while the affective faculty of judgement legislates in the invention *and* judgment of beauty in artworks (and, by analogy, the invention *and* judgment of teleological order in the empirical »sciences«). Kant insisted that the empirically given could only be judged aesthetically (that is, brought *a posteriori* under intellectually formed concepts of what things are meant to be), and his scrutiny of aesthetic judgement in his *Third Critique*, serves as a propaedeutic for his examination of the empirical (as opposed to theoretical) sciences. The analogy between judgments of taste in art and of teleological order in empirical science is indicated in the etymology of the word »aesthetic,« which is derived from the Greek *aisthētikos* (from *aisthanomai*), which means to »perceive.« This analogy, however, depends on the now questionable equivalence of fine art and beauty, and the association of beauty with formal purposiveness: that is, a projected, organic orderliness whereby the perceived form of something harmonizes with its conceptual essence (what it is meant to be).

<sup>1</sup> Page references are to the *Akademie* edition.

<sup>2</sup> Besides distinguishing art from science via such oppositions as those between intuition and intellect, immediacy and reflection, inspiration and argument, Kant's distinction between taste and genius harbours, *inter alia*, the oppositions between invention and convention, nature and culture, the originary-original and derivative-imitation composites, as well as *teknè* (intentional artifice) and chance.

<sup>3</sup> In the exposition that follows I shall avoid the term »creative,« despite its common usage. As Derrida points out, the determination of »invention« has historically vacillated between »discovery« and »production,« and has never been thought of as creation *ex nihilo*, which is traditionally reserved for a god. In his words (1989:47): »To invent is to reach the point of finding, discovering, unveiling, producing *for the first time* a thing, which can be an artifact but which in any case could already be there existing in a virtual or invisible state. The first time of invention never creates an existence.« See also Derrida (1989:43, 49, 63).

These reflective, aesthetic judgments, then, concern truth not as knowledge, but as beauty (which Kant defines as a projected, or »hoped for« orderliness without order). Correspondingly, for Kant, taste, or the faculty of aesthetic judgment, is a power to *feel* or *sense* the harmony between a thing's purposiveness (a teleological ideal projected by means of understanding and reason), and its form (perceived via the senses and imagination). Aesthetic interpretation, then, as a matter of taste, draws upon a sense of aesthetic »rightness.« To show taste, one must have mastered the rules that properly determine what a thing is meant to be in order to recognise a projected ideal as presented in an aesthetic idea. Further, one must be able to perceive the essential material form of the artwork, and judge whether or not this form harmonizes with the ideal presented. Taste, for Kant, which is an »economic« matter of sensing order or harmony, of judging whether or not something belongs, or is in the right place, can be cultivated and improved with practice.

In contrast, Kant (1987:308) describes invention in fine art (for him, the only possible invention) as the product of genius, described as a naturally given talent that cannot be induced through learning. He distinguishes the *genius* of the artist who produces inspired, original (and fine) art; the *great mind* of the scientist, whose work is by definition never original; and the *simpleton* (the mere technician) who »can never do more than just learn and imitate.« If the capacity for both theoretical science and technology is a matter of having the »skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other,« the capacity for genius, in contrast, involves *originality* (KANT 1987:307-308). The path of genius, then, does not follow existing patterns. Instead, a genius invents what was not »there« before, or, at least, discovers what was not yet visible to anyone else, in the form of a projected aesthetic idea. According to Kant's conception, then, invention, as the gift of genius or inspiration (but, interestingly, not luck or chance), is »aneconomic.«

(Before I continue, I should place between parentheses, to draw attention to it, the distinction I have just touched upon between the »economic« and the »aneconomic,« since Derrida's quasi-transcendental thinking, as should become apparent later, turns upon the relation of mutual contamination between these two terms. In outline, Derrida's thinking turns on the argument that the constitution of any economy, any closed or regulated system, in any domain, necessarily goes hand in hand with the suppression of the »aneconomic,« or that which in relation to a system remains errant, dis-ordered, resistant, aleatory, unexpected, or nonsensical. Any kind of constitution or institution, therefore, cannot avoid the violence of exclusion. For this reason, much as any system may aim to be complete, whole or total, the very gesture of drawing up some kind of encircling borderline, or settling upon limiting conditions for inclusion, has already made such totalisation impossible. In short, what is necessary to constitute a regulated system, namely the exclusion of nonsense, simultaneously, and paradoxically, ensures that it remains incomplete.)

Kant does not consign genius wholly to the sphere of the aneconomic. He admits that, »nonsense too can be original,« and adds, therefore, that an artwork will not be *fine* unless its genius is disciplined or cultured by taste. In other words, taste (aesthetic knowledge) on the part of the artist is certainly presupposed as a necessary condition for the production of fine art. But it remains insufficient: if fine art presupposes the rules of taste, it is not in principle *derived from* any rule that can be learned and imitated. Kant (1987:307), then, describes genius as »a *talent* for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given.« Yet, although the works of genius are not themselves produced through obedient rule following, or patient imitation, they must become *exemplary*; they must serve others as new models for imitation, or as the new standard or rule by which to make aesthetic judgements. In short, while it is itself protected from any pre-existing or traditional economy, artistic genius invents the new aesthetic economy or disposition to be followed by others to come. Thus, if there is no genius without taste, one can, as an interpreter or critic, display taste (follow the contemporary standard) without having the further attribute of artistic talent or genius.

On Kant's account, then, musicology as a discipline would firstly be, not theoretical (or determinative), but interpretative. It would be a matter of aesthetic taste rather than of scientific knowledge, since it deals with aesthetic conventions, rather than hard and fast laws. Secondly, musicology would come after the invention of the music. Although it may serve to guide lesser, imitative artisans in the production of academically correct works, it would not have the power, in principle, to prescribe to the musical genius, or control what an inventive composer may or may not do. For musicology to claim either the status of a science, or any kind of prescriptive power over genius, would, on Kant's account, simply be a matter of *hubris*.

Without necessarily denying this conclusion, Derrida's deconstructive, or quasi-transcendental, thinking nevertheless works to unsettle Kant's distinction between taste and genius, and, therefore, the order of the relation between invention and interpretation. But this, as is all too often alleged, is *by no means* simply to reverse polarities and prioritise the previously disadvantaged. It is just such simplistic binary thinking that inspires the contradictory misreadings of his work. On the one hand, having mistakenly redesigned »interpretation« (in Derrida's name) to mean creative »signing« rather than reiterative »countersigning,« some readers view his writing as the unrestricted freeplay of pure literary invention. Others, on the other hand, go to the opposite extreme in suggesting that Derrida's work, as merely non-inventive interpretation, says nothing new at all. Such readers insist that it is simply his obfuscating style that unnecessarily makes »exoticisms« out of perfectly ordinary statements.

I hope, as a side effect of the exposition that follows, to dispute this common misinterpretation that grounds such relentless attempts to place Derrida's thinking on one side (usually the lunatic) of one or another binary opposition; that be-

tween, say, foundationalist and anti-foundationalist thinking, genuine philosophy and literary genius, theory and artifice, truth and fiction, and so on. Derrida's thinking is nothing like the freeplay postmodernism rightly decried by philosophers of different persuasions, without being amenable to recuperation by systems of so-called pure philosophy either.

Instead, in both »Psyche: Inventions of the Other« (1989), which stresses the »paradoxical predicaments« in which the concept »invention« remains tied up, and »Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce« (1991), which focuses on the related aporetics of interpretation, Derrida's multiple deconstructive performances uncover the aporias that beset the seemingly obvious relationship of priority between invention and interpretation. Through the pattern of quasi-transcendental thinking that challenges all binary thinking, as I hope to show, Derrida demonstrates both that invention strictly speaking is ruined by interpretation, just as interpretation strictly speaking, is ruined by invention. One cannot demarcate a domain for the one that is not always already contaminated by the other, and this mutual contamination means that both »invention« and »interpretation« cannot become entirely true to their concepts. That is, both invention and interpretation *strictu sensu* are impossible — without this being enough to give up on the necessity for either. I shall conclude with some indication of why it may be important or interesting for musicologists to read Derrida on this topic.

#### *The Impossibility of Invention*

»Invention« was itself invented. As Derrida (1989:25-26) points out, its Latin roots, »mark the construction of the concept and the history of its problematics.« Moreover, this concept is periodically reinvented. If, for Cicero, inventive power, distinguished from and related to disposition and elocution, consisted in discovering things or ideas, it was reinvented by Kant as an unveiling that was strictly the work of genius in fine art; by Schelling who advanced the idea that philosophy too could and should be the poetic invention of new forms (DERRIDA 1989:58); by Leibniz, »at the dawn of what we might call technoscientific and philosophical 'modernity,'« as the inventive production of truth through the »programmed matrices« of method, which has been reiterated lately by technoscience as the production of machines (DERRIDA 1989:46-48). According to Derrida (1989:32, 47), this history marks an overall shift in determining the concept »invention,« from »inventive discovery« to »productive discovery,« or, one could say, from its aneconomic to its economic sense.

Cicero, Derrida notes, insisted that invention must be distinguished from disposition, since invention involves the discovery of things, while disposition involves positioning or arranging them. Moreover, the things discovered (ideas, themes, objects, substances) must be distinguished from the verbal forms used

subsequently to speak about them. Finally, while disposition applies across this divide between things and words (both things and verbal forms can be located in respective articulated systems), »invention« does not. In Derrida's words (1989:26), »invention is 'properly' applied to ideas, to the things one is talking about, and not to elocution or verbal forms.« Supposedly, since language as an articulated system of basic syntactical rules is always already there, the clear expression of an invention (the sphere of elocution), is a non-inventive matter of purely dispositional economy (system, placement, order, organisation). From out of the materials already at one's disposal, one puts together the discursive form most appropriate for the expression and communication of a novel idea (an invention). As Derrida (1989:26) puts it, »we now have in place one of the most traditional philosophical *topoi*,« in which one is left with an invention-disposition pairing for things, and an elocution-disposition pairing for words. Reiterating this traditional distinction, Kant reserves »invention« for the discovery of aesthetic ideas, while the material articulation of the idea in the work itself, the technique of its production (the arrangement or disposition of colours, shapes, notes, etc.) would be a matter of taste.

Unlike the elocution-disposition complex, the invention-disposition complex is traditionally thought of as oppositional. As mentioned earlier, unlike »creation,« artistic invention amounts to either uncovering for the first time something already there, but previously unrecognised, or discovering something novel by putting together existing entities in a new way. The earlier aneconomic sense of invention tended towards the passive. Invention, in Derrida's words (1989:46), »was represented as an erratic occurrence, the effect of an individual stroke of genius or of unpredictable luck.« On this account, some or other »content« would come to a genius through unpredictable revelation or inspiration (rather than as the effect of systematic research, experimentation, or intentional programming, which was construed as purely a matter of disposition). But, as Derrida (1989:46) will show, this purely aneconomic determination of the concept, indicates »a misunderstanding, unequally shared, of the real constraints on invention.«

Granting, then, that »the real constraints on invention« must be taken into account, invention was gradually reinvented in more active, economic (or dispositional) terms, to the extent that the concept today refers predominantly to »productive« rather than »inventive« discovery. In this case, invention is thought of less readily as the uncovering of hidden »content,« and more readily as »the productive discovery of an apparatus that we can call technical in the broad sense, technoscientific or techno poetic.« That is, invention becomes the invention of machines or methods that, once discovered, may »program« the production of more inventions (DERRIDA 1989:47-49). Derrida's hypothesis, then, is that across the board there has been a historical reduction of the aneconomic sense of invention to the economic. Today, in his words (1989:32),

there are only two major types of *authorized* examples for invention. On the one hand, people invent *stories* (fictional or fabulous), and on the other they invent *machines*, technical devices or mechanisms in the broadest sense of the word.« In both cases, invention is seen as *production*: »*Fabula* or *fictio* on the one hand, and on the other *teknè*, *epistémè*, *istoria*, *methodos*, i.e., art or know-how, knowledge and research, information, procedure, etc.

The philosophical roots of this economic conception of invention may be traced to »modernist« thinkers like Leibniz and Descartes, who both envisaged the invention of a »universal characteristics« (a system of universal scientific or linguistic symbols, or musical notation, that would be independent of any natural language), which, even if it presupposed the *discovery* of true »content« (to be organised), was intended to *produce* a new science, or that is, to foster invention (DERRIDA 1989:54-55). For Leibniz, a »universal characteristics« would not only be a dispositional aid (the laying out of a syntax or system) for organising what we already knew, but it would be a productive »form« that could help us perceive what was missing in our knowledge, invent the means to find it, and eliminate controversy. Here, then, the discovery of truths would be programmable through logico-discursive mechanisms or methods, which are invented artefacts in which the effects of chance would be factored in by probability calculations in order to ensure the repeatability of truth (DERRIDA 1989:56-57). As Derrida (1989:46) notes, invention, whether in fine art or technoscience, would be subject to »powerful movements of authoritarian prescription and anticipation of the widest variety.« In this case, the role of the inventor, in Derrida's words (1989:55), is, »not to fall upon the truth by chance, but, as it were, to know chance, to know how to be lucky, to recognise the chance for chance, to anticipate a chance, decipher it, grasp it, inscribe it on the chart of the necessary and turn a throw of the dice into work.«

The danger is obvious: Leibniz's claim for his »universal characteristics« — which »gives words to the languages, numbers to arithmetic, notes to music, and...teaches us the secret of determining rational argument« — is that it »saves the mind and the imagination, the use of which must above all be controlled« (DERRIDA, 1989:57). In trying to predict and control what comes to us as invention, would we not have lost the sense of inventiveness altogether? As Derrida (1989:46) asks, can we still call a programmed invention an invention? »Is it an event through which the future (*l'avenir*) comes to us?«

One might be tempted, then, to »dream of reinventing invention on the far side of the programmed matrices,« or, that is, to insist that the older, aneconomic, largely excluded sense of invention, which preserves a moment of chance or unpredictability, must be recovered for the concept. It seems commonsensical that, in Derrida's words (1989:41), »when it erupts, the inaugural invention ought to overflow, overlook, transgress, negate...the status that people would have wanted to assign to it or grant it in advance.« But, as he warns, »things are not so simple«:

one cannot simply revert to this aneconomic sense of invention, since invention understood in this sense is just as impossible as invention thought of purely in terms of economy.

Derrida's elaboration of this claim in »Psyche« packs in enough inventive power to make summary laughable. I acknowledge in advance, with a guilty smile, that I shall simply pull a thread or two from it to uncover the pattern of quasi-transcendental thinking that is repeatedly performed throughout the text. Such performances turn on the claim that one unavoidably determines certain concepts in incompatible economic and aneconomic registers. Concerning »invention,« these registers span a complex network of interrelated distinctions, such as those between: invention and disposition; genius and taste; originality and repetition; convention, event and advent; chance and method; institution as creation or construction; the possible and the impossible.

To the question of the proper register for determination of the concept »invention,« the answer remains undecidable. In each distinction considered, Derrida shows that the economic and aneconomic registers cannot be distinguished rigorously. Yet, they also cannot be harmonized, dialectically interwoven, or organised into a hierarchy or teleology in which one is subsumed under the priority and governance of the other. Nor can one register be reduced out of the picture altogether in favour of the other. In other words, one cannot form a unified concept of invention. Either way, then, as aneconomic or as economic, invention strictly speaking is impossible.

Accordingly, the pattern of Derrida's argument runs roughly as follows: For an invention to claim uniqueness, that is, to conform to the concept »invention,« it must occur as an inaugurating »event«: either as a flash of inspiration or revelation, in which something original-original occurs for the first time, or as a singular, transgressive moment that shakes the debris of past convention. Moreover, the uniqueness or novelty of invention requires that this first time is also a last time. As Derrida notes (1989:29), »archaeology and eschatology acknowledge each other here in the irony of the *one and only* instant.« We are tempted, therefore, to think that there will be no invention unless there is a break with convention; that invention denotes a moment in which »the same« (shorthand for that which is already given and has a recognised status as conventional, rule-governed, or ordered) must be transgressed, and something »other« (new, original, unpredictable, unique, disruptive) comes to light. In brief, the conditions of the possibility of invention would be: genius, singularity, originality, unpredictability and transgression.

On the other hand, »invention of the other,« as the opening in which the other »speaks« for the first time, may also be construed as a more or less direct concern with »invention« as allegory. Etymologically »allegory« derives from the Greek *allos*, which means »other,« and *agoria*, which means »speaking« (DERRIDA, 1989:26). The question, therefore, concerning the temporality of invention would



be this: Can the other speak (does invention occur), in an atemporal, original-originary flash of inspiration, or must it occur as narrative, in which case it must have a past and a future, and, importantly, a relation to the words convention, advent and adventure?

The answer is undecidable:<sup>4</sup> If one must think of inventive novelty in terms of an aneconomic »one and only instant,« this necessity finds itself already complicated by the figure of allegory. As Derrida points out, the word »event« itself bears traces of temporal relativity. Firstly, concerning the temporal mode of the past, the »event« of invention makes sense not as a unique instant, but only in relation to »convention« (as a tradition of possibilities *already* instituted and ready to be transgressed). An invention receives its status (becomes what it is, as original or transgressive) only if it is »protected by a system of *conventions* that will ensure for it at the same time its recording in a common history, its belonging to a culture: to a heritage, a lineage, a pedagogical tradition, a discipline, a chain of generations.« Secondly, since an invention must be valid for the future,« invention bears the traces of »advent.« In Derrida's words, to become what it is, invention »will also need the signature or the countersignature of the other« (the future interpreters) as if this »countersignature bore the legitimating authority.«

In other words, as Derrida notes, any »inventor« faces the paradox of always already having had to »sign-away« the originality of an invention, of having to presuppose the numerous conventions implied in making something at all, and in making it public (»a contract, consensus, promise, commitment, institution, law, legality, legitimation«), in order for it to be recognised as original. Invention, then, cannot be the wholesale transgression of status or an opening-out to the entirely novel. Rather, it relies on the rule-governed structures of »the same« both to »sign as« an inventive proposition, and to be recognised as such. But, if »event,« finally, is also associated with the idea of »adventure« or narrative as an open-ended story in which the unexpected may happen, then, in the unforeseeable time-to-come, the power of recognition may or may not constitute the event *as* invention (as the inauguration of a possibility that will remain at the disposal of everyone).

Paradoxically, then, an invention must claim uniqueness »even if« in Derrida's words, »the uniqueness has to be repeatable,« since an invention never takes place without convention, advent or adventure. If »invention *begins* by being susceptible to repetition, exploitation, reinscription,« it can be neither the ephemeral insignificance of a one and only chance instant, nor entertain its own destruction as the predictable effect of a conventional past and the advent of a programmable future. Invention, in either sense, is impossible.

<sup>4</sup> As Derrida (1989:28-29) notes, there is a verbal collusion here that, whether adventurous or conventional, must at least make us think; namely, »the convergence of several modes of coming or of venue, the enigmatic collusion of *invenire* and *inventio*, of event, of advent, of future or time-to-come (in French, *avenir*), of adventure, and of convention.«

To put the predicament in other terms (DERRIDA 1989:59-60): For an invention to live up to its aneconomic definition as an original-originary transgression of the possible, that which was not possible beforehand (the absolute other, the impossible) has to come to the inventor. Otherwise the invention only makes explicit what was already possible, if veiled, within the economy of »the same.« But this coming of the absolute other is in principle impossible. As soon as that which is other to possibility comes to the inventor it changes status — it becomes possible. Thus it never really was impossible. Derrida argues, then, that pure originary-originality, defined as openness to absolute otherness is impossible. Thus if by definition, »invention of the other« as absolute transgression, or as breaking all the rules, must be invention of what was not previously possible, or invention of the absolutely novel, and if this could be the only possible invention, then invention would be impossible.

It seems, then, that its opposite, »invention of the same« (we can invent only what was apparently impossible, but really possible), must be the only possible kind of invention. But, as already noted, invention as programmable discovery of what is already possible seems also to have lost its sense as invention.

If its aneconomic and economic registers likewise make invention strictly impossible, how may one dream of reinventing invention? It can only be done, Derrida (1989:44-46) insists, through »questions and deconstructive performances« that sharpen its enigma and resist the reduction of its essential ambivalence to one or another clear-cut meaning for the sake of a »programmatics of inventions.« His reinvention of the concept invention, therefore, will have been to uncover its truth as its inability to rigorously separate, unify or reduce its co-existing, competing meanings (DERRIDA 1989:49). This reinvention of invention leaves us in the aporetic predicament of having discovered that invention is a self-undermining, or auto-deconstructing, concept whose sense irremediably vacillates between simultaneous but competing registers, between which a choice is impossible.

The inventiveness of Derrida's own text is, accordingly, to unsettle, or re-invent, the concept »invention« by calling it deconstruction. One should note here that he explicitly rejects the one-sided conflation of deconstruction and the transgressive, disruptive, aneconomic sense of »invention,« insisting that the movement of deconstruction is »far from being limited to the negative or destructuring forms often naively attributed to it« (DERRIDA 1989:42). In other words, if deconstruction is »inventive« it will have to be so in a way that is neither aneconomic nor economic.

For example, he demonstrates, contra Cicero, that an unsettling disposition of discursive forms can be eminently inventive, citing Ponge's *Fable* as an exemplar for such deconstructive inventiveness (DERRIDA 1989:30-41).<sup>5</sup> While studi-

<sup>5</sup> This, incidentally, mimics Heidegger's penchant for demonstrating how elocutionary emphasis unsettles the sense of a sentence.

ously respectful of grammatical conventions, the first line of this poem — »By the word by commences then this text« — unsettles all of the traditional linguistic distinctions that mark the difference between the performative and the constative, use and mention, invention and repetition (description, recounting, quotation), telling and told, event and narration, because it is *simultaneously* all of these. Ponge, for example, performs the commencement of the text by describing this commencement, and this description is already a citation. From the start, *Fable* involves a »play with the places in language,« which demands respect for the conventions of grammar (disposition) to function at all. Yet, in its very respect for linguistic conventions, *Fable* uncovers their essential instability (DERRIDA, 1989:59-60). This unsettling constitutes, for Derrida, the inventive power of *Fable*: it »produces« not something, but an opening or dehiscence in »the same,« which invites the unpredictable happening of the other.

»*Fable* gives itself then, by itself, by herself, a patent of invention« (DERRIDA, 1989:36). To the extent that Ponge's *Fable* is an exemplar that gives the rule to deconstruction, it represents inventive genius in exactly Kant's sense. The problem is that it also simultaneously upsets the traditional distinction between disposition and invention (upon which Kant's taste-genius distinction depends), because its inventiveness consists precisely in its disposition.<sup>6</sup> Like *Fable*, the inventive power of deconstruction does not consist in breaking all the rules in order to produce novel contents or ideas »out of the blue.« It does not »invent the other« in this sense. Rather, deconstruction can be inventive, Derrida insists, precisely because the deconstructive event is never purely aneconomic.

But if invention therefore occurs through deconstructive disposition, it goes hand in hand with an understanding of disposition that is resistant to the kind of systematic disposition (mechanism, programme, method, language) that puts the throw of a dice »to work.« This, in turn, is by no means to suggest that deconstructive disposition is the precise opposite of system. Deconstructive thinking does not escape the orders and repetitions of convention, which is necessary to confirm even its status as the disruption of status, or as being beyond any possible status. Nevertheless, deconstruction, Derrida (1989:55) insists, is not a method and it does not operate according to the distinction between method and chance. Rather, it makes discursive moves, which open »the same« in preparation for the unpredictable coming of the other, within a narrative whose ending we cannot foresee or programme in advance. In Derrida's words (1989:60),

<sup>6</sup> Derrida (1989:27) goes on to show that the imprecision of this borderline between the aneconomic (invention-disposition) and the economic (elocution-disposition), is reiterated in the sphere of contemporary law. If invention is ideally reserved for things or ideas, then, Derrida notes, it would be interesting to ask why, in the domain of the arts, legislation concerning an author's or inventor's proprietary rights takes account not of ideas — »As for 'ideas,' they belong to everyone; universal in their essence, they could not ground a property right« — but only of compositional form.

if the other is precisely what is not invented...deconstructive inventiveness can consist only in opening, in uncloseting, destabilizing foreclosure structures so as to allow for the passage toward the other. But one does not make the other come, one lets it come by preparing for its coming.

The inventiveness of deconstruction consists not in the »invention of the other« (as the positive invention of an entirely novel idea, system, mechanism or method), but in uncovering the essential ambivalence in »the same.« Since it is premised on the insistence that what »is there« is inherently conflicted, self-undermining or auto-deconstructing, deconstructive invention does not happen in a flash, but is always already under way. It consists precisely in bringing to light the self-unsettling of what is ostensibly already settled; in uncovering the inherent disorder always already at work/play in the orders of the instituted; or in achieving a displacement within the bounds of conventional positioning. Reiterating what occurs in *Fable*, the inventiveness of deconstruction consists in producing an instability or opening within the already instituted, in preparation for the unpredictable happening of the other, which lets the other come, not simply by chance, but also without prediction or programme. Such preparation for the coming of the other is not passive: it is not »inertia open to anything whatever« (DERRIDA 1989:55). In other words, for Derrida, deconstructive invention means getting ready for an »adventure,« or dreaming of and preparing for an impossibility (the incalculable chance coming of an entirely other that escapes programming and a horizon of anticipation). This is not to suggest that it is possible to find the other in any positive sense — quite the contrary. Deconstructive preparation serves as a reminder that to close, closet, stabilise within the bounds of the already possible is always to have excluded something, or to have covered over discrepancies, which makes such closure temporary at best. The coming of the other, or its coming back is not invented, even if you might need inventiveness to prepare to welcome it (DERRIDA 1989:60).

In sum, Derrida's primary question in this essay concerns how invention can be something »other« than its reduction to one or another of its incompatible registers, since each, taken alone, makes invention impossible. Challenging the common assumption that there is a contradiction between deconstruction and invention, all of this serves, ultimately, to answer the question of the sense in which deconstruction, as impossible (as without method, system or status), is the only possible invention (DERRIDA 1989:36, 42, 48, 60-62).

And I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible...For a deconstructive operation, *possibility* would rather be the danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches« (DERRIDA 1989:36).

*The Impossibility of Interpretation*

In »Ulysses,« Derrida again performs the very thing that the text is about, making summary an impossible task. Nevertheless, with the help of this essay, and accepting the necessity and burden of violation, I shall now turn to »the other side« of the invention-interpretation complex, to address in more detail one of the implications of Derrida's reinvention of invention already touched upon in the foregoing exposition: namely that the interpreter as much as the inventor invents the invention. Derrida elaborates on this paradox in »Ulysses« by showing that what he calls the second, interpretative »yes« co-constitutes the first inventive »yes.« To put this in the lean (or malnourished, if you like) terms of quasi-transcendental thinking: The condition of the possibility of the original invention is its recognition by an interpreter; but this condition makes an original strictly speaking impossible. By the same token, the condition of the possibility of the interpretation is the gift, the giving out, of the original invention; but this very inventive originality makes interpretation strictly speaking (interpretation as getting to the heart or core of a text, or, therefore, as exactly replicating the essence of the original) impossible.

As a guiding thread through Derrida's intricate treatment of the double structure of this signifying »yes,« I shall rely on the three intertwined motifs of »yes,« »signature,« and »laughter.« As Derrida puts it (1991:590): »laughter bursts out in the event of signature itself. And there is no signature without *yes*.« The main point of this account will be to address the aporetic »structure« of this »yes,« which is itself the aporetic condition that makes »the event of signature« simultaneously possible and impossible in so many complicated ways. But before I address the figure of this »yes,« or explain what any of this has to do with laughter, I should point out that this »event of signature« encompasses multiple acts of signification (DERRIDA 1991: 577, 586, 590). In the first place it refers to the act of »signing« (as inventing or making meaning, as giving out, or putting together »texts« in the broadest sense possible). The act of »signing,« then, has at least a double sense. It refers both to signing one's so-called »proper« name (inventing the »text« of one's own ego), and to signing as the act of configuring signifiers. Moreover, this act of configuring signifiers also has a double sense; namely, »signing« as the event (associated with the personal problems of proper names), of authoring texts I call »mine,« and »signing« as the event of configuring a string of signifiers, a text, that I endeavour to make public as something not authored, but *written* (as standing by itself in its own idiosyncrasy, which may not be that of an author's own psychology). In the second place, this »event of signature« refers to »countersigning« (as interpreting, or reading given texts, as making sense of them).

Whether it describes psychological self-recognition (that applies to all of us, as narrators of our own lived narratives, as egos or selves), the »author« who assigns her proper name to a text, or the text that stands in its own right, the »event of signature« repeats, across these differences, the same aporetic pattern of call

and response. Hence the telephonic metaphors that dominate the essay (DERRIDA 1991: 571-575). Derrida's »first yes« refers to that instituting moment of inventive signing in its multiple senses, when something is given out, whether this is an ego, »my« artwork, or the »text« that writes itself through me. But he argues that this so-called »first yes« is inherently (always already) a double »yes, yes.« For, as he puts it (1991:576): »The *yes* can only speak *itself* if it promises itself to its own memory...*Yes* must preserve itself, and thus reiterate itself, archive its voice in order to give it once again to be heard and understood.« Further, this internal contamination of the »first yes« by the repetition of a »second yes« engenders all the problematic and aporetic figures of call and response, of instituting-invention and recognizing-repetition, which leave us in a double bind. On Derrida's account, then, »yes« may be thought of as the constituted effect of a quasi-transcendental condition; namely »repetition.« The very condition that makes it possible to determine that the »first,« inventive, instituting or positing »yes« has occurred, namely the recognizing, repeating »second yes,« threatens the »first yes« from within (DERRIDA 1991:576).

Firstly, how does the »second yes« (or all subsequent »yeses,« to be more precise) make the »first yes« possible? To begin with, Derrida (1991:590-1;593) argues that even the first inventive »yes,« which, in turn, calls for the second interpretative »yes,« is already itself a response. Implicitly, the »yes« of inventive positing — the »yes« I am here, listening for a recognizing response, and ready to speak or sign (ready to mean something to someone) — is already a response to a call. Recall Derrida's earlier insistence that »invention« has never meant creation *ex nihilo*, but the recognition or uncovering of something already there (»without why«), and itself calling out for inventive recognition. In confirmation here, he notes (1991:593): »*Yes*, the condition of any signature and any performative, addresses itself to some other that it does not constitute.« In other words, before the »other« as interpreter comes onto the scene, the inventive positing of something, the »first yes,« already occurs in response to another call (of being, a god, justice, gift, or whatever you want to name this) that is anterior to its instituting or inventive performance. But if all inventive positing (this is *me*, this is *it*) is already implicitly *recognition* of something, then the affirmative »second yes« of recognition must already be implicit from the start in signing a »proper name« (in inventing who one is, or what it is), even before the problematic call for repeated self-affirmation, and for a recognizing response from the other.

In the second place, Derrida's »first yes« functions only as a promise. In Derrida's words (1991:596): »We cannot say *yes* without promising to confirm it and to remember it, to keep it safe, countersigned in another *yes*.« It signifies that I am here, ready and willing to mean, become, institute, or achieve something. That is, the »first yes« functions as inventive positing, but only in the form of a potentiality, an intended beginning of something, a gesture of institution, a promise, or a projection. This inventive gesture, therefore, is not a matter of saying »yes« here I

am/it is, already complete. Nor is it even a matter of positing something potentially complete, which requires only the task of actualising this potentiality with consistency and integrity. Rather, this »first yes« invents or posits anything, as a kind of interminable »telephonic spacing«: as inherently calling for, or desiring, the repeated responsive affirmation at the other end of the line that ought to put the seal on the integrity of the invention (but which, in principle, can never be adequate to this task, making it impossible to terminate the call).

Further, if the interpreting »other« (which can also be the recognizing self in self-reflection) does not enact, in the »second yes,« a response to the »first yes« that recognises it *as* having been a »yes,« then the »first yes« never was a »yes.« As Derrida (1991:593-594) puts it: »The *yes* says nothing and asks only for another *yes*, the *yes* of an other, which...is analytically — or by *a priori* synthesis — implied in the first *yes*.« In other words, the »first yes« is internally structured (necessarily, *a priori*) as a call for the recognizing response of the »second yes« (the recognition that is the countersignature of an affirmative or understanding interpreter), and the repeated affirmation of other »yeses« (from both myself and others), which confer its identity, and without which it cannot be what it is (bearing in mind that this determination is never total, for the »second yes« similarly, cannot be what it is, without the recognizing affirmation of the third »yes,« and so on).

But, as Derrida shows, this call for recognizing repetition is highly problematic, since it puts those involved in its movement (that is, both self and other) in a double bind from which there is no clear-cut escape. What, then, is the internal threat harboured in the »second yes«? Clearly the potentially inventive »first yes« is vulnerable to the lack of repetition; that is, it is threatened in its very being by the possibility that there may not be a »second yes,« in which case there will not have been a »first yes« either. In this sense the *ego*/institution is threatened by schizophrenia, or lack of temporal continuity (memory, history). In other words, the *ego*/institution is threatened by a response to it that either does not re-cognise it at all, or mis-recognises it in a way that violates it beyond the point of no return.

But if, on the contrary, the »first yes« is repeated in the »second yes,« and all other »yeses« thereafter, faithfully, conscientiously and precisely as it was first formed, then the »first yes« is also threatened by this very precision (DERRIDA 1991:576;579;588). If the subsequent »yeses« repeat the »first yes« as if mechanically or compulsively (if, for example, I promise to marry without conviction and subsequently go through all the conventional motions of being married quite conscientiously, but indifferently, thoughtlessly, or out of habit), then the »first yes« is converted from being a »decision« after which everything changes shape, into merely the first of a programmable, predictable series of expected acts. In this way, the »first yes« is delivered a »death threat« (the threat of stasis, sterility, or paralysis). Were it to be construed as the first in a series of precise repetitions of the same without end, the »first yes,« from its inception, would put an end to history, not to mention change, novelty and surprise.

So far, I have conferred all activity upon the recognizing response of the »second yes,« as if the call for response implicit in the first (itself responsive) »yes« is passive and helpless. But this »first yes,« as signed text, as itself call for response, has its own powerful voice, which poses threats of its own to those who would hear it (DERRIDA 1991:576;579;588). The »first yes,« even as it is itself »inventive,« can become a force hell-bent on belittling, strangling or suffocating further invention, procreation or criticism insofar as it is posited as totalising, circumscribing, or encyclopaedic; insofar as it imagines itself capable of already containing or pre-programming every possible response; or insofar as it projects the kind of mastery or omnipotence that denies mastery to the one who comes second. Derrida (1991:578-9) has two kinds of projected omnipotence in mind here; namely the Hegelian, which pretends to gather every possibility into the all-encompassing, ultimately unitary, systematic maw of the dialectic, and the Joycean, which pretends to have pre-empted or preprogrammed every possible associative link already accumulated and still to be acquired. He associates both of these with a sarcastic or ironic laugh that reminds the others (the ones who come »second,« and are bound to read or recognise) that they remain permanently under the shadow of a debt they can neither escape nor pay off (DERRIDA 1991:587-8).

Here, then, is one way of putting the double double-bind: For there to be a »living« performance of the »first yes« at all, it has to be repeated or affirmed in a recognizing response. But perfect repetition places this »yes« under the threat of living-death. Repetition in the »second yes,« therefore, both necessarily constitutes and threatens to destroy, the first »yes.« By the same token, for there to be living, recognizing repetition at all, there must first have been a potentially inventive, instituting »yes.« But the perfect priority of this first performed »yes« threatens to suffocate the ones who come second under the weight of debt. The power for institutionalisation (the power to form a »history of effects« or tradition, as opposed to being forgotten or passed over) that belongs to the »first yes,« therefore, both necessarily constitutes and threatens to destroy the second »yes« (cf. DERRIDA 1991:580-1).

But if one cannot resolve this double bind by making a choice for or against repetition or institution, how then, does one negotiate it? According to Derrida (1991:589), one laughs a different kind of laughter. On the one hand, such negotiation requires one to hear within the call of an instituted text, another tone of laughter that always haunts the derisive laugh of omnipotence and mastery. This is the affirmative laugh of »the gift,« which, unlike the castrating laugh of mastery, does not cut down the power of commentary in advance, but instead cuts itself open, gives itself out as a provocation, and dares the surprise in another reading (which as a »reading« would still be, and yet is not, a repetition of the same).

On the other hand, such negotiation requires the one who comes second to take advantage of the opening conferred by this gift, to embrace the paradox of having to repeat the »first yes« differently. The second one must simultaneously



respectfully recognise the »first yes,« and disrespectfully suspend it in order to re-invent it, or to make anew the decision concerning a responsible response: that is, a response that is still a recognition (and not a violation beyond the point of no return), but which is, at the same time, not faithful to the point of death. In other words, just like the »first yes,« the responsible response has to be both the »second yes« that confers a certain »conventional« legitimacy and determinacy upon a »first yes,« as well as an inventive »first yes« in its own right.

#### *Quasi-Transcendental Thinking and Musicology*

One important general implication of the quasi-transcendental thinking sketched here with the aid of Derrida's thought is that Derrida's reinvention of invention takes inventiveness out of any restrictive, specialised domain, be it aesthetics or technoscience, or (within the aesthetic domain), the traditionally separated domains of inventive and interpretative activities. Speaking, for example, of Ponge's *Fable*, Derrida insists that it is difficult to be certain of its status as being merely literary as opposed to, say, philosophical. But furthermore, he adds:

Nor could we be sure that its deconstructive structure cannot be found in other texts that we would not dream of considering as literary. I am convinced that the same structure, however paradoxical it may seem, also turns up in scientific and especially in judicial utterances, and indeed can be found in the most foundational or institutive of these utterances, thus in the most inventive ones (DERRIDA 1989:35).

Insofar as it turns up in musicology, the quasi-transcendental structure of Derrida's thinking suggests that there are no »non-inventive« musicologists. Musicology is not merely a hermeneutic discipline that »comes after« the music, and remains eternally in debt to the artistic inventiveness of its geniuses. It is inventive in its own right, and there are no musicologists who do not also in some sense economically »produce« or aneconomically »invent« the music they apparently only interpret. At the same time, there are no purely inventive composers: there are no composers who do not also in some sense »interpret« the music they apparently only produce. In other words, first and foremost, Derrida's pattern of thinking demonstrates that there is no basis in the invention/convention distinction for the traditional belief that a musicologist's sole task is merely the analytical interpretation of musical compositions already so inventively brought into being by composers. Since this is an attitude that neatly absolves musicology from the responsibility for cultural critique, the importance of this pattern of thinking for critical musicology has to do with its power to address the dangers of ideological blindness that are the result of placing musicologists and/or artists strictly on opposite sides of the invention-convention coin.

To begin with, this rigid positioning induces an ideological blindness that will not recognize the inventiveness of so called conventional musicological interpretation. Yet, musicologists might do well to question Kant's distinction between taste and genius, which accords them the secondary status of mere interpretative parasites, since it ignores the extent to which it is the inescapably productive »second yes« of the musicologist that co-constitutes the musical composition by recognizing and validating it *as* »music,« rather than noise. Indeed, a musicology that does not acknowledge and take account of its inventive-productive role in musical composition remains susceptible to the ideological maintenance of the status quo, for it would be unaware of the legitimising or authorizing power invested in this hermeneutic process, and, therefore remain uncritical of its effects.

At the same time, granting the inventive-productive role that musicology inevitably plays in music-making, musicologists might do well to take note of Kant's distinction between theoretical and aesthetic judgments, and accept the aesthetic character of the discipline. In this case, Derrida's analysis of the invention-convention complex demonstrates clearly that a musicology aspiring to the ideals of »productive« theoretical science (the kind proposed by Leibniz's »universal characteristics«) would become ideological in the sense that it aims to produce the »right« kind of music, and *ipso facto* the »right« kind of musicologist, by programming invention. In other words, it aims at a system (a *tekne* or mechanism) that would exclude chance and change, construed as deviance, by determining or controlling what artists may or may not do, and what musicologists may or may not discern. Kant saw this danger, hence his distinction between theoretical judgment (which was indeed determinative, and had to do with a closed-system of *a priori* knowledge) and *a posteriori* aesthetic judgment (which, as reflective, was applicable in an inherently open-ended system, and, therefore had to do with the necessarily fictional projection of systematicity, orderliness or lawfulness, *without* system, order, or law).

In other words, the inventiveness of musicological interpretation cannot become restricted to a specific, traditional, productive methodology, which, after all did not »fall from the sky« (as rational or natural law, or god-given revelation), but is itself an invented, constructed, or fabricated hermeneutic approach (just one of many possibilities) that has an origin and a history, and, therefore, can be changed. In other words, to avoid the effects of ideological rigidity, the interpretative-inventive task of musicologists amounts to more than methodologically guaranteed, formal analysis of musical compositions.

Keeping in mind that the history of a discipline is predicated on the ongoing possibility of generating novel statements about a certain field of inquiry, for musicology to exist as a »traditional« discipline, a discipline with a history, it is imperative for musicologists to alternate, in turn, between a conventional and an inventive approach to their discipline. As with any discipline, musicology intermittently, from time to time, requires the challenge to be inventive, to approach

»the same« musical works or texts with a different mindset, a new conceptual or hermeneutical framework, and a correspondingly novel set of analytical tools. By producing in this way an instability or opening within the already instituted, fresh answers may be yielded by familiar compositions. The quality of this yield, of course, remains unpredictable. Yet, the alternative is to see the discipline founder on the rocks of conventional exhaustion, mechanical repetition and analytical boredom. For musicology to remain lively, it is important, without prediction or programme, to give the new its chance.

Finally, if musicology as a discipline would gain in self-understanding by viewing its activity as deconstructive, the same applies in the domain of composition. Composers never invent in a musical vacuum. Even if something novel comes to mind in a flash of innovative genius, for this musical innovation to be recognizable as an innovation (in the first place by the composer as interpreter), it has to be comparatively assessed against the backdrop of a musical tradition already in place. Moreover, as just mentioned, the inventive recognition of another interpreter is required to make this innovation public. Yet, entirely conventionally formed music is by definition ideological, since it verifies, legitimises and valorises the conventions stabilized in a tradition (in a musical as well as a social sense), even unwittingly, simply through their repetition. Then again, to be inventive, that is, subversive, musical composition cannot operate wholly outside what it aims to subvert or transgress. Derrida offers an explanation of how subversion in creative production might work-play as deconstruction. But this is also why attempts at deconstructive subversion are inevitably commandeered by precisely what they aim to subvert. Composers unaware of these entanglements easily remain susceptible to the ideological maintenance of the status quo; hence the need for constant, critical reinvention, as the modification and renewal of a tradition, marked by an alternation of conventional continuity and inventive innovation.

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*Sažetak*KVAZI TRANSCENDENTALNA PROTKANOST INVENCije I INTERPRETACIJE  
JACQUESA DERRIDAE

Tradicionalni i prividno očit odnos prioriteta između invencije i interpretacije koji, na primjer, vlada Kantovom analizom odnosa između ukusa i genija prečesto se koristi da bi se podržalo tradicionalno vjerovanje da je jedini zadatak muzikologa tek drugorazredna analitička interpretacija glazbenih kompozicija što su ih već tako inventivno umjetnici doveli do postojanja. To je stav koji vješto isključuje muzikologiju iz područja kulturne produkcije i koji, kako se često pretpostavlja, razrješuje disciplinu odgovornosti kulturne kritike. Posljedično, muzikolozi riskiraju ideološku sljepoću koja može rezultirati smještavanjem teorijske discipline i stvaralačkog rada točno na suprotnu stranu »inventivno-konvencijske« medalje.

Međutim, Derridaine dekonstrukcijske analize 'paradoksalnih kategorija', u kojima su oba ova pojma povezana, pokazuje da njihova uzajamna kontaminacija čini u užem smislu 'invenciju' i 'interpretaciju' nemogućima, i da stoga nema nikakva koherentnog temelja za to tradicionalno razlikovanje 'invencije' od 'konvencije'. Logička os Derridainih analiza ovdje je tvrdnja da se određeni pojmovi neizbježno određuju u nekompatibilnim ali neobjašnjivim ekonomskim i neekonomskim iskazima. Derrida bilježi da je tijekom povijesti 'invencija' kao pojam bila periodički ponovno izmišljena, pomičući naglasak od neekonomskog smisla, kao trenutnog nadahnuća povezanog s genijem, do ekonomskog smisla, kao produktivnog otkrića tehnoloških sredstava. Kao što ovo klizanje sugerira, neodredljivim ostaje odgovor na pitanje ispravnog iskaza za određenje ovog pojma. Laćajući se složene mreže međusobno povezanih razlika predloženih za njegovo određenje (na primjer, između invencije i dispozicije, genija i ukusa, izvornosti i ponavljanja, konvencije, događaja i pojave, slučaja i metode, institucije kao kreacije ili konstrukcije), Derrida pokazuje da se ekonomski i neekonomski iskazi ne mogu strogo razlučivati. Pa ipak, njih se, dijalektički isprepletene, ne može niti harmonizirati niti organizirati u hijerarhiju. Isto se tako ne može jedan iskaz izvesti iz svekolike slike. Ukratko, ne može se oblikovati pojam invencije koji istodobno ne bi bio kontaminiran svojim 'drugim', odnosno konvencijom (što je tradicionalno područje interpretacije).

Derridaina analiza interpretacije djeluje na vrlo sličan način kako bi pokazala da se ne može izdvojiti područje muzikološke interpretacije koje ne bi uvijek bilo kontaminirano nekom inventivnošću. Ono po čemu čitanje Derridae na tu temu čini zanimljivim jest da se njegova složena logika, koja priznaje neizbježnost paradoksa ili aporije i koja djeluje unutar njegovih/njezinih ograničenja, nudi kao moćno oruđe za praksu kritičke muzikologije.