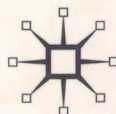


# the origins of deconstruction

edited by  
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# The Orig Deconstruction

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## The Origins of Deconstruction

*Also by Martin McQuillan:*

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DECONSTRUCTION: A Reader (2000)

THE POLITICS OF DECONSTRUCTION: Jacques Derrida and the Other of Philosophy (2007)

DECONSTRUCTING DISNEY (*with Eleanor Byrne, 1999*)

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POST-THEORY: New Directions in Criticism (*edited with Graeme Macdonald, Robin Purves and Stephen Thomson, 1999*)

# Foreword: 'Taught by Love'

Martin McQuillan

The story of Butades is well known, the Corinthian maid (sometimes called 'Dibutades', Butades being her father's name) who draws the outline of her lover's shadow on the wall so that she might remember him when he has gone. The story provides a mytho-poetic 'origin of painting', most heavily invested in by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traditions of art history. For a philosophical, if no less allegorical, understanding of such shadow play one might look to Plato's treatment of the Cave in *The Republic*. The questions raised by both Plato and Butades are significant and many: the origin of representation as such, the origin of representation as a category, the originariness of representation, and the representation of origins. The story of Butades is perhaps most interesting in this last respect. As a myth of origins it carries a certain poetic charm – art after all is erotic in origin. However, the story also tells us that the very idea of the origin is caught up in the problem of representation, not just that the narrative of an origin must be somehow secondary but that the idea of an origin is itself a retrospective, if fundamental, constitution of the conditions of that which it originates. The iconographic tradition of Butades is not about capturing the likeness of the real but about the erotic attachment to something that in itself has no substance (shadow, memory, art, representation). The 'origin' is, however, neither the shadow nor the lover but the act of drawing, which as an incomplete process is the origin of something other than itself, namely the completed outline (art, painting). Drawing cannot present itself as an adequate origin of art because the idea of art (the completed outline as *aide mémoire*) must be presupposed in order to imagine the process of its completion (Butades' drawing). In other words, Butades must be making art even before she draws and so art pre-exists its own origin. This is consequently complicated by the many belated works of art which depict Butades making art as the origin of the art of making. While the idea of the origin, traditionally understood, requires a single source of unmediated primacy, the story of Butades, and her pictorial history, shows that the origin of representation as a representation of origins knows itself to rely upon a certain *trompe l'oeil* whereby that which has no presence and is only ever an event of difference (drawing or marking) takes on the identity of a pure mimesis. However, what is interesting about Butades as a drawn figure herself, is that each representation of her must make visible the diremption between lover and shadow and the further displacement of that relation into the

hand which marks the drawing on the wall, taking its departure from a prior *différance*, which at once puts in play the differential system of marks and simultaneously recuperates the effects of that difference by retrospectively installing the historically secondary act of drawing as the constitutive origin of the art which seemingly legitimates the notion of drawing.

The origins of deconstruction are by definition overdetermined and, by analogy to Butades, similarly complex. There could be no single origin, not even the biography of the late Jacques Derrida, which could satisfactorily provide a point of fixity for deconstruction in this way. Like the process of drawing, deconstruction has no substance of its own. It is rather the process of what happens and any attempt to install retrospectively a starting point, to create an outside or beyond, and so a time before deconstruction, similarly runs the risk of presenting a secondary effect as the origin of its cause. Of course, this may well be the case as certain nostalgic if bad-tempered academics will remind us there *was* a time before deconstruction, even if deconstruction shows that this time was always already in deconstruction. Any attempt to sketch an origin for deconstruction (although one day an institutional history must be written) will leave the reader like a spectator to the Butades paintings, observing the belated mystification, or a mythologization as a demystification, of that which already presents itself as mystifying demystification in process. Rather than offer one origin of deconstruction this book provides fourteen, deconstructing the idea of the origin as much as demystifying the origins of deconstruction. For deconstruction does have origins (many in fact), some of which, like the art of Butades, have been 'taught by love'. That is, love as the betrayal of the lover in the least bad way. Butades loves her drawing, it is a narcissism par excellence. Like the story of Toth and the origins of writing in the *Phaedrus*, who betrays memory by the mnemonic device of writing, to speak of the origins of deconstruction is already to betray a certain idea of deconstruction and yet we must speak of such things ('in loving memory' as the phrase goes). Because the origins of deconstruction have no presence does not mean that they do not exist; deconstructing them is the task set by this book.

The editors would like to thank Daniel Ferrer for kind permission to reprint the two interview texts which make up the prologue section of this volume. I would also like to thank Hugh Silverman and the members of the Executive Committee of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature who first suggested that this book be written, for my part it is dedicated as a reminder of the friendships afforded by the IAPL.

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# Introduction: The Origins of Deconstruction – Derrida's Daughters

Ika Willis

You claim that there is no given starting point, so you start in the most traditional way imaginable with the problem of beginning, and you proceed with a game that is puerile and predictable, reflexive, narcissistic, you attempt to enclose us from the start in writing and the text, a whole complacent baroque discourse based on well-known and quite banal paradoxes of self-reference.

Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

## The origins of deconstruction

Why, then, start at the beginning? The choice of a starting place can never be justified ('at most one can give a strategic justification for the procedure'); but neither can we *not* choose, pretend to be starting 'just anywhere', for the 'just anywhere' already presupposes a map of the terrain into which we jab the blind pin: and the origin is that which will have instituted the map on which the origin is located *in the first place*. Which is to say that the origin comes both before and after the first place. The origin partakes of the circularity of the *logos* which deconstruction diagnoses as a time which is out of joint.

For deconstruction, the origin is 'the very order, reason and meaning of *logos*'<sup>2</sup>. Instituting an 'order of continuous derivation',<sup>3</sup> a linear temporal path along which a self-identical object is presumed to travel in a predetermined direction, the origin is the apparatus which unifies a thing's essence with its history: it is the 'before' and the 'from-since' which 'draw in time or space an order that does not belong to them',<sup>4</sup> the organization of time and space according to the order of the *logos*. From the very beginning, therefore, of course, we are always already involved in iteration, as well as in the structure of *différance* and of hauntology. The origin is the very order of *logos*; it is that supplement which comes from the outside to fill a plenitude's lack; it is *différance*... The problem of the origin, then, is the problem

of deconstruction: a formulation (*x is deconstruction, deconstruction is x – justice, for example*<sup>5</sup>) which will be familiar to anyone who has followed the changing names and quasi-transcendentals of deconstruction over the years since – to take a starting point at random – the 1976 publication of Gayatri Spivak's English translation of *Of Grammatology*.<sup>6</sup>

The writers in this volume suggest various ways of thinking the origin in deconstruction and various origins *for* deconstruction. Among the latter are Algeria; the Holocaust; Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*; Rousseau's 'Essay on the Origin of Language'; the fourth book of Vergil's *Aeneid*; and Plato. Many of these origins, therefore, are located outside the temporal field which would be plotted by an analysis seeking to map the continuous derivation of Jacques Derrida's work from its origin. Since deconstruction is *first and foremost* a reading, a response to a prior text, it always comes from outside itself and therefore has no origin proper to itself.

This volume as a whole seeks both to attend to and to resist, *through* that attention, the desire to 'ground' deconstruction through reuniting it with its origin in the biography and bibliography organized under the proper name *Jacques Derrida*.

It cannot be the case, of course, that the proper name Jacques Derrida marks the limits of the field of deconstruction, not least because deconstruction disorganizes inside/outside and persistently destabilizes what can be thought of as being proper to a text. The writers in this volume, then, take seriously our responsibility to betray Derrida by remaining faithful to a deconstruction which is not the straightforward ideology critique which frequently takes place under the same name as that mode of thinking from which we seek to differentiate it here: and in our desire (not) to bound the field of deconstruction by, to bind it *to*, the name Jacques Derrida, we are rigorously faithful to Derrida.

For property, boundaries, language, the name – all these inextricably interwoven terms – are gathered at and mark, according to Rousseau (according to Derrida), the fall into spacing. Spacing, in the 'Essay on the Origin of Language', as traced laboriously in *Of Grammatology*, is *both* an accident befalling speech from the outside *and* that monstrosity which haunts speech from within and which the *logos* can therefore neither contain nor break with. The fall into spacing is thus one of the origins of deconstruction – in both senses of that ambiguous genitive. It is at the beginning of deconstruction, in that it is a scene of origin where deconstruction is already at work; and it is one of deconstruction's origins, in that it conforms to the deconstructive thinking of the origin as that which 'comes from the outside as accident or catastrophe or is at work on the inside as monstrosity'.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, deconstruction might be said to begin at the origin of language – or at least at the 'Origin of Language'. Or, at least, one of the origins with which deconstruction is concerned is the origin of language, of spacing, and of the sign.

## Derrida's daughters

In Derrida's work, a series of female or feminine bodies figure the origin of spacing and the work of memory as/in the absence of the thing remembered: Gradiva, for example, in *Archive Fever*, whose footstep is 'this irreplaceable place, the very ash, where the singular imprint, like a signature, barely distinguishes itself from the impression'; yet 'this uniqueness is not even a past present ... would have been possible, one can dream of it after the fact, only insofar as its iterability ... haunted it from the origin'.<sup>8</sup> Or Butades, through whose 'exemplary narrative' the origin of painting in the iconographic tradition substitutes memory for perception, the impression for the imprint:

In this [iconographic] tradition, the origin of drawing and the origin of painting give rise to multiple representations that substitute memory for perception. Firstly, because they are *representations*, next, because they are drawn most often from an exemplary narrative (that of Butades, the young Corinthian lover who bears the name of her father, a potter from Sicyon), and finally, because the narrative relates the origin of graphic representation to the absence or invisibility of the model.<sup>9</sup>

Butades appears both in *Of Grammatology* and in *Memoirs of the Blind*: in both texts Derrida cites Rousseau's reference to the story of Butades in his appeal to 'Love' as the originator of drawing:

Love, it is said, was the inventor of drawing ... How many things the girl who took such pleasure in tracing her Lover's shadow was telling him! What sounds could she have used to convey this movement of the stick?<sup>10</sup>

The question 'Where does it come from?', with its echo of the primal scene, must already be caught up in a metaphysics of 'love' – that is, of reproductive heterosexuality in its relation to reproduction, kinship and filiation.

To trace Butades back to the first surviving attestation of her existence, in Pliny's *Natural History*, is to find not only that the original exemplary purpose served by her narrative is not the one to whose service she has been put in the iconographic tradition but also that Butades' origin – Butades *as* origin – is, appropriately enough, strikingly secondary, lacking, belated, rewritten, generationally confused. For the *Natural History* is a radically secondary text, deriving from multiple, discontinuous and effaced origins – on the most literal level, pointing to the textual sources for Pliny's claims, most of which have not survived. The *Natural History* is frequently read as nothing but the archive of other texts, a collection of traces from what would have been a non-erased origin.

Moreover, although in Rousseau's 'Essay on the Origin of Languages' as it comes down to us through Derrida, Butades is the origin of *painting* or *drawing*, she is originally (in the *Natural History*) no such thing: she is not an origin at all. The origin which this narrative exemplifies is that of sculptor, and the originator is Butades-the-father. Pliny introduces the anecdote with these words, making it clear that the anecdote is *not* about painting or drawing: 'Enough and more than enough has now been said about painting. It may be suitable to append to these remarks something about the plastic art'; sculpture is introduced, as in the anecdote itself, as a secondary effect of drawing/painting.

It was through the service of that same earth that modelling portraits [*similitudines*] from clay was first invented by Butades, a potter of Sicyon, at Corinth. He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline [*circumscripsit*] on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to fire with the rest of his pottery.

Pliny, *NH* 35.151

Remarkably, in the Butades story as it organizes an origin for the iconographic tradition, Butades' father (and the practice of sculpture) is effaced from the scene of drawing – and, perhaps, from the family scene as well, since his daughter (unnamed in Pliny) begins to bear his name without alteration. The iconographic tradition which places the daughter of Butades at the origin of drawing, naming *her* Butades and effacing her father and the place of sculpture in the scene, executes a point-by-point reversal of the original anecdote. The daughter, in the original scene only instrumental to her father's invention, becomes the origin herself – the secondary, derivative art of sculpture is excised from the scene of original drawing – and appropriates her father's name.

In *Derrida: The Movie* (Kirby Dick, Amy Ziering Kofman, 2002) Jacques Derrida is asked which philosopher could be his mother; he answers that only a philosopher to come, only his philosophical daughter or granddaughter, could be his mother. Is Derrida's – and therefore deconstruction's – origin, then, Derrida's daughter?

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The first set of essays in this volume take up the question of the origins of deconstruction in these terms of gendered embodiment, reproduction and filiation. These follow a Prologue that opens with Daniel Ferrer's interview with Jacques Derrida, which addresses the technicity of the writing body and the material practices of reading and writing around deconstruction,

which is followed by a conversation between Ferrer and Hélène Cixous about reading, writing, and the space of books in which Cixous locates herself. In the first essay of the 'Incubation' section Marc Froment-Meurice proceeds from the paradoxes generated by his titular pun on 'dating deconstruction' to articulate the implication of gender, heterosexuality and reproduction in the cyclical/linear temporality of dates. Lynn Turner's chapter, which grafts Derrida's critique of communication in 'Signature – Event – Context' onto Levi-Strauss's model of the 'communication of women', proposes a similarly grafted new beginning in its complex pun *Les Jeune Nées*, a pluralizing return to Cixous' 'newly born woman'; Ika Willis's essay, on the deployment of figures of the female body in the construction of originary autochthony and the thinking of sovereignty, rereads the undecidable hymen of 'The Double Session' in the terms of the undecidable marriage between Dido and Aeneas in Vergil's *Aeneid*. It is Thomas Docherty who poses the question of the origin of deconstruction in the form 'Where does deconstruction come from?'; he unfolds from this point a complicated discussion of *nostalgerie*, which thinks the determination of the present by the past through the interrelation of suicide, sovereignty and subjectivity. Finally, Jean-Michel Rabaté's essay, as if in response to Docherty's framing of the question, poses the origin of deconstruction as the marriage of Husserl and Joyce and rigorously plays out the consequences of this move.

This piece also serves as a transition to the second part of this volume, 'Inauguration', whose first two chapters explore the consequences of positing, as the origin of deconstruction, the 'first' book by the 'author' of deconstruction – Derrida's Introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*. Claire Colebrook gives a clear and rigorous account of the relationship of deconstruction to transcendental phenomenology, showing how Derrida's work is on both sides of the transcendental question and project at once; Margaret Grebowitz gives a meticulous account of the way that scholarship on Derrida prefers *Speech and Phenomena* to the 'Introduction' to the *Origin of Geometry* as an origin to deconstruction, and traces what is at stake in this choice for the thinking of the origin and of deconstruction by taking seriously Derrida's claim that *Speech and Phenomena* is only a supplement to the 'Introduction'. Paul Patton's chapter, by contrast, relates Derrida's work on beginnings and differential repetition to that of his contemporary Gilles Deleuze, and shows, through a reading of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, how both Derrida and Deleuze use the notion of *becoming* to complicate linear time and political foundation.

The impossibility of linear temporality opens 'Installation', the third and final part of this volume, to a concern with time and space – before/after, inside/outside, and their organization and disorganization through the appeal to the origin. John P. Leavey's chapter sets up the terms of the debate by discussing the temporality of reading, which is marked by a radical *secondariness* with respect an originary illegibility, in terms of the work of Walter

Benjamin and the impossibility of beginning (in its complicity with ending) Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Julian Wolfreys, arguing that there is no singular 'deconstruction' which is repeated in different temporal contexts, asks what its origin(s) could be, if it 'is' only where it 'takes place' – and where it takes place is *between*? In this case, the origin is already a *response* to an impossible injunction, and therefore always secondary, split and outside itself. This complexity of the inside/outside relation is taken up in Robert Eaglestone's chapter, which characterizes deconstruction as an *exorbitant* mode of thought and, in tracing its relationship to the ethical demands of the Holocaust, shows how deconstruction is structured by an attention to the inadequacy of a critique originating *either* from within *or* from outside the system which produces it. Claudia Barrachi similarly puts the inside and the outside of systems, and the linear consequentiality of historical time, into question, but now by returning to the concerns with which this book opened. Barrachi organizes her reading of the *Phaedrus* around the term *inspiration*: breathing – the passage of air into and out of the speaking/writing body – becomes a figure for the originary undecidability of the origin of speech. Finally, Gérard Bucher's essay, taking up Barrachi's concern with the *spirit*, finds the origin of art – and thus the beginning of differentiation between animal and human – between Heidegger and Bataille.

## Notes

1. Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 19–20.
2. Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 18.
3. *ibid.*, 19.
4. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 55.
5. Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (eds), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 3–67.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
7. Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 16.
8. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 92.
9. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 49.
10. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, cited in *Memoirs of the Blind*, 52, and *Of Grammatology*, 234.