In *Of Grammatology* Derrida took up the term *supplément* from his reading of both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Claude Lévi-Strauss and used it to formulate what he called “the logic of supplementarity” (G: 144–45). Derrida returned to Lévi-Strauss’s use of the word “supplement” in “Structure, Sign and Play” (WD: 289) and in *Given Time* (GT: 66–77), but I will focus here on Derrida’s reading of this word in Rousseau’s *Confessions, Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men*, and *Essay on the Origin of Languages* because his reading of Rousseau has proved so powerful and because the logic of supplementarity is better illustrated than generalised.

As Derrida observed, Rousseau in these works employed binary oppositions: nature versus society, passion versus need, south versus north, and, most significantly for Derrida in the late 1960s, speech versus writing. In the course of declaring these oppositions Rousseau can be found writing the ambiguous term *supplément* and its cognates into his narratives. The supplement is an addition from the outside, but it can also be understood as supplying what is missing and in this way is already inscribed within that to which it is added. In this way the word, “supplement” seems to account for “the strange unity” of two gestures: “on the side of experience, a recourse to literature as appropriation of presence, that is to say, … of Nature; on the side of theory, an indictment against the negativity of the letter, in which must be read the degeneracy of culture and the disruption of the community” (G: 144).

To the extent that Derrida presents the supplement as the unity of two gestures it is not yet fully radicalised. One can find in other authors’ formulations that suggest a notion of supplementarity to the extent that what stands first and what follows it can vary according to one’s perspective. One might say that the so-called Cartesian circle where the order of reasons is different from the order of being has that same structure. Or one might point to Georges Canguilhem’s formulation, articulated at the same
time as that Derrida was writing *Of Grammatology*, the historical ante-
riority of the future abnormal, while logically second, is existentially prior
(Canguilhem 1991: 243). But Derrida’s claim goes beyond the idea that
these two meanings of the supplement can be seen to function together in
Rousseau’s texts and elsewhere in spite of their apparent opposition.

When Derrida announced that “the logic of supplementarity,” rather
than the logic of non-contradiction, can be said to regulate or organise
Rousseau’s texts, he was introducing a new way of reading texts that con-
stituted a major departure from what had gone before. At this time other
philosophers still insisted on reading the canonical texts of philosophy
according to the imperative that contradiction cannot be tolerated, with the
consequence that there was a hermeneutical imperative to do whatever one
could to reunite seemingly inconsistent claims. Derrida responded to this
imperative by showing how the supplement allows Rousseau – and us – to
say the contrary without contradiction (G: 179; Bernasconi 1992: 143–44).

Identifying these twin gestures within Rousseau’s texts gave rise to
what came to be called “double reading.” The practice of double reading
as it relates to the supplement can best be illustrated by following the two
tracks that Derrida identifies in Rousseau’s texts. To begin with, Rous-
seau’s *Essay on the Origin of Languages* argues that the origin of (spoken)
language is in the South. Writing comes second and has its origin in the
North. But Derrida observes that in the course of giving this description
Rousseau refers to gestures joined to speech (Rousseau 1992: 31). Derrida
comments: “Gesture, is here an adjunct to speech, but this adjunct is not a
supplementing by artifice, it is a recourse to a more natural, more
expressive, more immediate sign” (G: 235) as when one can simply point
at an object and there is no need to speak (Rousseau 1998: 292). Speech,
far from being the original, is “a substitute for gesture” (G: 235). How-
ever, insofar as gesture can be seen as a form of writing, then the apparent
priority of speech over writing is put into question. Writing as an addition
(which is originally conceived as a simple exterior to speech, substituting
itself for it), comes to be seen as anterior to speech and in a way integral
to it. In other words, that something can be added to what is initially
thought of as in and of itself complete, and is presented as an origin,
reveals that the lack in sense precedes the origin and contaminates it.

The priority of speech is what Rousseau declares, corresponding to
what he wants or desires which, according to Derrida, is full presence: but,
as we have seen, Rousseau’s narrative tells a different story. The
declarations conflict with the descriptions. Derrida shows, however, that
their interrelation is regulated, thereby establishing that the two readings
are not independent and ultimately cannot be separated. They belong
together “in one divided but coherent meaning” (G: 132). They
constitute “structural poles rather than natural and fixed points of reference” (G: 216). In this way the second reading can be said to “supplement” the first, as writing supplements speech. And it is “undecidable” which meaning dominates the text.

There is another dimension to this reading. As we saw, for Rousseau, speech, and thus the South, initially represents presence, before it emerges that sometimes gesture performs this function better (G: 237). This ties Derrida’s reading of Rousseau to Heidegger’s account of Western metaphysics in terms of the priority of presence. The deconstruction of Rousseau thus belongs to the deconstruction of Western metaphysics. Rousseau’s text, on Derrida’s reading, both exhibits Western metaphysics and at the same time undercuts it. Or, better, the text deconstructs itself. Just as Rousseau wants to mark a full presence but finds that it has never existed, so Derrida finds that there never was such a thing as Western metaphysics as such (Bernasconi 1989: 246).

Derrida does not explore in the same detail how the same logic of supplementarity governs Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men* but it is not hard to reconstruct it on the basis of what Derrida says about the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. In the *Essay* Rousseau sets out to explain the break with nature – nature’s departure from itself – solely on the basis of “natural causes” (Rousseau 1998: 289). It is the same in the Second Discourse, when it comes to explaining how one could leave the state of nature. The basis for the movement beyond nature into society must already in some way be implanted within nature, thereby complicating the notion of nature, which is no longer to be seen as the full presence of an origin but as a lack that could in a different idiom be located beyond being as presence. This is why Rousseau can say that the state of nature no longer exists, perhaps never existed, and probably never will exist (Rousseau 1991: 13). Nevertheless this lack controls all discourse about the society, which is produced to supplement what is lacking there. In Rousseau’s essays on both the origin of inequality and the origin of languages, the powerful notion of origin takes on another character such that, as Derrida puts it elsewhere, “the movement of supplementarity” is “the movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin” (WD: 289).

Just as in Rousseau that which is beyond nature and which thereby makes up for what is lacking in nature is implanted within nature, so that nature is not the full presence that was sought, so albeit in a slightly different fashion, what is beyond being in Plato necessarily governs that absent origin by which it is supposed to be ordered. Derrida wrote in “Plato’s Pharmacy”: “The absolute invisibility of the origin of the
visible, of the good-sun-father-capital, the unattainment of presence or beingness in any form, the whole surplus Plato calls *epekeina tes ousias* (beyond beingness or presence), gives rise to a structure of replacements (*suppléances*) such that all presences will be supplements substituted for the absent origin, and all differences, within the system of presence, will be the irreducible effect of what remains *epekeina tes ousias*” (D: 167).

This shows just how far Derrida is from the straightforward exploration of the ambiguity of the word *pharmakon* as both remedy and poison that is sometimes attributed to him. He located the logic of supplementarity in still other texts and contexts. So, for example, around the same time that he published *Of Grammatology* he wrote *Speech and Phenomena* in which he described the relation of indication and expression in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*: “If indication is not added onto expression which is not added onto sense, we can nevertheless speak in regard to them, about an originary ‘supplement’: their *additon comes to make up for* a deficiency, it comes to compensate for a primordial non-self-presence” (SP: 74). All the details of Derrida’s argument cannot be rehearsed here, but it culminates in the now familiar claim that indication dictates expression on the grounds that writing cannot be added to speech “because, as soon as speech awakens, writing has doubled it by animating it” (SP: 83).

One of Derrida’s clearest explications of the logic of supplementarity is in his reading of Condillac’s *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* in *The Archeology of the Frivolous* from 1973. He finds in Condillac’s discussion of the attempt to create a language for a science of economics, that there is a need to supplement our speaking and writing (Condillac 1795: iii). With reference to Condillac’s discussion of how the defect of language might be addressed by a certain kind of supplementing that refers to an anteriority with reference to which there is something lacking, Derrida argues that there is need for a second sense of the supplement: “But what is necessary – what is lacking – also presents itself as a surplus, an overabundance of value, a frivolous futility that would have to be subtracted, although it makes all commerce possible” (AF: 101). In other words, as the present comes to present itself the necessity of what is lacking is produced as a certain frivolity. Or, as he explained in “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” the supplement is “added as a plenitude to a plenitude” and for this reason he could insist that it equally compensates for a lack” (WD: 212). It is in keeping with this insight that Derrida insisted both that no ontology could think the operation of the supplement (G: 314) and, at the same time, the time of the closure of philosophy, that the logic of supplementarity imposes itself on us in our reading of the texts from the history of Western metaphysics.
State of Suspension

“... the state of suspension in which it’s over—and over again, and you’ll never have done with that suspension itself ...” (LO: 63). Take this utterance, for the moment, as something bracketed, cited in the fullest Derridean sense of the term, surrounded on both sides by ellipses (that is, by suspension points or *points de suspension*), lifted from a text that begins, as Derrida’s often do, by suspending the question it sets out to address, pausing to hold it up, to hold us up, in a moment of contemplation. “over—and over again”: the pause initiates the possibility of the endless repetition of endings; “you’ll never have done with that suspension itself”—suspension resists the demand for closure, for transparency. All it can reveal to the gaze of authority is its own essential equivocation, its own being-otherwise.

What would it mean to suspend suspension, to pause the pause, to interrupt interruption and thereby hold it up, examine it? Fixation and contemplation, punishment and mitigation, an inactivity actively maintained: the paradoxical, aberrant quality of suspension reveals itself at every turn. Attempts to define it often draw upon a kind of internal catachresis that keeps it from fully coinciding with itself, manifesting in contradictory phrases: passive activity, active passivity. Fading into the background, it calls attention to the attenuated presence of what it suspends. Thus the suspension of a privilege makes us realise what we have lost, the suspension of judgement may be taken as an indicator of the soundness of that judgement, and the request that an audience suspend its disbelief causes that audience to anticipate the unbelievable.

Though we customarily speak of uncertainty as a lack or privation, suspension enables uncertainty to appear as something other than a negative form of knowing. It provides a way of avoiding typical responses to that uncertainty, such as dismissing what is not known as being