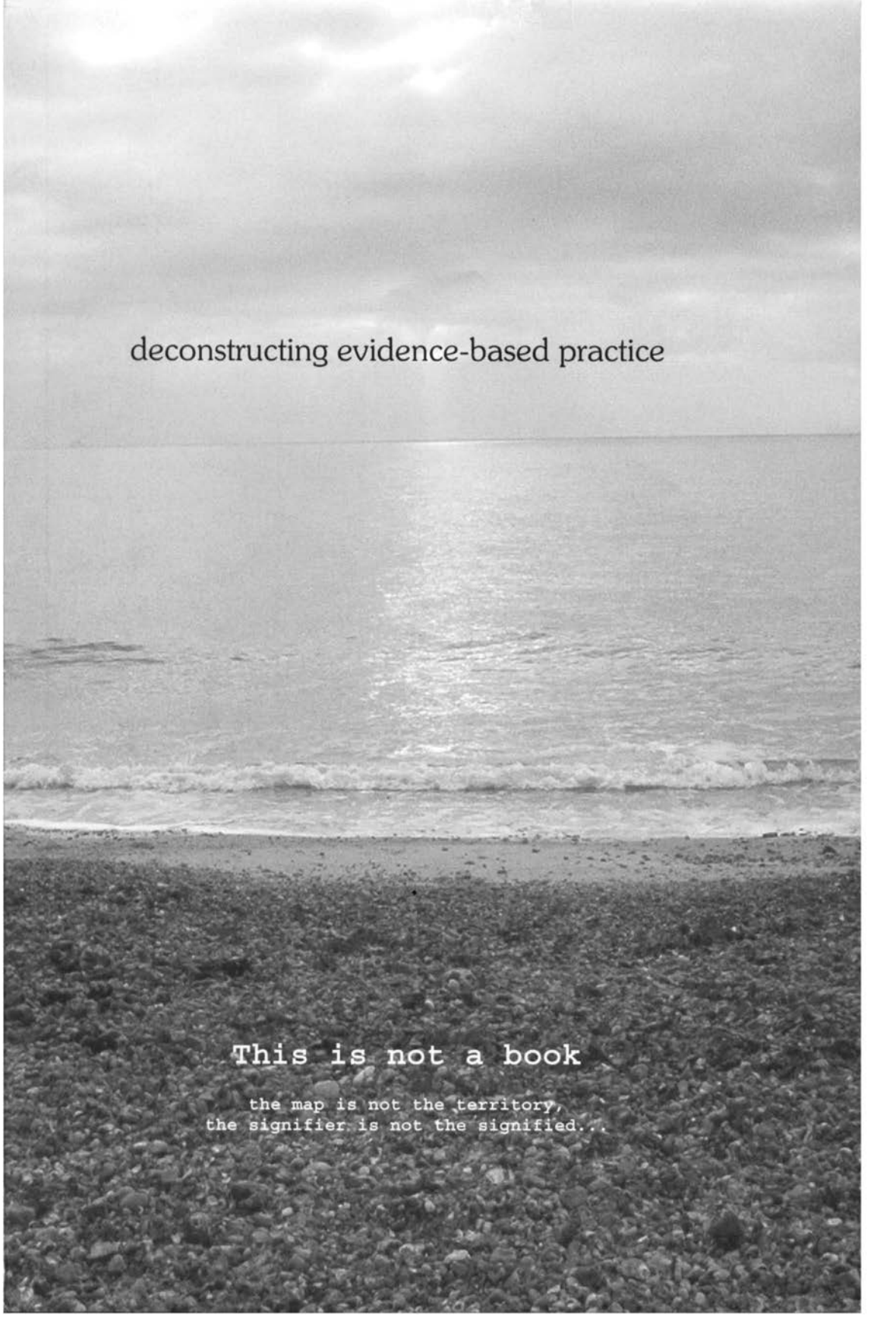




deconstructing evidence-based practice

Dawn Freshwater and Gary Rolfe

A black and white photograph of a beach. The foreground is filled with dark, pebbly stones. In the middle ground, waves are breaking onto the shore. The background is a vast, cloudy sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

deconstructing evidence-based practice

This is not a book

the map is not the territory,
the signifier is not the signified...

What deconstruction is not? everything of course!
What is deconstruction? nothing of course!
Jacques Derrida 1983

I know that I have said nothing and will ever say
nothing. And the words don't give a fuck
Jean Genet 1952

I have nothing to say and I am saying it
John Cage 1949

everything and nothing

deconstructing evidence-based practice

... "pharmakon,"
... etc. By definition, the list can ne
and I have cited only names, which is inadequate an
for reasons of economy. In fact, I should have cited the
and the interlinking of sentences which in their turn
these names in some of my texts.

What deconstruction is not? everything of course!

What is deconstruction? nothing of course!

I do not think, for all these reasons, that it is a *good word*.
... is certainly not elegant (*beau*). It has definitely

dawn freshwater

gary rolfe

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For Lyn

I repeat, my love: *for you*. I write for you and speak
only to you
Jacques Derrida 1980

Preface

'Here is what I wrote, then read, and what I am writing that you are going to read. After which you will again be able to take possession of this preface which in sum you have not yet begun to read, even though, once having read it, you will already have anticipated everything that follows and thus you might just as well dispense with reading the rest.'

(Jacques Derrida - Outwork, prefacing)

Preface 1

The authority of the 'is'

... perhaps deconstruction would consist, if at least it did consist, in... deconstructing, dislocating, displacing, disarticulating, disjointing, putting "out of joint" the authority of the "is".¹

cont. from p.213/ it pretends to'². All endings, all beginnings, are arbitrary; no, artificial. Let's pretend to begin then.

Before the text

Our explicit intention here has been to write an academic book. That is not to say, a book that is divorced from practice; on the contrary, we have tried to write a book that will encourage you to think deeply about practice and perhaps to change the way you practice as a result of those thoughts. We appreciate that, to a certain extent, our intention flies in the face of some current trends, particularly the trend for books and journals that claim to help the 'busy practitioner' to practice more effectively without having to take the time to do too much reading or thinking.

We do, of course, recognise that many practitioners *are* extremely busy people who are perhaps so immersed in their day-to-day practice that they have little time to think, let alone to read. However, we also believe that to practice is not merely a case of doing, even if it is 'evidence-based doing'. We believe that practice entails reading about doing, thinking about doing, writing about doing, reading about thinking about doing, writing about reading about thinking about doing, and indeed, most other permutations on the above. And until healthcare workers and their managers recognise, accept and facilitate this expan-

ded concept of practice, they will find it difficult to make the leap from workers to practitioners and from a job to a profession.

We believe that any concept of practice *must* include a reflexive critique of that practice. But herein lies the dilemma, since any practice that looks inwards at itself will only ever be able to judge itself according to its own preestablished criteria. All professions, all disciplines, all discourses include an essence, a set of 'givens' that are seen as being so fundamental that they do not need to be questioned; propositions and beliefs that, as the American constitution says, 'we take to be self-evidently true'. For example, the aim of nursing is to care for the sick, the aim of medicine is to preserve life, the aim of research is to generate knowledge, good practice is based on best evidence, and so on. These self-evident first principles are rarely challenged, and represent what the French philosopher Jacques Derrida referred to as 'the authority of the "is"'.³

Our aim in writing this book is to challenge the authority of the 'is', to initiate a critique of health and social care practice and theory that does not emanate from (and is therefore not bound by the rules of) the practice and theory that it seeks to criticize. For example, we believe that it is important to be able to explore issues of validity and reliability in research without accepting as self-evident that research is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and/or truth. We want to be able to explore ideas of caring in nursing without accepting as self-evident that caring is a necessary component of nursing. We want to be able to explore the aims of healthcare without accepting as self-evident that health is necessarily a desirable aim in itself. But we also wish to apply this criterion to the very act of criticism itself. We want to explore an approach to critique that is not bound up with the usual rules and expectations of academic scholarship. We believe that what Derrida referred to as 'deconstruction' offers just such an opportunity to step outside of these preconceptions. In an age where evidence-based practice is fast becoming the gold standard in all areas of health and social care, deconstruction highlights the importance of challenging the underlying contradictions that are inherent in *all* texts that contain the evidence which guides our practice. But it goes further: it not only challenges the accepted view of evidence-based practice as the gold standard, it also challenges the *very idea* of a gold standard, of a preferred or authorised way of doing things.

Into the text

In the introduction to his influential book on the theory and practice of deconstruction, Christopher Norris writes that 'Deconstruction is the active antithesis of everything that criticism ought to be if one accepts its traditional values and concepts'⁴. Foremost in the list of traditional values and concepts is the idea that a text is a representation of a single and (as far as possible) unambiguous meaning, and that the meaning placed in the text by its author can be uncovered, elucidated and challenged by the critic. Deconstruction, then, is the *active* antithesis of this concept. It seeks not only *intellectually* to undermine the idea of a single fixed meaning that can be teased out and explored, but also *actively* to demonstrate the absurdity of that idea by revealing the hidden contradictions and *aporias*⁵ inherent in *all* texts, along with the ways in which authors consciously or unconsciously attempt to conceal those contradictions beneath a seemingly logical and rational façade. Much of the activity of deconstruction therefore takes place in the 'margins of the text', in the seemingly innocuous and even superfluous passages where the author's guard is down. As Norris tells us, 'To "deconstruct" a piece of writing is therefore to operate a kind of strategic reversal, seizing on precisely those unregarded details (casual metaphors, footnotes, incidental turns of argument) which are always and necessarily, passed over by interpreters of a more orthodox persuasion'⁶.

Deconstruction is a response not only to the idea of an authoritarian text (that is, a text that upholds the authority of the 'is', a text which claims to 'tell it like it is'), but also to the idea of an authoritative approach to critiquing that text, and in particular, to the doctrine of structuralism, which seeks to provide a more or less scientific method for what was previously regarded as the *art* of criticism. The structuralists, as upholders of the traditional values of criticism, advocate a single method in order to uncover a single meaning in the text. In contrast, deconstruction shuns the idea of a single method. As Roland Barthes, a structuralist-turned-post-structuralist, observed: 'At a *certain moment*, therefore, it is necessary to turn against Method, or at least to treat it without any founding privilege as one of the voices of plurality'⁷. Norris goes even further to suggest that deconstruction does not seek to replace Method with multiple methods, but rather to reject the very notion. Deconstruction is therefore less a method and more a perspective. It involves a certain way of thinking about texts and about itself (what might be called

an interpretive self-consciousness) that troubles the underpinning assumptions of the text. It challenges the notion of wholeness within texts, arguing that all representation is partial. The internal fissures of the text are revealed not only through what is written; fault lines are also detected within the silences, the gaps, the margins, the *aporias* and between the lines.

We can see, then, that 'To present "deconstruction" as if it were a method, a system or a settled body of ideas would be to falsify its nature and lay oneself open to charges of reductive misunderstanding'⁸. This clearly offers a challenge to the would-be deconstructionist: if there is no method, then what exactly is deconstruction and how is it to be learnt and practised? We might turn to Jaques Derrida, the 'founder' of deconstruction, for an answer. However, he tells us merely that 'deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible'⁹. In fact the *act* of deconstruction is, in one sense, unnecessary, since a 'deconstructive reading attends to the deconstructive processes *always* occurring in the texts and *already* there waiting to be read'¹⁰. The deconstructive process comes not from the reader/critic but from the text itself; it is already there, it is the tension 'between what [the text] manifestly *means to say* and what it is nonetheless *constrained to mean*'¹¹. To say that deconstruction is impossible is therefore to acknowledge 'the impossible desire of language ... to make present the permanently elusive'¹².

There is no method to deconstruction because texts *literally* deconstruct themselves in their impossible attempt to employ language as a 'transcendental signifier'¹³, that is, as a way of 'pointing' at some eternal truth or other. As Spivak observes, 'All texts ... are rehearsing their grammatological structure, self-deconstructing as they constitute themselves'¹⁴. All that the budding deconstructionist needs to do, then, is write, since in the final analysis, deconstruction is writing. Furthermore, it is writing with no preconceived goal; as Roland Barthes put it, '*to write* is an intransitive verb'¹⁵, a verb without an object, an end in itself. Deconstruction manifests itself in the *process* of writing rather than in the product: 'Deconstruction *takes place*, it is an *event* that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject'¹⁶.

But if this is indeed the case, then deconstruction is impossible in another and more tangible sense. Firstly, of course, the process of deconstructive writing produces a second text as a supplement to that which it seeks to deconstruct, which is itself (in Spivak's words) self-

deconstructing as it constitutes itself (what we might call the process of being re-invented whilst simultaneously being invented). Secondly, as we have seen, there is no single authoritative and 'correct' deconstructive reading/writing of any particular text. Therefore, each text contains within itself the possibility of a vast number of supplementary deconstructive texts, and each of those is likewise open to further deconstruction *ad infinitum* in an infinite regress. As Spivak points out, 'The fall into the abyss of deconstruction inspires us with as much pleasure as fear. We are intoxicated with the prospect of never hitting bottom'¹⁷. But we do not even need to *write* in order to fall into the abyss. The very act of reading creates a new and different text; that is to say, *reading writes*. To deconstruct a text is therefore to embark on an endless (and thus, in a sense, an impossible) journey, in which the destination is constantly revised as soon as it is realised. It is a leap in the dark in the knowledge that you might never again set foot on solid ground, indeed, you might even begin to question if there ever was solid ground.

We can see, then, that although deconstruction is first and foremost a way of writing, it is a particular kind of writing that transgresses many of the accepted rules of 'good' academic scholarship. Unlike most academic writing, deconstruction is not concerned with the clear communication of a single authoritative message. In fact, it seeks to undermine the very notion of the possibility of clear communication, since 'meaning and language undermine each other ... for language is not the vehicle of meaning but its destroyer'¹⁸. As Derrida asks:

Is it certain that there corresponds to the word *communication* a unique, univocal concept, a concept that can be rigorously grasped and transmitted: a communicable concept? Following a strange figure of discourse, one must first ask whether the word or signifier 'communication' communicates a determined content, an identifiable meaning, a describable value.¹⁹

Deconstruction, then, is the enemy of clear and straightforward communication; it seeks out the parts of the text where communication *inevitably* breaks down. But not only does deconstructive writing undermine the idea of straightforward communication in the texts it seeks to critique; it is itself often obscure and demanding of the reader in ways far beyond the simple transmission and understanding of meaning. Deconstructive

writing is concerned with asking rather than answering questions; it attempts to engage the reader in a creative partnership; it is catalytic rather than communicative, and seeks to empower rather than instruct. As Barthes observed, the author (that is, the singular, authoritative voice that 'tells it like it is') is dead²⁰, and the aim of deconstructive writing is to transform the reader into her own author, into a deconstructive *rewriter*. As we have seen, *reading writes*.

But deconstructive writing not only transgresses the boundaries of content; it also often steps outside of the accepted notions of form; indeed, the *very idea* of the book is pushed to its limits. As Derrida points out, in questioning (deconstructing) the function of writing, we must also question (deconstruct) the function of the presentation of writing, and since writing is *reflexive*, the writing that questions the form and function of writing must itself step outside of the form and function that it is questioning. In other words, it is not possible to write a traditional book that questions the form and function of the traditional book: 'the book form alone can no longer settle ... the case of those writing processes which, in *practically* questioning that form, must also dismantle it'²¹. Deconstruction puts its money where its mouth is; it practices what it preaches; in *practically* questioning the form and content of writing and of the book, it also dismantles it.

Beyond the text

We have seen that the purpose of deconstruction is not the simple, clear communication of ideas from writer to reader; rather, the purpose of deconstruction is dissemination, change, action, reflection, and to challenge the 'self-evident' beliefs and assumptions of academic scholarship. This can be an uncomfortable process, not least because we are confronted with ourselves and our practices; deconstruction knows our hiding places and remorselessly exposes them.

Deconstruction is therefore not only concerned with texts. Or rather, deconstruction aims to stretch the idea of the text beyond its natural limits to include *all* attempts at representation. By unsettling the 'givens' with which we have surrounded ourselves, not only is our account of the world challenged, but also our account of ourselves. In other words, deconstruction involves the dissolution of the self as a single stable image, it *precedes* the process of construction(ism) in which the many 'selves' that we have always been are permitted to become. Self is

therefore deconstructed and reconstructed through the process of writing and reading texts, and deconstruction offers an opportunity to engage in reflexive dialogue with self and others. Self as an authority is challenged whilst simultaneously becoming an authority; self is inventing itself through writing whilst being invented by the text. As Roland Barthes so succinctly put it: 'I am writing a text and I call it R.B.'²².

The self, then, is constantly in creation and co-creation with others and with the environment, and this co-creation leads to the acknowledgement of multiple selves which are always becoming and never ending. Like written texts, the notion of the solid ground of the self is contested, thereby allowing, indeed, impelling, the writer to be written by her²³ writing, and the practitioner to be transformed by her caring interventions by and with her patients. In this sense, deconstruction is not unlike psychoanalysis. As Sarap²⁴ points out, the 'close reading' of a text is 'very similar to psychoanalytic approaches to neurotic symptoms', whilst Norris contends that Derrida 'is proposing what amounts to a psychoanalysis of Western "logocentric" reason'²⁵. It is certainly true that Derrida initiated an intense interest amongst deconstructionists in the work of Freud and other psychotherapists, and this interest has more recently been reciprocated by a number of psychotherapists who have started to look at (verbal and non-verbal) conversations as texts to be deconstructed²⁶.

If psychoanalysis works as a psychological metaphor for deconstruction, then a commonly used physical metaphor is that of the X-ray. Derrida sees written texts as (metaphorically) composed of layers of references and citations, as 'an infinite number of booklets enclosing and fitting inside other booklets, which are only able to issue forth by grafting, sampling, quotations, epigraphs, references, etc'²⁷, one written over the top of the other, each acknowledging the influence of the one immediately below it, whilst at the same time acting to obscure it. The deconstructive reading of a text is thus likened to an X-ray photograph which discovers or makes visible the layers of textual references which were previously hidden below the surface.

Reading then resembles those X-Ray pictures which discover, under the epidermis of the last painting, another hidden picture: the same painter or another painter, no matter, who would himself, for want of materials, or for a new effect, use the substance of an ancient canvas

or conserve the fragment of a first sketch. And beneath *that*, etc...²⁸

Other metaphors employ such images as space: Fox²⁹, for example, likens deconstruction to the shift from striated space (which has hiding places) to smooth space in which horizons and edges come into view. What all these metaphors have in common is that they describe a bringing of something that was previously (wittingly or unwittingly) concealed into the foreground. Hence subtext is turned into text and texts within text are made explicit. Further, to deconstruct locates 'culture', with all its hidden agendas, biases and inequalities, chaos and disorder, conflict and secrets, at the centre of a text.

Subverting the text

Deconstruction therefore looks beyond the traditional notion of the written text. Whilst it aims to identify the author, her influence and her contradictions, it also attempts to make explicit the embedded cultural, traditional and contextual dissonance inherent in *all* texts. As previously mentioned, this can and does cause some discomfort (and excitement) for those engaged in the deconstructive endeavour. If tradition is the illusion of permanence, then deconstruction troubles us to let go of the illusion, to settle for being unsettled, to agree to be consistently inconsistent and to be open to transformation. Giddens³⁰ comments that through deconstruction, tradition loses its force and agency, and, transformed by reflexivity, becomes emancipated.

Herein lies another paradox for the deconstructionist to battle with, for whilst deconstruction aims to examine the hidden hierarchies within a text, it also rejects dialectical critique and abandons emancipatory movement³¹. On the one hand it is political, in that it has radical political implications, and yet, just as deconstruction turns away from method, Derrida also views it as a retreat from any kind of direct confrontational politics³². It is political precisely because it is apolitical; it refuses to play by the traditional rules of the game of politics, recognising that those rules stack the odds in favour of those already in power. As Spivak notes: 'Deconstruction cannot found a political program of any kind.... deconstruction suggests that there is no absolute justification of *any* position'³³. Thus, by refusing to play power games, deconstruction offers the potential for liberation from the inherent social and cultural constructions of power.

Rather than becoming involved in power struggles, deconstruction is

concerned with the analysis and exposure of the systems of binary opposites that prop up the hierarchy and which are inherent (and often disguised) in all texts. Derrida argues that these binary pairs are always presented in such a way that one of the terms is seen as superior to the other, for example 'Theory:practice', 'Doctor:nurse', 'Health:illness', and so on. For Derrida, the *primary* binary pair, from which all others spring, is 'Speech:writing', and he devoted much of his early work to exploring the unchallenged primacy of the spoken word over the written word (what he called logocentrism) in some of the key texts of Western philosophy. However, rather than simply inverting the binary pair, Derrida attempted to show how each is dependent on and contained within the other, so that neither is possible without its seeming opposite. The power structure that the text is attempting to promote is therefore subverted by demonstrating how the seeds of the argument against the power structure are concealed just below the surface.

A note on the author(ity) of the text

If Barthes is right and the author is dead, then who is writing this text? On the face of it (that is, on the cover of the book), it has two writers; two authors. But that, of course, is only half the story: for the deconstructionists, all texts are intertexts; all texts take their meaning only in relation to other texts; more than that, all texts *are* all other texts, are nothing but a series of (literal and figurative) *quotations* from other texts; 'the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them'³⁴. Do you see?

So, on one level, this text has two authors but innumerable writers. But on another level, the *book* might well have two authors, but the *text* can only ever have one. The text you are reading now was *not* written by two authors consecutively pressing the keys of the word processor; it has a *single* author (I won't tell you which). Similarly for the entire text that comprises this book: every word, most paragraphs and some entire chapters were the work of a single author. And even where collaboration took place, it fell to one or other of us to transcribe (and inevitably to add to) that collaborative text.

It therefore feels somewhat dishonest to continue to write in the plural, to refer to myself as 'we'. The rest of this book is therefore written

in the first person: *I address you directly*. You might, if you wish, attempt to discover the 'I' that is writing any particular sentence; there are certainly some clues in the text; but it is not that important, and I suspect that you are not particularly interested. In any case, this is an intertext which probably contains more original ideas from Derrida than from Freshwater or Rolfe.

Notes

- 1 Derrida, J. The time is out of joint. In A. Haverkamp (ed) *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*, New York: New York University Press, 1995, p.25
- 2 Derrida, J. Living on: border lines. In H. Bloom et al. (eds) *Deconstruction and Criticism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, pp.96-7
- 3 Ibid., p.25
- 4 Norris, C. *Deconstruction Theory and Practice (revised edition)*, London: Routledge, 1991, p.xi
- 5 Norris (ibid., p.49) tells us that 'Aporia derives from the Greek word meaning "unpassable path".... What deconstruction persistently reveals is an ultimate impasse of thought engendered by a rhetoric that always insinuates its own textual workings into the truth claims of philosophy'.
- 6 Norris, C. *Derrida*, London: Fontana, 1987, p.19
- 7 Barthes, R. Writers, intellectuals, teachers. In R. Barthes *Image Music Text*, London: Fontana, 1977, p.201, italics in original
- 8 Norris 1991, op. cit., p.1
- 9 Derrida, J. (1987) Psyche: inventions of the other. In P. Kamuf (ed) *A Derrida Reader: Reading Between the Blinds*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p. 209
- 10 Payne, M. *Reading Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p.121, italics in original
- 11 Norris 1987, op. cit., p.19, italics in original
- 12 Payne, op. cit., p.121
- 13 Usher, R. & Edwards, R. *Postmodernism and Education*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.144

- 14 Spivak, G.C. Translator's preface. In Derrida, J. *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p.lxxviii
- 15 Barthes, R. To write: an intransitive verb. In R. Macksey & E. Donato (eds) *The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970
- 16 Derrida, J. (1983) Letter to a Japanese Friend. In P. Kamuf, A *Derrida Reader*, New York: Harvester, 1991, p.274, my italics
- 17 Spivak, op. cit., p.lxxvii
- 18 Delanty, G. *Modernity and Postmodernity*. London: Sage, 2000, p.140
- 19 Derrida, J. (1971) Signature Event Context. In J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982, p.309
- 20 Barthes, R. (1968) The death of the author. In R. Barthes *Image Music Text*, London: Fontana, 1977
- 21 Derrida, J. (1972) *Dissemination*, London: Athlone, 1981, p.3
- 22 Barthes, R. (1975) *Roland Barthes*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p.56
- 23 As we shall see (page 11), one of the functions of deconstruction is to dismantle 'binary pairs' of the type He:she. However, in some cases, especially where a power dynamic is involved, Derrida argues that binary pairs must be reversed before they can be overturned (see page 161). Our fear, then, is that if we attempt to write in gender-neutral language,, the male polarity will simply reassert itself by stealth back into the text, if not by the writer, then by the reader. For this reason, we intend to use female gendered pronouns throughout this book.
- 24 Sarap, M. *An Introductory Guide to Post Structuralism and Postmodernism*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1993, p.50
- 25 Norris, C. (1989) Deconstruction, post-modernism and the visual arts. In M. McQuillan (ed) *Deconstruction: A Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p.109
- 26 Chaplin, J. *The Rhythm Model*. In I. Bruna Seu and M. Colleen Heenan (eds) *Feminism and Psychotherapy*, London: Sage, 1998, Chapter 8
- 27 Derrida, J. The double session. In J. Derrida *Dissemination*, op. cit., p.223
- 28 Derrida, J. *Dissemination*, op. cit., p.357

- 29 Fox, N. J. *Beyond Health: Postmodernism and Embodiment*, London: Free Association Books, 1999
- 30 Giddens, A. Modernity and self identity: self and society in the late modern age. In F. Frascina & J. Harris (eds) *Art in Modern Culture*, London: Phaidon Press, 1994
- 31 Derrida, J. Forces of law: the mystical foundation of authority. In D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld & D.G. Carlson (eds) *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, New York: Routledge, 1992
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Spivak, G. Practical politics of the open end, *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 12, 1-2, pp.104-11, 1988, p.104
- 34 Barthes (1968) The death of the author, op. cit., p.146

Preface 2

The first time I saw Jacques Derrida

This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text¹.

Deconstruction, as you have seen, is a way of writing; not a *particular* way of writing, but nevertheless a way that is different from the standard academic format. Deconstruction has its own style(s), its own structure(s), its own form(s). It challenges not only the *content* of the text, not only the *style* in which the text is written, but the very *form* that it takes. Deconstruction (you will recall) challenges the very idea of the book; deconstructive texts deconstruct themselves.

I might therefore begin by deconstructing the idea of a preface. I could point out, for example, that the preface occupies a curious 'third place', neither part of, nor separate from, the book, 'neither in the markings, nor in the markings, nor in the margins, of the book'². If deconstruction consists in uncovering the contradictions hidden in all texts, then I could discuss how all prefaces are built upon a lie, that the *prae-fatio*, the 'saying before-hand', is always written retrospectively, and that 'the preface would announce in the future tense ('this is what you are going to read') the conceptual content or significance ... of what will *already* have been *written*'³, or simply 'Here is what I wrote, then read, and what I am writing that you are going to read'⁴.

I could further show that the idea of the preface is the mirror of the idea of deconstruction, that 'A preface would retrace and presage here a *general* theory and practice of deconstruction'⁵, that the preface is *itself* a deconstruction, and that 'each reading of the "text" is a preface to the

next'⁶.

I could continue by citing the opening sentence of Derrida's own preface to *Dissemination*: 'This (therefore) will not have been a book'⁷, and show how this single sentence contains the seed (semen) of the entire book: 'as presentation ("this"), anticipation ("will"), negation ("not"), recapitulation ("have been"), and conclusion ("therefore")'⁸.

But of course that has already been done, so I will begin instead with someone else's preface, or rather, with the writing of someone else as a preface. The French/Algerian writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous describes her first encounter with the work of Jacques Derrida:

The first time I saw Jacques Derrida (it must have been in 1962) he was walking fast and sure along a mountain's crest, from left to right, I was at Arachon, I was reading (it must have been *Force et signification*), from where I was I could see him clearly advancing black on the clear sky, feet on a tightrope, the crest was terribly sharp, he was walking along the peak, from far away I saw it, his hike along the line between mountain and sky which were melting into each other, he had to travel a path no wider than a pencil stroke.

He wasn't running, fast, he was *making* his way, *all* the way along the crests. Going from left to right, according to the (incarnate) pace of writing. Landscape without any border other than, at each instant, displacing him from his pace. Before him, nothing but the great standing air. I had never seen someone from our century write like this, on the world's cutting edge, the air had the air of a transparent door, so entirely open one had to search for the stiles ...⁹

The first time I saw Jacques Derrida... No, let me rephrase that. The first JD that I saw (it must have been 1996) was digging, burrowing, not so much from left to right as downwards, deep into the heart of something. Not digging himself deeper into a hole, but digging a hole for others (and himself) to fall into: *une abîme*, as he would call it; an abyss. I was reading *Of Grammatology* at the time, at the behest of Max van Manen. Van Manen¹⁰ had taught me about writing, and in particular, how writing is a means as well as an end. He encouraged me to explore the process of writing and the ways in which it differs from speech. He introduced me first to Roland Barthes and then to Jacques Derrida.

The first time I saw Barthes, he was ambling, meandering, strolling,