BLACK AND LIGHT:
Madness and the Cogito in *The Story of Adele H.*

Claudine Isé

*Claudine Isé* is in the Ph.D. program in Film/Literature at USC. She is currently interested in popular media subcultures, particularly cyberpunk literature and film.
To know that one does not write for the other, to know that these things I am going to write will never cause me to be loved by the one I love (the other), to know that writing compensates for nothing, sublimes nothing, that it is precisely there where you are not—this is the beginning of writing.¹

Roland Barthes

NAME:

Is the lover’s discourse, the writing of a love letter, a fundamentally irrational impulse? What does it mean to write of one’s love, to post a letter and expect a reply? The love letter, Barthes tells us, exists only in the absence of the other, the one who is desired. Similarly, Derrida writes that “noncommunication and misunderstanding are the very horizon of culture and language,” theorizing that in the system of the postale (postal or mail system) we find a metaphor that links desire, writing, deferral and absence. This implicit failure of language to communicate demonstrates the impossibility of a unified consciousness (the Cogito). Rene Descartes attested to the existence of cogito in asserting “I think therefore I am.” But can this “mental postcard”—Descartes to Descartes—be trusted? Is not consciousness a site for madness as well as rationality?

Derrida’s book The Post Card is partially structured as though written on a series of postcards addressed to a lover. Through these transmissions, Derrida investigates and elaborates the “principle” of the postale and the concomitant structures of desire and displacement that govern mass communications and the technological media, including cinema. The postcard is a structure like film, comprised of a doubled or “two sided” discourse—the imagistic and the linguistic signifier. The similarities between the apparatus of cinema and the structure of the postcard enable us to use a deconstructive analysis to examine film as a “writing machine” whose dual tracks of language and image are inscribed within and divided throughout by the play of indecision, doubling, and the mis-placement of meaning.

ADDRESS:

This discussion will attempt to address the moments in which the film L’Histoire d’Adele H. (Francois Truffaut, 1975) moves from being a discourse on madness to one that puts the rational claims of cinematic practice into play. The theoretical approaches elaborated in The Post Card find their counterpart in this film, which provides an ideal reference-text when discussing the various intersections of communications, technology, and desire. The film’s constant tracing and re-tracing of the paths and the promise of the love letter provides a further link between dissemination through the postale, and the threat of “madness” residing in the margins of all discourse. Madness appears as a rupture or a breakdown in the discourse, and for Derrida these ruptures are an inevitable product of its attempt to appear coherent and unitary rather than fragmented and disseminative.

TEXT:

The application of deconstruction to film theory helps us to understand the ways in which the photographic image is a form of l’écriture or writing.² Three aspects of Derrida’s postale are of particular interest to us at this point. First, the postale is structured by the assurance of a rendez-vous manquez, or missed appointment. It is often the fate of the letter to fall out of the pile, go astray, wind up in the “dead letter office”—it is always the destiny of the letter to “miss its mark.” This characterizes the posting of a letter, the act of writing, and the posing of a Cogito.³ As the opening quote by Barthes illustrates, and as Peter Brunette and David Wills explain, “the act of writing assumes (at least structurally) that writer and reader are involved in a rendez-vous manque: they will not both be present at the same time, now or in the future, or there would be no need for writing.”⁴ This notion of the “missed appointment” also relates to Christian Metz’s conception of film as an “imaginary signifier,” predicated upon the absence of the signified object, which becomes the desired object. Thus, the
argument that cinema be included in a paradigm of "writing," which Derrida has expanded to include all representational acts or "correspondences" which are communicated, dispatched through the postal system, the telephone, computer networks, etc. And it is this assumption that we can and do enjoy an untroubled access to the meaning of the Other that Derrida questions. He argues that our faith in the destiny of and the legacy left by our words is rooted in Western metaphysics and the philosophical traditions of Plato and Socrates:

Whatever I say, whatever I do, I must paste on myself a stamp with the effigy of this diabolical couple, these unforgettable complices, these two patient imposters... Cynically, without a cent, they have issued a universal stamp. A postal and fiscal stamp, by making themselves appear to advance funds. And on the stamp both are to be seen in the course, the one in front of the other, in the course... of drawing a stamp and of signing the original... They have signed our I.O.U. and we can no longer not acknowledge it.

The promise of the letter/postcard is renewed with each act of affixing an address, or of writing one's signature—signalling an intent to channel meaning, an insurance policy against the misreading of the letter. But the promise will remain unfulfilled despite the letter's arrival, for the letter, like the Cogito, is not self-present and cannot simply mean. As Peter Brunette explains, ... simply because a message has been addressed somewhere (by the inscribed intention of its author, for instance), this is no guarantee that it will arrive safely at that address. And Derrida insists that a message's going astray or being stolen, interfered with, or diverted in some fashion is not simply an unfortunate accident that can befall sense along the way. On the contrary, those possibilities are always present at the very point and in the very event of the message's formation. Hence the formula a letter can not arrive becomes a letter cannot arrive. If and when it arrives—and of course it very often does—this is a matter of arrival and not a function of its being a letter, since there is nothing in the constitution of the letter that guarantees its arrival. The true poignancy of the love letter lies in the inevitability of its loss.

The inspiration for the series of letters in the "Envois" ("that which is sent") section of The Post Card is a postcard drawn by Mathew Paris, that poses Socrates at his writing desk, with Plato standing behind him, a finger raised, in direction? admonition?—which reverses the historical relationship between Socrates and his pupil. By following through with the implications of this reversal, Derrida places under erasure the terms to arrive, to happen, to destine, destiny, address, to inherit, etc. In this way, The Post Card is concerned with the overturning of patriarchal tradition through what Derrida argues is the implicit death of the father invoked by writing within a tradition. Derrida suggests the ways in which patriarchal tradition may be overturned in transgressive uses of the postal, messages disseminated and a-destined: "... even while the postal era believes the proposition of an irreversible heritage (father to son, speaker and logos), its practice is just the reverse, exactly as the postcard shows. The postcard—as a means of communication marking the operation of an institution of identity, and also the engraved scene—is an image of teleology...

... as soon as we no longer know very well who speaks or who writes... the text becomes apocalyptic. And if the dispatches always refer to other dispatches without decisive destination, the destination remaining to come, then isn't this a completely angelic structure, that of the Johannine Apocalypse, isn't it also the structure of every scene of writing in general?"

So, if we accept the principle of deferral inherent to the postale, the failure of communication can be linked with the repeated attempts of l'ecriture to affirm our sense of Cogito. Cartesian rationality is founded upon principles which put the
assumption of reason into crisis, in order to prove that a reasoning Cogito ultimately exists. The practice of cinema provides the spectator with a similar experience of putting the rational into crisis. In the flickering alternations between darkness and light played before us on the screen, we as spectators are constructed as subjects to be literally and figuratively enlightened by the cinema. The apparatus of cinema, particularly the projection of light, functions to smooth over difference, masking the interruptions and fragmentations between disparate images in order for them to “make sense.” Similarly, the play between light and dark, enlightened reason and madness, recurs as a structuring element throughout L’Histoire d’Adele H. In this way, we see the film effect a kind of “writing” of the rational with light.

ZIP CODE:
L’Histoire d’Adele H. collapses the experience of Adele’s madness into the film discourse itself; thus “outside” and “inside,” “reason” and “unreason” become confused, often indistinguishable. We no longer know who “authors” this discourse—ourselves or Adele. The film repeatedly places systems of writing under erasure in order to call into question the spectator’s Cogito and the suppression of unreason upon which it rests. The plot concerns Adele, daughter of Victor Hugo, leaving her father’s home in pursuit of her lover, Pinson, soldier in the British army. When Adele confronts Pinson she learns he is no longer in love with her. She repeatedly attempts to regain his love by sending him voluminous quantities of love letters, but it is to no avail, for Pinson is engaged to another woman. In order to remain in Halifax, Adele must also repeatedly write home for money, lying to her parents that she is engaged to Pinson. Adele even resorts to a hypnotist, inquiring as to the possibility that she can hypnotize Pinson into falling in love with her. Adele grows disinterested in all activities save writing, becoming progressively weaker and more disheveled. She runs out of money but still manages to follow Pinson to Barbados, where she suffers a total breakdown and is removed back to Paris. We learn that Adele spends the rest of her days in an institution, writing “in her own private language.” The film’s discourse reflects the obsessions of the postal, figured in Adele’s excessive letter writing, her frequent correspondences with her parents to ask for money and for permission to marry Pinson, and in her desire to cast off the legacy involved in being Victor Hugo’s daughter. Adele wants to place her father, and his signature effect as the “greatest living French poet,” under erasure. This is neatly figured in the scene when the hypnotist asks Adele to reveal her father’s name. Adele instead traces the name VICTOR HUGO onto the dusty glass of mirror, which simultaneously reflects her own face, and then quickly wipes it off. Unlike her father, who writes with the purpose of rational critique, Adele’s writing is excessive, private, and resists insertion within the patriarchal economy of writing or of literature. The “excessive” is that element which is the residue or remainder, that which cannot be consumed within the economy of signification, which instead works to disrupt the smooth transmission of meaning by the letter, word, and logos. Excess in part comprises what Barthes called the punctum, the uncoded element in the image which undoes the boundary between outside and inside and collapses frame into text. The excessive is the glitch in the system that assures the letter of never reaching its destination, and for film the excessive element bears with it the potential to put the Truth-bearing power of filmic signification under erasure. This concept of excess is a primary rupturing force throughout the
text, one that “will always remain to resist the will to a unitary meaning” and thus functions to upset the certainty of the Cogito. The excessive gesture of Adele’s letter writing lies in its self-direction—its masturbatory quality, if you will, and because of this, her love letters, although addressed to Pinson, will always be “returned to sender.” Pinson refuses to read her letters and scorns her declarations of love, yet Adele continues to write to him, and to her parents, lying that they have married. Fueled solely by her desire to write and her continued belief in Pinson’s promises of marriage, Adele fills reams of paper with her declarations of love. At one point she runs out of paper, and in her frenzy to continue writing she tears pages out of a book (perhaps one of her father’s?) and writes on the blank sides of the pages. The desire to write to her love becomes consumed by the desire to write of her love, regardless of whether Pinson will return her love letters in kind. Again, a female auto-eroticism through writing; the desire to write as an end in itself. This excessive expenditure of writing produces no response but rather consumes itself in its own desire.

PHOTOGRAPH:

The opening credits consist of a successive series of hand-drawn maps and watercolor images, written and spoken words, photo-graphics, and carto-graphy, which foregrounds the film’s constant movement across the borders of different types of filmic signification. The sketches are of gothic-looking castles and villages presented from different angles and points of view. The drawings are colored in brown and black tones, the predominant color scheme of almost the entire film, and act as a referent to the stylistic tradition of Dutch painting, particularly that of Rembrandt. The credits are superimposed over these drawings and are written in French. They are translated below in English subtitles. Successing the credits is a “message” written onscreen stating that the story of Adele H. “is true. It is about events that really happened to people who really existed,” i.e., that everything that occurs in the film actually took place. Illustrated here is a fundamental assumption of the postal principle, and of course of logocentrism as well—that events take place, that they existed in a prior moment of fullness and coherency that the representation attempts to convey. Yet the statement’s placement within the text itself makes it an undecidable signifier, and in its insistence that these images be read as true and historical it also functions as a self-reflexive (dis)claimer, directing our reception of the film text while being a part of that film text itself. We see here the first of many doubled effects or framing discourses, which presumes to delimit the boundaries of the text while participating in its constitution. As Brunette and Wills explain, “the status of the frame is completely relational...in other words...it has no status...it is inside, but only in terms of an outside, outside only in terms of an inside.”

This initial framing of the discourse as “true,” as representing the events in the lives of “real people,” is followed by the image of a map of North America, the camera slowly zooming in, while a male voiceover, speaking in French, adds a historical background to the story:

The year is 1863. The United States are in the throes of a civil war. Will Britain join the Southern Confederacies in fighting the Yankees? Since 1862 British troops have been in Canada, in Halifax, capital of Nova Scotia, formerly French Acadia. The climate in Halifax is tense. To weed out smugglers and Yankee spies, Port authorities maintain a close check on passengers of the “Great Eastern” known as “the floating city.”

The hermeneutic questions posed by the introduction of history, however, are never answered by the events in the film. This historical discourse, spoken by a male authoritative voice, can in retrospect, and against Adele’s history, be read as a rupture, a posing of a history outside of Adele’s with which the text remains unconcerned. The male voiceover in fact recalls the techniques of documentary filmmaking, with its claims to objectivity and privileged sites of au-
tority. The foregrounding of history, and its inability to cohere with the remainder of the text, functions to discredit or at least make useless, the presence of the male voice and his power to structure the discourse. Thus, the history lesson misses its mark, remaining unrecovered, and the authority of the male logos is shaken.

The use of voiceover also foregrounds the issue of translation across national boundaries as well as across different forms of writing. The version of The Story of Adele H. which I have studied is comprised of a combination of French (translated into English through subtitles) and English dialogue. The voiceover must be seen to be heard, that is, we “see” the meaning of his words translated across the screen. The dialogic interplay between speech and writing reinscribes the “failure” of language and the constitutive “lack” in writing. For if language must be translated, and inaccurately at that, then its signifying capabilities are not self-sufficient. The subtitled version of this film is far more interesting than the English version, because it increases the disseminative potential of different forms of filmic “writing.” It also reinscribes the choices made in language and in the process of translation. Why are certain scenes spoken in French, others in English? Does the “spirit” of the scene itself warrant speech of a particular language? Why do Adele and her landlords converse entirely in French during one scene, and then switch to English in the scene immediately following? Even if there were technological “reasons” for a scene to be conducted in a particular language, those reasons are not apparent within the text of the film itself, and do not enter into our reading of the film. No matter where the film is shown, at least some part of it must be translated at the bottom of the screen in a language that is “foreign” to certain of its audiences. This is something that we cannot overcome, the rupture created by language itself, the need to translate a discourse across the boundaries of distance and time.

SUPERIMPOSITION:

The use of superimposition works as another framing device that will further my discussion of madness and the Cogito. Of particular interest is the scene which superimposes the images contained within Adele’s dream of drowning with the framing image showing Adele dreaming in bed. We are presented with a doubled
discourse, that of the dreamer and the dream, the irrational and the rational. However, the image of the drowning woman remains an undecidable element—is it Adele who is drowning, or is it her sister Leopauline? This is only one of the several slippages and transpositions between Adele and her sister; another occurs in the post office when she tells a little boy that her name is Leopauline. The pictures in Adele’s family album demonstrate her “remarkable likeness” to her sister, who drowned at the age of 19. This resemblance was shown to us by a drawing rather than a photograph of Leopauline, which makes the image of the two sisters even more difficult to discern, confounding our attempts to “translate” an image across the mediums of drawing and photography. Superimposed with the dream image is the purportedly “rational” discourse of Adele in her bed, dreaming, and choking and coughing as if she herself was drowning. Does the simultaneity of superimposition signify that Adele is dreaming of her own drowning, or that she is suffering in sympathy, unable to distinguish between reality and the dream image of her drowning sister?

The superimposed image in this context attempts to preserve a sense of coherency and rationality in the image while simultaneously exposing the Cogito’s fundamental instability. A Derridean reading of the cinema might place it in a category similar to that of philosophy. In “Cogito and the History of Madness,”15 Derrida, arguing against Foucault, claims that the philosophical discourse provides “the reassurance against the anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness.”16 That is, at the point in which the Cogito allows itself to become most aware of its non-Being (the “hyperbolic” moment)17 the philosophical discourse reinscribes a transcendental signified in order to stabilize meaning once again. The experience of the cinema, I would argue, is itself a hyperbolic practice. In the cinema, the work of a film and a film text depends upon the play between presence of the image and its always-absent referent. Like Cartesian rationality, it must reassure itself of possessing a rationality and a self-presence by putting its very being into crisis. Our ability to definitively judge what we see depends upon a long process in which the validity of the image is constantly destabilized. The film attempts to realign itself on the side of presence and rationality by presenting “madness” and rationality side by side. It assures itself of its status of Being by its consciousness of remarking upon two discourses, that of madness and that of rationality. The assurance of the Cogito, and the assurance of the cinema, is attained through structuring a difference between the mad or dreaming discourse and the rational discourse which frames it, allowing us to recognize that one is “false,” the other “true,” while repressing the awareness that both discourses are constructed, and function in support of the self-presence of the Cogito/image. In other words, by recognizing the dreaming/insane/ir-rational discourse as being that of a dream and not of rationality, one feels assured of Being, of being able to pinpoint the location of the “rational” discourse—that of Adele in her bed, dreaming. Foucault located the use this hyperbolic procedure in the discourse between doctors and patients, characterizing hyperbole as a “theatrical device” which consists of a distancing of the delirious discourse, the “madness of the image”, from the patient, by extending the logic of this discourse to its extreme implications. The insane patient is encouraged to remain within the delirious state while the doctor attempts to demonstrate the fallacy of the delirious image from within the discourse itself: “if illusion can appear as true as perception, perception in its turn can become the visible, unchallengeable truth of illusion.”18 It is precisely this “marvelous logic of the mad” which has the power to reveal that which is irrational to the insane, a logic which seems to mock that of the logicians because it resembles it so exactly, or rather because it is exactly the same, and because at the secret heart of madness...we discover, finally, the hidden perfection of a language...the ultimate language of madness is that of reason, but the language of reason enveloped in the prestige of the image, limited to the locus of appearance which the image defines...19 The superimposition of two discourses puts the logos in crisis in order to enable us to locate that of sane and insane, or
rationality and the dream. With the end result that the Cogito/image and the spectator appear intact, and the postal can continue to circulate.

Important for our purposes is Derrida’s understanding of the Cartesian principle of hyperbole as an “uneconomic expenditure,” i.e. excess, which will nevertheless be reconciled to an economy and overcome by economy.26 Our privileged position in the construction of meaning in the discourse rests on the film’s ability to constantly put the image in crisis, through excessive gestures such as the superimposition of Adele’s dreams or fantasies over images of her “waking” self. While the excessive gesture is recontextualized, it is never completely subsumed by the film’s economy. This is especially true of The Story of Adele H., which is constantly problematizing the cinematic signifier in the name of Adele’s obsession and “madness.” Yet with the recognition of madness we are promised sanity, and with the presentation of rationality we are troubled by an unwanted excess. Derrida argues that to define philosophy as the attempt-to-say the hyperbole is to confess—and philosophy is perhaps this gigantic confession—that by virtue of the historical enunciation through which philosophy tranquilizes itself and excludes madness, philosophy also betrays itself (or betrays itself as thought), enters into a crisis and a forgetting of itself that are an essential and necessary period of its movement. I philosophize only in terror, but in the confessed terror of going mad. The confession is simultaneously, at its present moment, oblivion and unveiling, protection and exposure, economy.21 If we substitute the word “cinema” for Derrida’s “philosophy,” we have a telling account of the relationship between madness, Cogito, and the film image. The Story of Adele H. contains within its own discourse both the process, and the result, of the negotiation between these three elements.

The play of light in The Story of Adele H. also works as a primary framing device, linked with the establishment of Cogito while simultaneously placing the Cogito under erasure. In order to find a “way into” the textual deployment of light in this text I will trace the play of what our authoritative voiceover has informed us are Victor Hugo’s dying words: “I see a black light.” A seeming paradox, for how can light be black? A man’s dying words are looked at as privileged signifiers, encouraging us to ask, what did he mean by saying that, how do these words perhaps sum up the totality of the man’s existence? Hugo sees the light, but it is a black light, illuminating what it simultaneously obscures. This play of the black/light paradox is figured within the mise-en-scene of the film. The painterly mise-en-scene is obviously influenced by Rembrandt’s style, in its color palette (deep reds, golden browns, muted greens), the effects of underlighting that compress planes of space and create soft focus images, and the focus of light on a single part of the frame, for instance a face halved by shadows. What we have essentially is writing with the effects of light. This is a notion that we find in Enlightenment thinking and previously in much of classical art theory.22 Rudolph Arnheim sees the use of daylight and candlelight in churches during the Middle Ages as based on a Neo-Platonic rationality “based entirely on the metaphor of light.”23 This lighting style influenced the work of Rembrandt and others. Arnheim explains,

Illumination tends to guide attention selectively, in accordance with the desired meaning. An object can be singled out without having to be large or colorful or situated in the center. Similarly, secondary features of the scene can be
subdued at will... Light can be made to fall on, or be withheld from, any object...  

Rembrandt’s language of light is translated into Truffaut’s mise-en-scene, especially in the shots of Adele spying on Pinson making love, in which half of her face is completely blackened by shadow, and in the other half, the curve of a smile. Arnheim writes that light is figured either as beaming down upon an object from above (the light of God), or from within an object emitting an energy of its own. Derrida takes this several steps further, linking this schemata of light to the Cartesian economy of the Cogito: This identification of the Cogito with reasonable—normal—reason need not even exist—in fact, if not in principle—the proofs of existence of a veracious God as the supreme protective barrier against madness. This identification intervenes from the moment when Descartes determines natural light (which in its undetermined source should be valid even for the mad), from the moment when he pulls himself out of madness by determining natural light through a series of principles and axioms. These principles and axioms serve to demonstrate to Descartes that God exists and that “the light of nature teaches us that fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect.” But Rembrandt’s use of light is dependent upon blackness as well. Arnheim writes that “in perception darkness does not appear as the mere absence of light, but an active counterprinciple” emphasizing through the points at which light has fallen, the objects under contemplation by the artist’s eye. So the notion of a black light, then, must be seen not as contradictory but as constitutive of the signifying principles of light. This substitution and play of darkness and light constitutes the cinematic apparatus as well. Lighting functions as yet another framing effect in the film discourse, in which blackness must be seen as part of the signifying element along with light. In the text of Adele H., the play of black and light is one which purports to reveal the “truth” through framing devices that guide us through Adele’s progressive descent into “madness.” But if blackness is the supplemental quality that allows us to recognize light and therefore the Cogito, then the impossibility of an enlightenment through a “black light” begins to unravel the entire discursive system. Derrida describes the act of Cartesian hyperbole as making reference to the “other light, a black and hardly natural light, the vigil of the ‘powers of unreason’ around the Cogito.” The black light is the light of madness, yet the recognition of this light is the precondition of our assumed rationality. The majority of the film is shot in shadowy, low-key lighting. However, there is a point at which this economy of light as a signifying element is exploded in excess and overpresence. When Adele follows Lieutenant Pinson to Barbados, the lighting switches abruptly from the play of subdued shadows and earthy hues, to a harsh, white, and unforgiving brightness. The images take on an almost documentary quality. They are shot in bright daylight, rather than in the “black light” of previous scenes, and the shots are constructed in deep focus rather than compressed planes. Adele is displayed by the full light of her “madness,” her dress torn to shreds, hair wild and tangled, her face emitting only a blank stare as she haunts the streets and alleyways, no longer able to recognize what was once the object of her obsession. Importantly, the lighting strategies of the text are complicit in the excessive gestures of her madness. Rather than selective, discriminating light, there is an infusion, a dazzlement, of light. The entire system of lighting is upset at the moment when Adele is figured in her deepest moments of insanity. She has become unable to recognize herself or Pinson. Accordingly, the light, too, is no longer able to “distinguish” as it had previously. The expenditure of light is not reconsumed but is spent. And with this expenditure of light, the Cogito of the image, like Adele, can no longer speak itself, speak of itself, in order to distinguish Being from non-being. The film text ultimately shares in Adele’s unreason, and because as a signifying system it is complicit in her madness, the film discourse does not construct a “clinical gaze” in the service of the Cogito, but rather is entirely sympathetic with the madwoman’s loss of self.

Spectator 26
The madwoman and her image are the rupturing force, the glitch in the otherwise ordered system of representation that ultimately overturns it. Victor Hugo’s last words, if they can be said to mean anything at all, speak only of the futility of the search for meaning, the fallacy of Enlightenment rationality. His logos is denied a final moment of coherency. With his dying words the father speaks of the fundamental irrationality of his life’s work, the writing which constituted him as a brilliant man and France’s greatest poet. The writer’s Cogito is undone by his own speech.

3Cartesian rationality has it that the Cogito, the assurance that we are unitary beings whose consciousness is immediately accessible to ourselves, can be affirmed through the process of hyperbole, a method of systematic doubt. The fact that we exist, that we are thinking beings, is for Descartes the ultimate assurance of existence; hence, “I think, therefore I am.”
4Brunette and Wills 61.
5The use of the term “the other” differs, sometimes radically so, from discourse to discourse. Here I imply Lacan’s uses of “the Other,” which are described by Tóril Möi: “(t)he most important usages of the Other are those in which the Other represents language, the site of the signifier, the Symbolic Order or any third party in a triangular structure.” Another formulation, the Other is the differential structure of language and of social relations that constitute the subject in the first place and in which it (the subject) must take up its place” in Sexual/Textual Politics, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1985) 100-101.
6Central to the Platonic system of thought is the belief in the power of reason to reveal the intelligibility and order organizing the world of appearances. Socrates’ view that virtue is a means towards understanding and that the virtuous life must be grounded in knowledge is reformulated by his student. Plato wrote of the need for a balance between reason and passion, culminating in a life of self-mastery in which the human will finds its natural guide in reason.
8Brunette and Wills 64.
9Gayatri Spivak, in the “Translator’s Preface” to Derrida’s Of Grammatology, writes that Derrida’s sous rature (under erasure) “is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience” xvii.
10Logos can be defined as the spoken word, in which being is articulated through rational forms of discourse. The concept of logocentrism is understood as the privileging of the spoken over the written word, because the spoken word is thought to be more evocative of a conscious Being and ordered rationality.
12The signature effect is a framing device which, along with claiming originality and intentionality, places limits on the interpretations of a text.
13Brunette and Wills 58.
14Brunette and Wills 101.
16Derrida, Writing and Difference, 59.
17Foucault uses Descartes’ notion of hyperbole, the putting of the real into crisis, in order to return to rationality.
18Madness and Civilization,187.
19Madness and Civilization, 95.
20Derrida,Writing and Difference, 62.
21Derrida,Writing and Difference, 62.
22The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement predominant in the Western world during the 18th century. The thinking during this period was strongly determined a form of rationalism that replaced religious, metaphysical assumptions with methods derived from science and philosophy.
24Arnheim 326.
25Derrida, Writing and Difference, 29.
26Descartes, quoted in Writing and Difference, 59.
27Derrida, Writing and Difference, 61 (emphasis mine).