

## Chapter Four

### Epistolary Exchange: Play of the *Fort Da*

The sending and the receiving in epistolary exchanges are closely connected with the movement of going away and return, which is resonant with Sigmund Freud's analysis of the *fort da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). According to Freud, the *fort* refers to the "gone" of the thrown-away reel in play, while the *da* means the return of the reel in hold (15). The *fort da* movement is controlled with a string to send away and pull back the reel. Through a repetitive control over the reel, the string-holder gains the pleasure of mastery. For Freud, the pleasure of mastery may overcome the disturbance resulting from the fear of loss. Based on Freud's perspective on pleasure, I consider that the *fort da* movement of epistolary exchanges, that is, the movement between the sending and the receiving, can be rendered as predominantly manipulated by the sender's wish for gaining the power of mastery. The sender procures the pleasure of mastery to overcome his/her anxiety about the receiver's absence. The sender's pleasure consists of constancy and consistency, which enhance the sender's confidence in mastering the absence.

Such a mastery of pleasure, nevertheless, is rendered too euphoric or credulous in Jacques Lacan's interpretation of the *fort da* game. Lacan proposes a different kind of pleasure acquired from suffering. In "Tuché and Automaton" (1964), Lacan considers that pleasure cannot be simply accumulated and enjoyed in the stable condition of mastery derived from the repetitive *fort da* movement. He contrives an object of desire to participate in the play, which is supposed to represent the subject's unfulfilled desire. In the *fort da* movement, the object of desire as the reel needs to be repetitively sent away and retrieved to ensure both the subject's desire and mastery. In this operation, pleasure is gained not from an accumulation but from a temptation of suffering. Pleasure is experienced in the tantalizing paradox of persistent approximation and elusion of the

subject's desire. This pleasure in suffering, which Lacan calls *jouissance*, is characteristically demonstrated in epistolary exchanges. In the exchanges of letters, the sender is more eager to keep on writing the letter than to meet the absent receiver in real encounter. Pleasure needs to be retained in the hindrance of suffering; similarly, the sender's desire requires the maintenance of distance to develop and consume its energy.

Although Lacan points out the credulity of self-mastery in the Freudian mode of *fort da* game, his analysis of the object of desire in the *fort da* play still mainly projects the subject's desire in the self-constructed scene of loss. To breach the veil of self-indulgent mastery in Freud's and Lacan's understanding of the *fort da* game, Derrida proposes that the *fort da* movement forms a rhythm (*Post Card* 406). With the rhythm, repetition and substitution simultaneously operate to form a possible movement. Such a movement persistently takes place in disequilibrium. The *fort da* movement in rhythm, in my estimation, clarifies the process of postal relays, in which no identity should be confirmed on the basis of the singular truth. The concept of relay involves multiple senders and receivers and hence possibly elicits a diversity of effects. The diversity renders the final destination impossible. In this sense, Derrida deems the multiple senders and receivers as *facteurs* (373), who are mail carriers in multiple kinds of connections with the post card.

In this chapter, I want to elucidate Freud's and Lacan's different interpretations of the *fort da* game first. Then, how their interpretations respectively correspond to the acts of sending and receiving will be entailed under close examination. Moreover, Derrida's arguments about these interpretations will be elaborated, of which the primary issue is his concern about the possibility of deviation. Deviation suggests no final return to an already given and determinate destination of the truth in the process of transmission. The post card is the epistolary form through which Derrida proposes to illuminate the multiple possibilities of deviation.

## I. Theories of the *Fort Da* Game

### Freud's Theory of the *Fort Da* Game: The Substitute for the Mother

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explores the function and the operation of the pleasure principle through an observation of his one-and-half-year-old grandson Ernst's play of a wooden reel. Before going on to investigate Ernst's play, Freud first in the beginning defines his concept of the distinction between pleasure and unpleasure in terms of "the quantity of excitation" (8). Based on this measure, the distinction goes "in such a manner that unpleasure corresponds to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a *diminution*" (8, Freud's emphasis). This distinction refers to the concept of pleasure as a diminution of excitation, which means that pleasure is gained in satisfaction. The satisfaction here follows "the 'tendency towards stability'" (9) and attempts to achieve "the task of mastering or binding excitations" (35). In other words, without much disturbance of incongruous or subversive factors, the circumstance of satisfaction is established to be a space where pleasure could be ensured constantly and consistently. As a result, Freud asserts that "The pleasure principle follows from the principle of constancy" (9). Predominated under the pleasure principle maintained in constancy, even the unpleasure inevitably caused by reality can be explained as a detour and postponement of the final enjoyment of the pleasure. Freud suggests that the reality principle may be a temporary diversion of the pleasure principle:

We know that the pleasure principle is proper to a *primary* method of working on the part of the mental apparatus, but that, from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, it is from the very outset inefficient and even highly dangerous. Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and

carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure. (10, Freud's emphasis)

Although the pleasure principle may not be directly functioned and fulfilled while encountering predicaments in reality, it is not subsumed to the dominance of the reality principle. It is still retained as the ultimate destination, waiting to be pursued and approached. Confronted with the reality principle, the pleasure principle is simply temporarily repressed and postponed to preserve individual security. The self-preservation reserves a future possibility for the pleasure principle to maintain its dominance. Furthermore, the pleasure principle takes advantage of its temporary unpleasure to create a tantalizing and seductive effect on its appearance. Such an effect, to a greater degree, renders the pleasure principle as an unachievable destination. It can be only partially and divisively understood through ““approximations”” (10). The characteristic of being unattainable thus enhances the idealized presence and domination of the pleasure principle. The aim of idealizing the gain of the pleasure, even with encounters of the unpleasure, corresponds to Freud's way of interpreting Ernst's play of the reel. What interests Freud in Ernst's play is the repetitive *fort da* movement of the reel:

The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o'. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful '*da*' ['there']. This, then, was the complete game disappearance and return. (15, explanation added by Translator)

Freud regards Ernst's utterance of "o-o-o-o" as an expression of the German word "'*fort*' ['gone']" (15), which is uttered when Ernst throws away the reel with a string. The utterance of "*da*" is heard when Ernst makes the reel come back again and return to his control to be thrown away one more time. Freud proposes that Ernst plays the reel to and fro because the reel represents a substitute for his absent mother. In this sense, Ernst's play of the reel is a kind of compensation for his loss of the mother (15). He first throws away the reel far from himself, which represents that his mother goes away from him. Then, he pulls the reel back, which represents that his mother returns to him. During the play, what compensates him most soothingly may be his grab of the lost reel, since the return of the reel equivalently implies the necessity of his absent mother's return. Therefore, Freud relates this scene of the *fort da* game to a manifestation of the pleasure principle by confirming that "there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act" (15), namely the act of return with the utterance of "*da*." According to Freud, the return, the *da*, is more pleasing than the go, the *fort*. It is at the moment of the *da* that Ernst can feel the greatest pleasure by defending his confidence in the necessity of his mother's presence again. Ernst's pleasure comes from the great promise of constantly retrieved security of the mother's presence, which moreover consistently vindicates the unity of his world.

Freud further reinforces the maintenance of the constant and consistent presence by analyzing the repetition compulsion that impels Ernst to the repetitive play of the reel. He conjures up two possibilities to explain the repetition: either to master or to revenge. On the one hand, the child may gain mastery from the repetition:

On an unprejudiced view one gets an impression that the child turned his experience into a game from another motive. At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting

independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not. (16, Freud's emphasis)

Through the repetition, the constant disappearance and return of the reel, Freud suggests that the child can transfer himself from his passive situation of feeling distressed at the mercy of his mother's absence to his self-established active control over the unpleasure. The movement of repetition promises the child the power to master the situation, even though such a mastery may constantly soar and plunge between grasp and loss, that is, between pleasure and unpleasure.

On the other hand, the child may seek revenge for his distressing experience through the game of repetition:

But still another interpretation may be attempted. Throwing away the object so that it was 'gone' might satisfy an impulse of the child's, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him. In that case it would have a defiant meaning: 'All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself.' (16)

This kind of interpretation observes the child's repetition of the play as a way of releasing his distress and annoyance at the mother's absence. In that case, the child is still subject to the power of mastery that can be gained in repetition. The child can actively master the mother's absence instead of being passively obliged to accept the loss. Nevertheless, this is merely a mastery of make-believe. The child is ensnared in the camouflage of mastery produced from repetition: "As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience to one of his playmates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute" (17). Although the game of repetition helps the child gain the active role of mastering between presence and absence, the child actually plays a manipulation over the substitute. In other words, his mastery is constructed through the mediation of the reel as a substitute to overcome the experience of unpleasure.

This unpleasure does not necessarily undermine the dominance of the pleasure principle, since, for Freud, “the unpleasurable nature of an experience does not always unsuit it for play” (17). Instead, the unpleasurable experience also serves as “a yield of pleasure from another source” (17). Freud intends to orientate both pleasurable and unpleasurable experiences to the service and dominance of the pleasure principle, which means to protect a world of pleasure without much disturbance of excitation. Under the unity and stability of the pleasure principle, every step beyond the pleasure principle will merely become a detour, a path that goes astray from the main road and will finally return to the destination of pleasure. As a result, during the process of fulfilling the pleasure principle, the movement of repetition functions to accumulate the power of mastery. Repetition can be calculated and hence can amount to increasing mastery during the procedure. In Freud’s view, repetition is enacted to stabilize the process of gaining pleasure and reduce the influence of excitation as the disturbing other.

### **Lacan’s Theory of the *Fort Da* Game: The Object of Desire**

In “Tuché and Automaton” (1964), Lacan further touches the issue of the camouflage of mastery in accumulated repetition. Concerning the *fort da* game, he does not regard the reel as a substitute for the mother that makes it convenient to pretend to master the presence and the absence of the mother. Rather, he further relates the absence of the mother to the cause of a split in the child as the subject: “It is the repetition of the mother’s departure as cause of a *Spaltung* [split] in the subject” (1964, p. 63). This split unavoidably happens in the process of the subject’s formation of the self, where the subject identifies himself/herself through a necessity of the other. This necessity is “not at all that of some need that might demand the return of the mother” (62). Different from Freud’s view, Lacan suggests that the child as the subject in the game of repetition is not restricted to an actually uncontrollable demand of the mother’s return. The restriction delimits the child’s power of

mastery within the confinement of the substitute reel. To a further degree, in Lacan's view, the child as the subject deems the split as being within himself/herself and the reel as part of his/her own formation. From this perspective, Lacan describes the connection of the reel with the split subject:

This reel is not the mother reduced to a little ball by some magical game worthy of the Jivaros – it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained. This is the place to say, in imitation of Aristotle, that man thinks with his object. It is with his object that the child leaps the frontiers of his domain, transformed into a well, and begins the incantation. If it is true that the signifier is the first mark of the subject, how can we fail to recognize here – from the very fact that this game is accompanied by one of the first oppositions to appear – that it is in the object to which the opposition is applied in act, the reel, that we must designate the subject. To this object we will later give the name it bears in the Lacanian algebra – the *petit a*. (62)

In the *fort da* game, the reel belongs to the subject, who throws it away and then pulls it back to the same place where the subject manipulates the play. The return to the same place demonstrates to the subject that the reel will eventually be retained to the subject's possession, regardless of how many times the reel is detached from the subject. This demonstration is based on the subject's confident mastery of the reel by the string that is grasped and controlled by the subject. Thrown away by the string, the reel will definitely return to the subject's control along the line of the string. The subject takes advantage of this already regulated *fort da* game to solidify his/her formation of the self by constructing an opposition between the subject and the object. Such an opposition does not mean to render the relationship between the subject and the object as inimical. Rather, the relationship may be considered reciprocal. The object is a constructed opposite, a contrived



other by the subject and from the subject himself/herself. In terms of the object, difference between the subject and the object can be highlighted so that the subject can be designated with an identity. The object is what the subject devises and utilizes to produce and deepen the inevitable split of the subject himself/herself. The object, which Lacan names as the *objet petit a*, is ““the other which isn’t another at all, since it is essentially coupled with the ego”” of the subject and is “the object of desire which we seek in the other” (Evans 125). The object as the other to the subject is not the other completely against the subject, but it is the other sustained and yearned by the subject’s wish to master and fulfill the object of desire. Through the mastery and fulfillment, the subject therefore can ensure his/her own value from the controlled object, the controlled other.

This is how the subject tries to overcome the distressing experience of loss and to confront the split within himself/herself by way of the *fort da* game. The split is “overcome by the alternating game, *fort-da*, which is a *here or there*, and whose aim, in its alternation, is simply that of being the *fort* of a *da*, and the *da* of a *fort*. It is aimed at what, essentially, is not there, *qua* represented [...]” (Lacan, 1964, p. 63, Lacan’s emphasis). The split is paradoxically played out as being simultaneously rejoined and ruptured in the alternation of being the *fort* of a *da* and the *da* of a *fort*. The split can be rejoined by the subject’s rule over the regulated *fort da* game as if the split could certainly be subsumed at the mercy of the subject’s control. The subject gains “narcissistic satisfaction” (61) from this self-ordained mastery. On the other hand, the split is also continually ruptured, since the subject characterizes its object, its other, as the object of desire. The object of desire, though belonging to the subject, cannot be designated with an immobile signification and destination once it is achieved at one point. Rather, the object of desire will evoke a “return of need” (61) as soon as it reaches a certain destination that can be figured out. In the *fort da* game, the return of need corresponds to the alternation of the movement. When the reel is gone in *fort*, it is then needed to return to the *da*. When the reel is back to the *da*, it is

impelled to be gone again to the *fort* in terms of the subject's eagerness to pursue the desire. By virtue of this return of need, the *fort* or the *da* cannot be fixed upon an unchangeable position. The movement of the reel can be the *fort* of a *da* and the *da* of a *fort*.

Owing to the return of need, in Lacan's point of view, repetition of the *fort da* game cannot be deemed as merely repetition without difference. Each time of repetition "demands the new" (61) in terms of its relation to the absent other as the object of desire. In this sense, though being still within the subject's narcissistic mastery, the movement of repetition is constantly enacted in the "sliding-away" (61) from a terminal designation. The repetition proceeds to "elude" (62) a certain decisive signification. Repetition as the movement with renewal continuously disturbs the subject's desire to control its unity, whereas such a disturbance also prolongs and reinforces the subject's power of mastery. As Lacan asserts, "It can be seen in the child, in his first movement, at the moment when he is formed as a human being, manifesting himself as an insistence that the story should always be the same, that its recounted realization should be ritualized, that is to say, textually the same" (61). Repetition ensures an insistence on the child's ability to handle the absence and the presence. It is ritualized to become textually the same, which implies that it both includes similarity and contextual difference. Enacted as a ritual, the repetition is practiced in a regular period and with certain routine customs. However, difference emerges between the various kinds of repetition. As a result, repetition, in Lacan's understanding, is a "requirement of a distinct consistency" (61), whose difference is maintained in consistency.

The distinct consistency of repetition also explains the difference between Freud's and Lacan's concepts of pleasure. Freud regards pleasure as being preserved in the stable surroundings without much disturbance. Within the preservation, pleasure can be gained from the order of the unity. Nevertheless, in my connection of Lacan's concept of

*jouissance*<sup>1</sup> with his analysis of the *fort da* game, I propose that for Lacan, the concept of pleasure does not lie in the peaceful and static confinement of the law of the order. Instead, the concept of pleasure, as in the repetition of the *fort da* game, must suffer between the subject's intention to control the object as the other and the constant elusion of the object of desire. It is the repetition of suffering that prolongs the process of pursuit and increases the possibility of approximating the object of desire. It is also a process for the subject to solidify his/her identity through the repetitive endorsement.

## II. Epistolary Exchange: Play of the *Fort Da* Game

### Epistolary Exchange in the Economy of Freud's *Fort Da* Game:

#### Pleasure in Fulfilled Mastery

Following Freud's exposition of the *fort da* game, the process of epistolary exchanges will be rendered as mastery of absence under the dominance of the pleasure principle. Freud's grandson Ernst plays the *fort da* movement of the reel because his mother is absent from him. Therefore, Ernst makes the reel become a substitute for the absent mother so that he can play and master the substitute to comfort his own distress over the loss. Analogous to the circumstance of Ernst's play, epistolary exchanges become necessary and inevitable in terms of a separation between the sender and the receiver. The separation is caused by the factor of distance, which unavoidably results in a discrepancy between the sender's presence and the receiver's absence. To decrease the impeding influence of this discrepancy, epistolary exchanges are meant to compensate and substitute for the distance. Due to the necessity of exchange, the roles of the sender and the receiver

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<sup>1</sup> Dylan Evans summarizes the difference between Freud's concept of pleasure and Lacan's concept of *jouissance*: "The pleasure principle functions as a limit to enjoyment; it is a law which commands the subject to 'enjoy as little as possible.' At the same time, the subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go 'beyond the pleasure principle.' However, the result of transgressing the pleasure principle is not more pleasure, but pain, since there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear. Beyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this 'painful pleasure' is what Lacan calls *jouissance*; '*jouissance* is suffering' (S7, 184). The term *jouissance* thus nicely expresses the paradoxical satisfaction [...] the suffering that he derives from his own satisfaction [...]" (92).

are overlapped. The sender receives a reply from his/her intended receiver, while the receiver also becomes the sender to respond to the absent other's message. This is the "epistolary pact" (Altman 89) between the sender and the receiver.

However, the equivalence contracted in the epistolary pact does not well accommodate in Freud's mode of *fort da* exchange. Freud's analysis of the *fort da* game primarily emphasizes the overlapping role of the sender as the receiver. In this circumstance, the receiver's role, as the absent mother replaced by the reel, is assimilated into the letter as the substitute for his/her absence. The receiver's response does not count much for the sender. The sender simply involves the receiver's absence to enhance his/her ability of mastery. The assimilation is intentionally exercised by the sender to ensure his/her mastery over the anxiety about distance and absence.

In the sender's use of the letter as a substitute, the absent other is often objectified into the material support of the letter. The absent other is almost equalized with the letter. In "Envois," the sender reveals an inclination to assimilate his/her intended receiver with the post card that s/he presently writes. The sender writes: "Again *en train* I am writing to you between Oxford and London, near Reading. I am holding you stretched out on my knees. *En train* to write you," "you have to understand, if I write *on* the card, as I equally would write on you" (*Post Card* 32, Derrida's emphasis). The living intended receiver is transformed into the material object of the post card for the sender to manage the other's absence within his/her compass of control. More specifically, as in Franz Kafka's letters to Milena, the absent lover's kisses can even be written into the letter (Schuerewegen 30). Franc Schuerewegen analyzes that Kafka "see[s] the love letter as a fragment of the other, of the other body [*du corps autre*]" (30).

From the substitution of the letter for the absent receiver, the sender produces his/her pleasure by mastering the communication with the objectified and immobilized other. As Ernst, the sender also grabs a string, which helps him/her ascertain the orientation of the

letter controlled in his/her frame of intention. As Ernst, the sender also expects to acquire a greater satisfaction from the return of message from the absent other. However, this greater satisfaction primarily arises from the sender's own control of the communication. The sender's pleasure is self-indulgent and self-fulfilled. This kind of pleasure overlooks the desire for return and the risk in return. The desire for return is not dynamically stimulated to induce the temptation of transgression, since desire is regulated under the power of mastery. By the same token, the risk in return is also avoided in the sender's management. The pleasure is conditioned to be enjoyed in mastery. The pleasure is maintained in constancy and consistency. The sender accumulates his/her affirmation of mastery under the pleasure principle. The anxiety about distance and absence are overcome and transformed into the pleasure of mastery. The *fort da* exchanges of letters are the sender's monologue in soliloquy, even though the receiver is ostensibly involved to develop a dialogue. The sender's desire for the absent receiver is transferred to his/her predominant concern for self-mastery.

As the child repetitively plays the *fort da* game to ensure his mastery of the reel, the sender similarly wishes to consolidate his power of mastery in repetition. It is for the desire to verify his/her ability of mastery that the sender is impelled to repeat the act of epistolary exchange. Driven by the "compulsion to repeat" (Freud 19), the sender attempts to complete his/her mastery by "mastering or binding excitations" (35). In other words, the sender wants to regulate all the factors of disturbance to enhance his/her management of pleasure in mastery. Corresponding to Peter Brooks' opinion of repetition, the sender's mastery through repetition binds the possibilities of changes:

Repetition in all its literary manifestations may in fact work as a "binding," a binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable "bundles," within the energetic economy of the narrative. Serviceable form must, I think, mean perceptible form: repetition,

repeat, recall, symmetry, all these journeys back in the text, returns to and returns of, that allow us to bind one textual moment to another in terms of similarity or substitution rather than mere contiguity. [...] As the word “binding” itself suggests, these formalizations and the recognitions they provoke may in some sense be painful: they create a delay, a postponement in the discharge of energy, a turning back from immediate pleasure, to ensure that the ultimate pleasurable discharge will be more complete. (Brooks 101-102)

As Brooks suggests, the tautological movement of repetition can be collected to create an effect of binding. The repetition facilitates the mastery of diverse textual moments to be eventually converged into one economy of narrative. In a similar way, the effect of repetition in Ernst’s play of the reel also functions to collect the various moments of the *fort* and the *da* into an economy of the string-holder’s mastery of the movement. When such an effect of repetition is carried out in letter exchanges, the sender practices his/her contrived scenario with the effects evoked from the receiver’s absence. One of the post cards in “Envois” records this self-centered contrivance:

[...] all the orders that one already pretended to give *oneself*, and more easily by writing letters [...] but in fact the order that I then feign receiving from you is a permission that I give to myself and I give them *all* to myself , the first being to choose my subject, to change subject, to stay with the same one while I am caressing another one with *the same hand*, and while I am irritating a third with my pen or my *grattoir*. *Tauta men tautē*. I “paralyze” myself. (*Post Card 58*, Derrida’s emphasis)

The sender “paralyzes” himself/herself in his/her self-endowment of all the orders, although s/he has to pretend to receive the orders from the absent other. The absent other is merely a subterfuge for the sender to keep on writing. Contrary to the purpose of

maintaining communication, the sender actually intends to write for his/her own wish rather than for the absent other. Letter writing is the form that the sender selects to fulfill his/her desire for creation. The sender decides his/her subject of writing and the intended receiver from whom s/he might get inspired. The sender thus takes advantage of epistolary exchange as a means of creation. Chin-yuan Hu refers to Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust, and Franz Kafka as the typical letter writers of this kind (Hu, 2003). These three letter writers employ letter writing as their writing strategy of literature. They hardly care about encountering with their intended receivers. They are inclined to keep the distance with the intended receiver so that their creation of literature may continually last and thrive. Through letter writing, they are able to bind a variety of inspirations into the complete pleasure of writing.

For Derrida, the sender's paralysis not only reveals his/her imprisonment in self-centered act of writing but also demonstrates the sender's lack of a "return of need" (Lacan, 1964, p. 61). In Derrida's argument, the absence of a return of need is what inertly paralyzes the sender:

Paralyzed: paralysis does not mean that one can no longer move or walk, but, [...] that there is no more tie, that every bind, every liaison has been unknotted (in other words, of course, analyzed) and that because of this, because one is "exempt," "acquitted" of everything, nothing goes any more, nothing holds together any more, nothing advances any more. The bind and the knot are necessary in order to take a step. (*Post Card* 127)

The meaning of binding and paralysis are different from those manipulated by the sender in his/her own exertion. The binding refers to an interaction with the absent receiver. It requires the sender not to acquit and exempt himself/herself from the other's influence. The sender's preponderant appreciation of self-scrutiny interprets "the other's existence only as mutism and citation" (Spivak 28). Moreover, this way of self-indulgence only renders the

sender as “slave to belief” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 31) and paralyzes the sender into an impotent compulsion for desire.

### **Economic Detour: The Sender’s Autobiographical Speculation**

The constancy and consistency are sustained not only in Freud’s *fort da* game, but also in his manipulation of writing. Derrida comments that Freud’s method of writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* corresponds to the mastery of the game in repetition. Derrida calls Freud’s writing an “autobiographical speculation” (*Post Card* 305), by which Freud establishes his own autobiography. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud constantly proposes to go beyond the dominance of the pleasure principle by suggesting possible exceptions. Nevertheless, once he proposes one way to go beyond, he tends to retrieve the influence of the pleasure principle into focus, or vice versa. For example, when putting forward the reality principle as an inevitable obstacle to the implement of the pleasure principle, he explains that “That, however, is unpleasure of a kind we have already considered and does not contradict the pleasure principle: unpleasure for one system and simultaneously satisfaction for the other” (Freud 20). Despite his proposition of going beyond, Freud constantly and consistently instills new explications to reinforce the significance of the pleasure principle. In the same manner, when he confirms the dominance of the pleasure principle, he also later refuses his previous assertion. As in his analysis of the *fort da* game, he supports the control of the pleasure principle with almost the whole of Chapter Two to give evidence to that hypothesis. However, when the chapter is about to end with confirmation of the principle, he inversely insists on the proposition of going beyond: “They are of no use for *our* purposes, since they presuppose the existence and dominance of the pleasure principle; they give no evidence of the operation of tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it” (17, Freud’s emphasis). Even if in later chapters of the essay, the



repetition compulsion – the compulsive desire to interminably repeat the *fort da* movement – is suggested to be the more primitive tendency, Freud still insistently advances on shoring up an inevitable dominance of the pleasure principle. His strategy consists in a maintenance of “the essential impossibility of holding onto any thesis within it, any posited conclusion” (*Post Card* 261). Such an impossibility seems to imply a multiplicity of other possibilities, but for Derrida it is only used as an expedient to preserve the singular value of the pleasure principle:

What repeats itself more obviously in this chapter is the speculator’s indefatigable motion in order to reject, to set aside, to make disappear, to distance (*fort*), to defer everything that appears to put the PP into question. He observes every time that something does not suffice, that something must be put off until further on, until later. Then he makes the hypothesis of the beyond come back [*revenir*] only to dismiss it again. This hypothesis comes back [*revient*] only as that which has not truly come back [*revenu*], that which has only passed by in the specter of its presence. (295)

According to Derrida, Freud’s *fort da* writing between confirming and going beyond the pleasure principle is primarily intended to avoid endangering the dominant position of the principle. The danger that would possibly threaten the dominance of the pleasure principle is constantly approached and then evaded.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Freud’s method of writing repeats his grandson Ernst’s play of the reel. Ernst’s *fort da* movement continually attempts to grasp the absent mother’s presence by using the reel as a substitute, but his

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<sup>2</sup> Sun-Chieh Liang refers to Freud’s vacillation between confirming and going beyond the pleasure principle as the “principle of negative affirmation,” which “will forever tend to unravel the systematicity of the whole” (77). According to Liang’s elaboration, the negative affirmation reveals “an anxiety of influence”: “their desire to establish themselves as the founders of a new generation indicates an anxiety of influence, and this anxiety is most manifest in their employment of the language of ambiguity and elusiveness. By presenting itself as foundational, this language experiences itself by finding itself, by circling back to itself. This circular structure of narcissistic identification, I propose, is a mere figment of the patriarchal imagination. In other words, concord can only be achieved when the origin identifies with the end, when what is lost can always be found” (77).

mastery of the reel through repetition also implies the sustained absence of the mother. The mother becomes assimilated into a mere substitute to satisfy the child's control of activity. Similarly, Freud also takes control of the activity to establish and transmit his legacy of theory, as Derrida understands his way of control:

Especially if the involved witness gives all the signs of a very singular concern: for example, that of producing the institutions of his desire, of grafting his own genealogy onto it, of making the tribunal and the juridical tradition his inheritance, his delegation as a "movement," his legacy, his *own*.  
(299, Derrida's emphasis)

As an involved witness of his grandson's play, Freud analyzes the *fort da* movement to serve his own intention. Derrida argues that Freud "has only retained the characteristics pertinent to the economic point of view" (299). The economic point of view refers to an advantageous standpoint, from which Freud's personal desire to construct his own legacy of psychoanalytic institutions and genealogy can be made possible and convenient. In other words, he intends to dominate in advance what will be given and taken to his descendants according to his will. This domination will guarantee his position as the predecessor, even if he does not stand by supervising the later genealogy. It is analogous to his presupposition of the dominant pleasure principle that ostensibly buttresses both possibilities of compliance and deviation. Derrida elaborates this economical kind of autobiographical speculation:

The speculator then can survive the legatee, and this possibility is inscribed in the structure of the legacy, and even within this limit of self-analysis whose system supports the writing somewhat like a grid. The precocious death, and therefore the mutism of the legatee who can do nothing about it: this is one of the possibilities of that which dictates and causes to write. [...] One then gives oneself one's own movement, one inherits from oneself for all time [...].

(305)

Freud, as the speculator, intends to subsume his possible legatees “under the same roof” (*Post Card* 298-299) of his legacy so that he may expect an intellectual genealogy inherited from and based on his knowledge as the principle. He contrives his autobiography by presuming that his knowledge can survive and decide what should be given to the transmission of inheritance. As a result, he recognizes his knowledge as what is already given, which waits to be further reinforced by the later genealogy.

Such an autobiography seems to be a productive abundance, but Irigaray criticizes its use of speculation as a movement toward paralysis:

And another question: is Ernst walking or not at the time of the *fort-da*?

Probably not. He does not use his legs to try to find his mother. Why? Why does he stay still, as though his legs were paralysed? Why does he speak, as it were instead of walking? He searches for his mother with his arms and his mouth. And with his ears perhaps? Sounds vibrate in his mouth and resonate in his ears. It is almost as though, in some way, he becomes speech, he speaks to himself. (1990, p. 132)

Irigaray implies that Freud’s way of interpreting the *fort da* game traps himself into a predicament of paralysis where he goes *fort* and *da* within his own circulation of mastery without moving beyond the given scope by himself. He repeats to speak to himself in his own authorized speech. This way of speaking can be applied in letter exchange to inspect the sender’s intention and expectation of writing the letter. Although the sender writes the letter with the other as the receiver in his/her mind and frequently interpellates the other as “you,” the sender actually more depends on his/her need of response than takes the other’s stance into consideration. The sender writes in order to satisfy his/her desire for the other’s response so that s/he can ensure and construct his/her self-identified world under management. The sender sends away the letter in the movement of the *fort*, but

immediately makes the message return to the *da* in himself/herself. The sender in advance holds firm the string of transmission before precipitating himself/herself into the risky *fort da* movement. Eventually, the sender secures his/her construction of the self within an already given and regulated field. As the dominance of the pleasure principle, the sender “lets the other ventriloquate it (him): in silence then” (*Post Card* 293). The other is impelled in a given position to articulate for the sender, while the articulation is filtered and selected by the sender. The other’s voice is muffled and grafted for the sender’s service. Such a rehearsal is primarily planned in accordance with the sender’s decision and is thus rendered confined within the given scope. The design corresponds to what Derrida elucidates about the given: “What is given is first filtered, selected, actively delimited” (299).

From other perspective to understand the sender’s regulation of the *fort da* movement, William N. West provides an illumination in a discussion of the act of giving:

[...] the act of giving is not itself a loss, as we might logically expect, but merely a change of beneficiary [...]. The shift of possession from giver to receiver can be used to shore up not only the giver’s having, but even his being, by preserving the identity of the giver in another. What is shifted becomes not simply attributes or objects, but identity itself [...]. The gift, then, of the giver’s self returns to him with no loss at all. In fact, only such a return to sender, by its constant replenishing of the giver, prevents the giver’s gradual decay. (West 6)

The act of sending obliterates everything but itself. In this absolute destruction, the writer can send letters only to himself or, better, can receive only letters that come from himself, or seem to through the medium of another whom he destroys with his gift, allowing himself to receive his gift to himself in safety. (West 11)

As West expounds the act of giving, the sender as the giver sends the letter to the other to exchange for his/her solidity of identity. The other, who plays the role of the medium, does not introduce much disturbance to the sender's position of exertion but simply facilitates the sender's exercise of mastery. The sender's act of giving principally aims to secure his/her giving and receiving in calculation. Even though the sender appears to send and give, s/he has in advance guaranteed his/her interest under control. Therefore, the detour that the sender goes through is selected and regulated economically, namely, advantageous to his/her purpose. This detour is not "the pure detour – the detour that would really take us out of the way, that would exceed the economy of return" (Naas 69), but an economic one:

[...] a detour always has the structure of an annulled gift; just as the gift is always given with the expectation of some return, so the detour is always taken with the expectation of some future taking or taking-back, the expectation of getting back on track – back on track further down the road or with a greater appreciation for the road already taken. A detour is, thus, always speculative, always bent on some capitalisation of time or space.

(Naas 68-69)

The economic function of the detour is particularly highlighted in emphasizing the sender's inclination to regulate the process of the *fort da* movement. By speculating on the risk and gain along with the detour, the sender decides the detour that will favor his/her fulfillment of the self. No excess is necessary or threatening to the selected detour.

Such an economically stressed detour echoes Derrida's critique of the postal tradition. According to Derrida, the postal tradition is mainly concerned about the security and mastery of the postal process. The postal tradition is guarded within protection and stability under its own law that designates and destines the way of sending. The guardians of the tradition and the law cooperate to consolidate an epoch, which commands a variety of rules under one predominant economy. Derrida criticizes the formation of such an epoch:

These guardians belong, like that which they believe they guard, to the same epoch, to a great halt, the same, which forms a set with itself in its postal representation, in its belief in the possibility of this type of correspondence, with all its technological conditions. By hiding this condition from itself, by living it as a quasi-natural given, this epoch guards itself, it circulates within itself, it automobilizes itself and looks at itself, up close to itself, in the image that it sends back to itself by the post precisely. Plato and Freud, the same drama, they live under the same roof or almost. The trajectory of the *fort:da*, in any event, remains very short (at least in the *representation* that they have of it, and which rests on the postal tradition, for outside this familiar and familial representation, they are without relation, moreover like S. and P. between them, at an infinite distance that no epistle will ever be able to traverse) [...]. (*Post Card* 62-63, Derrida's emphasis)

The postal tradition contrives its own circulation, based on its belief in its devised postal representations, which are also part of the given under the law that renders epistolary correspondence stable and controllable. The sender and the receiver can be regulated and designated in terms of the law, whose domination similarly confirms the final destination. The possibility of evasion does not play a role in this circulation. The itinerary of the epistolary *fort da* movement of exchange in this circulation is impelled to follow the string held by the law. The *fort da* repetition is manipulated to procreate more legitimate representations of correspondence, which consistently accumulate to establish the system of an epoch. The word "epoch," as Martin Heidegger traces its etymological meaning in the Greek word *epoche*, means to "hold back": "Epoch does not mean here a span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of Being with regard to the grounding of beings" (9). The epoch holds back within its "self-manifestation" (9) in its own system

while relegating other kinds of economies to become mere auxiliary medium for its completion. Owing to this method of self-manifestation through undermining other possibilities, this epoch is eventually capable of discerning itself as the crowning value by practicing its own rules.

### **Epistolary Exchange in the Economy of Lacan's *Fort Da* Game:**

#### **Mastery of Pleasure in Suffering**

Corresponding to the idea of the epoch and to Freud's intention of mastery through the *fort da* play, Lacan nevertheless feels dissatisfied with being confined within a stabilized condition to fulfill the mastery. In his analysis of the *fort da* game, the reel is not so much regarded as a substitute for the absent mother as part of the subject himself/herself. The subject throws away the reel from himself/herself, renders the reel as an object of desire at a distance, and then pulls it back in return to himself/herself. The object of desire, though derived from the subject himself/herself, is constantly rendered as unsatisfactory to the subject's desire, which is inexhaustible under his/her own hypothesis. Therefore, the subject impels himself to repetitively send away the reel as the *objet petit a* and constantly retrieve it within his/her control. The compulsive repetition of the movement paradoxically displays the subject's intention to simultaneously master and evade an entire manipulation of the reel. This paradox does not refer to a sustained hesitation or indecisiveness between the *fort* and the *da*. Rather, the paradox suggests that the subject attempts to establish his/her mastery and identity by running the risk of imaginarily suffering himself/herself from the insistently unsatisfied desire.

This narcissistic repetition of the *fort da* movement can be inspected in the circulation of letter exchanges. Different from the communication that deliberately neglects the influence of distance, the sender has a secret wish to maintain the distance instead of declining its effects. In the process of letter exchanges, the sender gains a different kind of

pleasure by suffering from an unfulfilled desire for the absent other. Such a pleasure is distinguishable from that accumulated in secure stability. The sender writes in order to approach the absent other, to bring his/her absence into the presence within the sender's hold. Namely, the sender sends the letter to be gone, to the absent other of the *fort* and then returns the other's response to his/her control, to the *da*. However, the sender does not satisfy himself/herself with the other's response as a further step to approximate the absent other. The sender inversely transforms the letter into the object of desire, which constantly reminds him/her of the distance that obstructs the fulfillment of his/her desire for the absent other. The letter recalls the sender's suffering from the distance, which makes him/her unable to accomplish the presence of the absent other. But it is also in this suffering that the sender can insistently demonstrate himself/herself as the subject who can handle his/her own inexhaustible desire and demand. Through the *fort da* movement of alternating evasion and mastery, the split subject, between himself/herself and his/her object of desire, becomes more proficient in exercising his/her identity. That is, through an apparent risk, the sender intends to take back more endorsement of his/her identity. The maintenance of distance and hence the continual process of letter exchanges ensure the sender's gain from the persistent writing, even though it seems to constantly reject a further step to approach the absent other.

The path that the sender selects to consolidate his/her position accords with William N. West's explication of the act of accepting the gift. West asserts that "In the end, to accept the gift is to lose everything; one can accept gifts only indirectly, parasitically, benefiting from the receptions of others [...]" (9-10). In letter exchanges, to make the establishment of identity acceptable as the gift, the sender cannot gain it directly simply by shaping it. Moreover, the sender needs to give it to the other and then benefits from its return to vindicate that his/her identity has been accepted and admitted. West also claims that "To try to possess entirely is in the end to lose all possession" (7). If the sender hoards his/her



identity merely within an isolated scope without the other's interference, that identity would become not only stabilized but also credulously believed. This kind of identity would become too protective to confront any threatening challenge. Based on the pattern of Lacan's *fort da* game, although the sender does not guard his/her identity to the extent of stability but persistently precipitates it into unsettlement, the sender still masters the final destination of reinforcing his/her position.

The sender's achieved identity through the distancing of the other may correspond to what Lacan says in his lecture "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1972) that "the sender [...] receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form" (53). The sender sends away his/her letter in order to receive it from the other. The reverse form of the letter, despite going through "a supplementary transfer" (46) that passes by the other, still retains its singular materiality (38) that would promise to sustain and reinforce the sender's identity. In other words, the letter is not rendered as possibly going astray during its detour. As Lacan argues, the detour is instead a way to preserve the sender's identity: "For we have learned to conceive of the signifier as sustaining itself only in a displacement [...] this because of the alternating operation which is its principle, requiring it to leave its place, even though it returns to it by a circular path" (43). In conceiving the letter as the signifier "which represents a subject for another signifier" (Lacan, 1981, p. 207; Evans 187), the letter similarly represents the subject's identity in terms of its relation to the other. The letter needs to depart from its place to go through a process of displacement, where the materiality of the letter would not become fragmentary. What counts is its detour that relates the sender to the other. Through a detour of circulation, the letter finally returns to its track back to the sender's hold. This is why Lacan can be assured that "what the 'purloined letter,' nay, the 'letter in sufferance,' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination" (1972, p. 53). Although the purloined letter is in *poste restante* distant from the sender's fetch, the letter would finally in a reverse form return to its sender as the

destination.

### **Multiple Destinations of the Letter:**

#### **Effect and Teleological Illusion in Epistolary Reading**

Derrida disagrees with Lacan's assertion that "a letter always arrives at its destination" primarily in two aspects. On the one hand, Derrida criticizes Lacan's concept of the singular materiality of the letter that enables the letter to remain intact even if it goes through a detour. Derrida views that the unchangeable materiality of the letter "implies a theory of the letter as an indivisible locality: the signifier must never risk being lost, destroyed, divided, or fragmented without return" (*Post Card* 438). The risk the unchangeable letter takes in the detour is still supervised under protection. The sender is restricted to his/her own confined scope. The variations induced from the detour are simply instrumentally used to enhance the subject's identity. Moreover, the restricted subject is orientated by a truth that "contracts itself (stricture of the ring) in order to bring the phallus, the signifier, the letter, or the fetish back into their *oikos*, their familiar dwelling, their proper place" (441). This truth is the other aspect from which Derrida rejects Lacan's concept that "a letter always arrives at its destination." The truth suggests a lost *oikos*, a lost home or dwelling place that needs to be found again. The home is the proper and legitimate place for the final return. The letter is transmitted to look for this final shelter. The suggestion assumes that the home for the final return be already existent, though being lost presently. If this assumption is examined in letter exchange, it presupposes that the event of communication be already a fact and letter exchange is merely a way to implement or enhance the fact. Derrida hence criticizes Lacan's concept of the truth that leads to "a single *proper* itinerary of the letter which returns to a determinable place that is always the same and that is *its own*" (436, Derrida's emphasis):

Lacan leads us back to the truth, to a truth which itself cannot be lost. He

brings back the letter, shows that the letter brings itself back toward its *proper* place via a *proper* itinerary, and, as he overtly notes, it is this destination that interests him, destiny as destination. The signifier has its place in the letter, and the letter refinds its proper meaning in its proper place. A certain reappropriation and a certain readequation will reconstitute the proper, the place, meaning, and truth that have become distant from themselves for the time of a detour or of a non-delivery. (436, Derrida's emphasis)

The proper can be qualified according to the determination of the truth. The truth legitimizes the proper itinerary to arrive at the destination. The destination of the truth can only be reconstituted and achieved on the basis of its own proper procedure. The truth thus ascends the throne as the crowning value. However, such a predominant truth is circumscribed within its delimited formation of presence.

Diverging from Derrida's critique of Lacan, Barbara Johnson clarifies Lacan's claim of the singular materiality of the letter without division from other perspective. Johnson stresses the function of the letter as an effect rather than as a material substance. The letter as the signifier would be meaningless unless it goes through the process of displacement, in which it would be highlighted as an effect on different kinds of positions. Johnson rejects Derrida's interpretation of the letter in Lacan's analysis as a singular identity unsusceptible to partition:

Therefore, by saying that the letter cannot be divided Lacan does not mean that the phallus must remain intact, but that the phallus, the letter, and the signifier *are not substances*. The letter cannot be divided because it only functions as a division. It is not something with "an *identity* to itself inaccessible to dismemberment" (1975a, 86-87; emphasis mine) as Derrida interprets it; it is a *difference*. It is known only in its effects. The signifier is an articulation in a chain, not an identifiable unit. It cannot be known in itself

because it is capable of “sustaining itself *only* in a displacement” (1972b, 59; emphasis mine). It is localized, but only as the nongeneralizable locus of a differential relationship. (1977, p. 242, Johnson’s emphasis)

From Johnson’s viewpoint, the letter does not serve as a material object that can be practically divided, lost, or going astray. Instead, not endowed with an identity that could be damaged and divided, the letter functions as a division of effect, which is played out through its relation to multiple different holders in the process of displacement. As a result, the letter would not be recognized with an identity by accumulating various sorts of effects produced through the displacement. Rather, the displacement renders the letter as a difference. Each effect induced by the letter is deemed as a particular effect at that moment. Each effect is particular and distinguishable from others, since it may supplement part of the absence discovered in others’ blind spots. It further inspects some absence unknown to itself waiting for others’ supplement. The letter, functioning as an effect, hence lays bare the difference in terms of a relation to the absence. In this way, the difference makes each effect of the letter an achievable destination. In other words, every holder of the letter can illuminate a division of effect and render his/her reception of the letter as a partially effective destination. This is how Johnson supports Lacan’s concept that “a letter always arrives at its destination” by suggesting such a possible displacement of the destination:

Everyone who has held the letter or even beheld it including the narrator, has ended up having the letter addressed to him as its destination. The reader is comprehended by the letter; there is no place from which he can stand back and observe it. Not that the letter’s meaning is subjective rather than objective, but that the letter is precisely that which subverts the polarity “subjective/objective,” that which makes subjectivity into something whose position in a structure is situated by an object’s passage through it. The letter’s destination is thus *wherever it is read*: the place it assigns to its reader

as his own partiality. Its destination is not a place, decided a priori by the sender, because the receiver is the sender, and the receiver is whoever receives the letter, including nobody. (1977, p. 248, Johnson's emphasis)

Johnson argues that the receiver is the sender, since as soon as the receiver receives the letter, s/he becomes involved within the movement of sending and also situated in relation to the effect of the letter. The receiver's involvement with sending is distinct from the interpretation of Lacan's *fort da* game as a strategic way to accomplish the sender's identity. In Johnson's explication, the receiver in the sender's position would not become the dictator of the circulation of the letter. Instead, the receiver is a partial destination effected by the letter. In this sense, the receiver as the sender no longer counts on the polarity between the subject and the object to guarantee his/her determinate identity as the singular destination. Divergently, the receiver recognizes his/her partial reception of the letter as the momentarily effective destination. Each different receiver may reach a diversely effective destination based on his/her reading of the letter. As a result, the letter's destination is thus wherever it is read.

Slavoj Žižek's understanding of Lacan's "a letter always arrives at its destination" may partially correspond to Johnson's standpoint. Žižek evokes "the logic of recognition/misrecognition" (10), "by means of which one (mis)recognizes oneself as the addressee of ideological interpellation" (10). The receiver's position is still brought to focus here. The receiver (mis)recognizes himself/herself as the addressee, that is, as the intended receiver, of the letter in terms of a "*teleological illusion*" (10, Žižek's emphasis). The illusion makes the receiver believe that "*whoever* finds himself at this place is the addressee since the addressee is not defined by his positive qualities but by the very contingent fact of finding himself at this place" (11, Žižek's emphasis). Žižek intends to stress that the position of the receiver cannot be decided by a determinate quality that limits the receiver to passively receive the letter. Instead of being labeled as the receiver, the

receiver is interpellated to recognize and respond to the message of the letter. The receiver's recognition/misrecognition of the letter renders himself/herself as the intended receiver of the message in a contingent way. It happens by chance. In this manner, Žižek argues that Lacan's proposition "is far from being univocal" (10), even though the contingent destination recognized by each receiver may be still under the interpellation of the Other (10) as the source of desire, as the destined receiver. The Other is destined as the true receiver of the letter. Once the sender sends out the message, the message is definitely received and converged into the reservoir of desire. A variety of interpellated receivers with a teleological illusion merely return to the reservoir of desire to share a partial meaning of that already achieved destination. The teleological illusion induces a certain limited variation within the defined destination.

### **Epistolary Exchange in the Economy of Derrida's *Fort Da* Game:**

#### **The Post Card in the Relay of Rhythm**

To further inspire possible divergences of the letter, Derrida suggests the post card to be a kind of letter that highlights the indeterminate circulation in the detour of communication. Different from the letter veiled by the envelope, the post card is not sealed in the traditional form to guard its message. The post card is exposed to multiple ways of examination during the process of transmission. Despite the exposure, the message of the post card simply remains partially decipherable for those passing examiners. It is even plausible to suppose that the partiality in deciphering the message is mostly decided by each examiner's preferable way of interpretation. Therefore, the post card remains irresolute between the presence and the absence of its message, between the public and the private of its receivers. The identity of the post card is obscured under the disguise of indeterminacy: "a post card seeking to pass itself off as something else, as a true letter that would have to pass through the censor or customs, an imposture in order to get rid of the

duties on everything” (*Post Card* 38). The post card exposes itself in a similar way to that the letter has to be censored by the postal networks. However, different from the letter, the post card exposes itself not to be manipulated by the postal networks, but the exposure means to reserve its dynamism in indeterminacy. The apparent exposure of privacy in publicity resembles the scene of “cards on the table”: “an absolute camouflaging by means of too much evidence” (175). The way of camouflaging the privacy in the form of the post card swerves from the general viewpoint of preservation in secrecy. The post card continually reminds the sender of its supplementary indeterminacy on the status of privacy and publicity. The sender in “Envois” remains indecisive about the value of presence displayed in the act of publication:

I have published a lot, but there is someone in me, I still can't quite identify him, who still hopes never to have done it. And he believes that in everything that I have let pass, depart, a very effective mechanism comes to annihilate the exposition. I write while concealing every possible divulging of the very thing which appears to be published. (*Post Card* 80)

The sender has a tendency to doubt the presented presence of publication and to reserve the possibility of something absent against the visibility of the presence. The privacy and the publicity are maintained in an unfinished process of interrelations. Such an indecisive characteristic illuminates the transmission of the post card as a process of the *fort da* movement in relays. The idea of relay emphasizes the participation of the medium during the transmission, but the medium does not play the role as guardian to ensure the return of the message to the sender's hold. The role of the guardian participates in the process of transmission in a limited way, who restrictively maps out a “postal lure” (*Post Card* 66) of order. This postal lure is produced to coordinate all the knots constitutive of the process of transmission with a final destined destination: “For to coordinate the different epochs, halts, determinations, in a word the entire history of Being with a destination of

Being is perhaps the most outlandish postal lure” (66). The scheme of the postal lure frames a structure of presence with its blindness to the represented immediacy in illusion. Disenchanted by the postal lure, the idea of relay expands the circulation of the *fort da* movement from the narrow scope between the dictating sender and the manipulated receiver to an extensive participation of multiple senders and receivers. In this sense, Derrida deems the *fort da* movement as the movement of a step in rhythm:

*Fort: da.* The most normal step has to bear disequilibrium, within itself, in order to carry itself forward, in order to have itself followed by another one, the same again, that is a step, and so that the other comes back, amounts to [*revienne*] the same, but as other. Before all else limping has to be the very rhythm of the march, *unterwegs*. Before any accidental aggravation which could come to make limping itself falter. This is rhythm. (*Post Card* 406, Derrida’s emphasis)

Derrida uses the movement of the step to elucidate his concept of the *fort da*. The movement of the step must experience the disequilibrium by raising one of the legs from the ground in order to march forward. The other leg will follow the previous action to form a step. The latter movement repeats and follows the former, but it cannot be regarded as the same thing as the former. Instead, it repeats as the other. Neither will this other movement be relegated as simply derivative of the former one. Derrida claims the repetition in derivation to be a classical kind of repetition:

Sometimes repetition, classically, repeats something that precedes it, repetition comes after – as it is said, for example, that Plato comes after Socrates –, repetition succeeds a first thing, an original, a primary, a prior, the repeated itself which in and of itself is supposed to be foreign to what is repetitive or repeating in repetition. [...] In the classical hypothesis, repetition in general would be secondary and derivative. (*Post Card* 351)



The classical hypothesis of repetition enthrones the existence of an original to be repeated and replicated, which at the same time subordinates latter acts of repetition as derivative and inferior to the original initiator. The classical way of repetition therefore follows the thread of a privileged standard to weave the variety of repetition into its unity.

Contrary to such an integration of repetition, both the *fort* and the *da*, the going and return of the movement of the step repeat to characterize the repetition in rhythm. The repetition in rhythm is not arranged to play out repetitively with a compromised harmony, in which every movement can be directly and orderly related. Far from the state of tranquil harmony, the relation constantly implies *unterwegs*, i.e., detours, within the possibility of every movement. An inexhaustible kind of pleasure emerges from the detours of the post card:

You know, those interminable, horizonless deliberations, hour after hour, days and nights, on the division of pleasure, on what does not amount to pleasure, on the reckoning and unreckonable of enjoyments, all these implicit evaluations, the ruse and contortion of all these economies, we were sublime in them, unbeatable experts, but it was a bad sign. What was still good was only the necessity, the act of deliberating about it together and as far as the eye could see, the inability to exhaust the subject, the immense preference, clear as day and so much greater than our ratiocinations. Even the trifling quarrels were erotic dispositions. (*Post Card 40*)

The detours of the transmitted post card create deliberations, whether by the intended sender and receiver or by the multiple receivers and senders, that delay an immediate enjoyment of pleasure. Pleasure is to be tasted in various ways of representations. It is inexhaustible and uncontrollable in both the sender's and the receiver's rationality. In the rhythm of the *fort da* movement, pleasure is temporarily satisfied and then continually aroused for replenishment.

The post card transmitted in the relays of such an incessant rhythm of the *fort da* movement goes through a detour of disequilibrium under the inspection of multiple receivers and senders. Its message is continually exposed and approached in the rhythm of the *fort da* movement without resting upon one definite point. In this sense, Derrida's proposition of the rhythm does not suggest an undecided hesitation that constantly remains in the same place, nor does he render the rhythm as a play that attains nothing. Diverse from the logic of receiving a certain result based on some causality, Derrida finds effects induced from the *fort da* relays that will preserve the traces of changes in the process. Peter Schwenger elucidates this kind of preservation within the apparent paradox of the rhythm:

From one perspective, this is writing as negation, the absence of the book, endless deferral and disequilibrium, unavoidable disaster. From another perspective, a step is taken in the very act of falling, and then another, and these steps make up a march which is not exactly the march of progress, riddled as it is with repeated absences, but which somehow works [...]. Our epistemology is baffled; yet something moves, something changes, change is possible. Texts are posted into a network of relays which may well be too intricate to trace, but which nevertheless leaves its traces. In *Envois* we find a quotation from the *Theatetus*: "states of inactivity rot things and destroy them, whereas states of activity preserve them" (253). [...] The postal principle, which is a principle of motion, thus becomes also a principle of preservation. (Schwenger 179-180)

Preservation in accumulation would not be an effective way to fulfill the goal. From Derrida's point of view, the principle of preservation lies in a rhythm that constantly practices repeated absences in every movement of the *fort da*. The preservation does not mean to maintain something intact without change. The preservation in rhythm moreover intends to repetitively bring the absence into examination. The process of relays will

neither impose a certain determination upon the absence nor efface its lack with a complement. The relays pass by the absence, leaving traces that may partially supplement but not complete it.

This is the way the post card can be preserved in the process of transmission. The post card is preserved in the relays among multiple receivers and senders instead of the singularly intended sender and receiver. In other words, the post card “is lost for the addressee at the very second when it is inscribed, its destination is immediately multiple, anonymous” (*Post Card* 79). At the moment of being inscribed, the post card is no longer destined to the intended receiver, but it becomes repeated within multiple destinations of receivers. The multiple destinations as well endanger the sender’s dominant role as the message producer, since the multiple receivers also become senders to send messages based on their respective relation to the post card. The possibilities of multiple destinations as various detours in the transmission of the post card confirm Derrida’s standpoint of examining the postal system: “without the possibility of deviation and remaining the entire postal system there would be no delivery of letters to any address at all” (443, Note 17). The deviations, as the kept *poste restante* in the transmission, are not secondary incidents. Instead, they are the process that cannot be organized to perform an already given scenario of exchange. The postal process with deviation and remaining proposes “nothing as given” (West 17), in which “there is more than one gift that can be given or taken” (17) as well as there is more than one possibility that can be sent or received in a post card. This proposition encourages Derrida’s critique of Lacan’s concept that “a letter always arrives at its destination”:

The remaining structure of the letter is that [...] a letter can always not arrive at its destination. [...] Not that the letter never arrives at its destination, but it belongs to the structure of the letter to be capable, always, of not arriving. And without this threat (breach of contract, division or multiplication, the

separation without return from the phallus which was begun for a moment by the Queen, i.e. by every 'subject'), the circuit of the letter would not even have begun. But with this threat, the circuit can always not finish. Here dissemination threatens the law of the signifier and of castration as the contract of truth. It broaches, breaches [*entame*] the unity of the signifier, that is, of the phallus. (*Post Card* 443-444)

Derrida refuses the identification of the final destination, since this final destination reinforces a kind of final truth and declines the possibility of any threat to the complete circulation of the letter. The truth preserves a unity under its own law that guarantees the dominant position of the sender. Derrida's proposition that "a letter can always not arrive at its destination" intends to undermine the truth by evoking the possibility of dissemination in the transmission, such as breach, division, and multiplication. The dissemination will not promise a return to the path of the truth without any danger. The danger implies possible lapses, goings awry, interceptions, procrastinations, and so on. These deviations and delays damage the presumed unity of the truth by rendering no position easily admissible to a definite security. With this attitude, Derrida does not attempt to identify any position of either the sender or the receiver, but he suggests that "There would only be '*facteurs*,' and therefore no vérité. Only '*media*,' [...]. The immediate will never be substituted for them, only other frameworks and other forces" (194, Derrida's emphasis). In other words, both the sender and the receiver are *facteurs*, i.e. mail carriers, of the letter in the process of transmission. They are the *media* of the transmission, who do not mediate the vérité, the truth, to enhance the mastery of the truth, but they perform their receiving and sending in the relays of the *fort da* movement. They constantly encounter the absence within themselves and others. Derrida adopts the term of "*abyme*" to delineate the recurrent encounter with the absence:

Each one makes himself into the *facteur*, the postman, of a narrative that he

transmits by maintaining what is “essential” in it: underlined, cut out, translated, commented, edited, taught, reset in a chosen perspective. And occasionally, within the narrative, lacunae are again pointed out, which makes a piece of supplementary history. And this supplement can embed itself in *abyme* within another lacuna that is bigger or smaller. Bigger or smaller because here we are within a logic that makes possible the inscription of the bigger in the smaller, which confuses the order of all limits, and forbids the *arrangement of bodies*. (373, Derrida’s emphasis)

The idea of abyme, i.e. abyss, implicates an interminable process of the facteur’s dissemination and supplement of the letter. There is no essential truth imposed upon the letter. There are only various kinds of perspectives that incessantly induce possible diversities of the letter. Each kind of perspective discovers, interferes, and connects with the absence that is speculated on the letter. The post card, in its ambiguous form, further exposes and implicates the effects of relays among the multiple perspectives. The post card, as the postmodern text explicated in Brian Rotman’s words, is “forced as a sign to engage in the creation of its own signified — one written in the only terms available to it, that is, future states of itself” (qtd. in Schwenger 177). The post card implies that the multiple reading of it engages the receiver to be the sender to evoke his/her own possible way of relaying the message. The receiver and the sender are both facteurs, rather than owners, of the post card in relays.