

Chapter Three

Epistolary Writing: Paradox of the Supplement

Distance is the tantalizing element in epistolary writing. Distance causes absence and arouses anxiety. Ambivalently, distance is also the catalyst of the sender's desire, which impels the sender to keep living in his/her own imaginary presence of the absent receiver through writing. The final encounter or consummation is craved but interminably delayed and eluded. This is the seduction of distance. Derrida illustrates the "enchantment" (1978, p. 358) of distance: "one must keep at a distance from distance, not only [...] to protect oneself from this fascination, but also in order to experience it. There must be distance (which is lacking) [...]; one must keep one's distance [...] how to seduce without being seduced" (358).

To explicate the seducing without being seduced by keeping at a distance, I apply Derrida's concept of the supplement to analyze and reinforce the enchantment of distance in epistolary writing. Both effects of addition and substitution induced from the supplement explain the sender's paradoxical wish to keep distancing the absent other in letter writing. The sender in "Envois" persistently oscillates between the effects of immediacy and deferral. It is the oscillation that interminably stimulates the sender's desire for an imaginary presence in absence.

I. Derrida's Concept of the Supplement

Implication of the Supplement in Rousseau's Text

In *Of Grammatology* (1976), Derrida extends Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the supplement to discuss the relationship between nature, culture, and writing. For Rousseau, the distinction between nature and culture, speech and writing, thing and image of representation features a hierarchical and binary relationship of supplement. The latter

terms supplement the insufficiency of the former ones. However, the insufficiency of the former “natural” and “original” terms does not accordingly suggest that they share an equivalent or reciprocal connection with the supplementary ones. Rather, the supplementary culture, writing, and image of representation at best play an auxiliary role to additionally enhance the purity of nature, speech, and thing.

In other words, the supplement is regarded as instrumental to the allegedly “natural” and “original” truth. Rousseau reveals this kind of instrumental reason in his *Confessions*: “The part that I have taken of *writing and hiding myself* is precisely the one that suits me. If I were present, one would never know what I was worth” (qtd. from *Of Grammatology* 142, Rousseau’s emphasis). Here, hiding the presence of “myself” through the disguise of writing is selected to be a way of marking and manifesting my worth as being “myself.” That is, my worth would not better become conspicuous unless a supplement of my worth through writing is added to my presence. In order to gain an advantageous pleasure of “recognition” (Derrida, 1976, p. 142) and identity, my presence can be temporarily subordinated to become the absent one in exchange for a further confirmation of my self-sufficient nature of presence.

In this way, the supplement seems to be both beneficial and harmful to the self-sufficient presence. On the one hand, it reinforces the solidity of the presence. On the other hand, it implicitly points out the existent lack of the presence that needs to be supplemented. This lack might be threatening, since it suggests that the presence does not exist as a complete and pure unity. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of such an instrumental supplement is actually prescribed under the maneuver of the natural presence. To compensate the constructed loss of presence as a result of adopting the supplement, Rousseau subjects the supplement to functioning as an “adjunct” (1976, p. 145) parasitical to the presence. Rousseau’s value of the natural presence therefore “condemns writing as destruction of presence and as disease of speech” (142). The supplement can be only

inferiorly and reliantly related and “rehabilitate[d]” in terms of “the reappropriation of that of which speech allowed itself to be dispossessed” (142). Writing as the supplement to speech is merely positioned as “the restoration, by a certain absence and by a sort of calculated effacement, of presence disappointed of itself in speech” (142). Writing is submitted to the maneuver of speech. It serves as a calculable measure that can be contrived to create the effects of reappropriations in the ostensible absence and effacement of the presence of speech.

To sum up, even though Rousseau evinces the “concealment” (141) of the supplement within the natural presence, he still renders the supplement as a compensatory and affiliated kind of replenishment to the immediacy of the natural presence. According to Derrida, Rousseau “is nevertheless more pressed to exorcise it than to assume its necessity” (141). He is more eager to affirm the assistant property of the supplement than to give it its important and indispensable participation in the practice of the natural presence.

The Supplement as Addition

Inspired by Rousseau’s text, Derrida examines and further extends the concept of the supplement to a logic of the “exorbitant” (157) beyond the hierarchical logic of nature over culture, speech over writing, presence over absence. Derrida unfolds the concept of the supplement from two aspects: the supplement is both the addition and the substitution simultaneously.

From the aspect of the supplement as an addition, Rousseau’s employment of the supplement may be recalled:

The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating

function. This kind of supplementarity determines in a certain way all the conceptual oppositions within which Rousseau inscribes the notion of Nature to the extent that it *should* be self-sufficient. (1976, pp. 144-145, Derrida's emphasis)

The supplement, characteristic of being an addition, functions as an extra surplus to the self-sufficient system of the natural presence. The supplement adds itself to enrich and accumulate the abundance and completeness of the presence so that the presence can be recognized and identified as the absolute and transcendental signified. Subjugated as a calculable item, the supplement can be collected through insistent accumulation to empower the dominant authority of the presence. It is invented as an ancillary representation of the presence and accommodated to the operation and intention of the presence. If there is a lack within the presence for the supplement to fill in, then the presence intentionally leaves the lack by itself. The presence needs to contrive an existence of the other to supplement and manifest its self-sufficient unity. It is with the help of the supplement that the presence may enjoy its self-satisfactory pleasure of accomplishing itself. The lack within itself would always be witnessed to maintain the fullest presence under its sleight of hand. As a result, the supplement and the presence itself are positioned and valued in terms of a hierarchical difference: the supplement is enslaved and evaluated with significance on behalf of the masterful purity of the presence. The presence overpowers the supplement as well as the supplemented absence. Upon the establishment of such a privileging presence, the binary link between oppositions is thus deemed as natural and predominant.

The Supplement as Substitution

Paradoxically, the use of the supplement as an additional reinforcement simultaneously implies a necessity of the supplement as an interminable practice of

substitution. Derrida expounds the supplement as substitution:

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself. (1976, p. 145, Derrida's emphasis)

The supplement as substitution goes beyond the hierarchical relationship of oppositions. It is not prescribed to serve a perfection of an idealized presence. Instead, it is created as an image or representation of the presence to illuminate an inevitable absence within the presence. The presence is not endowed with a self-sufficient wholeness in advance. Inversely, the presence is “contaminated” by an anterior lack of a full presence when the supplement is adopted to its enrichment. The supplement does not merely accumulate the presence to the peak and then becomes assimilated into the pleasure of the achievement. As Derrida says, “it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence” (145). Rather, the supplement “produces no relief” (145) for the presence, inasmuch as that it makes the presence involved with an unfavorable fear of not filling and controlling the absence. Because the supplement supplements itself through substitution, it is constantly instigated to be replaced once a certain form of substitution is amplified to the degree of stability. Therefore, the process of constant and endless supplement in substitution would not privilege a self-sufficient presence to become the dictator of the supplement or to subjugate an imposed absence to be the destined passive receiver.

The refusal of the binary link between oppositions does not therefore suggest that the supplement plays the role as a third party between and for them. As Vincent B. Leitch points out, the supplement as an “undecidable” “escapes any appropriation into the binary oppositions of philosophy and literature, yet it dwells amidst such oppositions, resisting and disorganizing them while refusing inclusion as a third term” (174). The supplement is not to be assimilated as part of the presence to complement the absence. Nor would it become a neutrally stabilized and identified item that maintains itself within the link to interact with the oppositions. The supplement is instead an “*exterior*” addition (Derrida, 1976, p. 145, Derrida’s emphasis) as an adjunct and a proxy. The exteriority constantly proposes the necessity of the supplement as well as dynamically threatens that necessity by endangering the possible identity of the supplement. The supplement could not be comfortably positioned in the vicissitudes amidst presence and absence. It variably substitutes differentials for the predictable and the immutable.

Paradox of the Supplement

Although the two aspects of the supplement – addition and substitution – appear to be paradoxical, they are not respectively and singularly detached from each other. The detachment would result in separating and isolating the two aspects within their own respectively different operation of one single system. Instead of resting upon the isolated and steady basis of operation, both aspects of the supplement confront changes “from moment to moment” (1976, p. 145). They are “by turns effaced or become[s] discreetly vague in the presence of the other” (145). They go through indecisive alterations of effacement and appearance. During the process of variation, moreover, the effacement does not cause a disappearance without leaving a trace and the appearance is not privileged as the permanent maintenance of visibility and presence.

Contrary to the process of momentary changes, if the two aspects of the supplement

are put into binary oppositions, both of them would fall into the simplified reduction of extremity. On the one hand, the supplement as addition would therefore be maneuvered without admittance of its exterior position as a proxy by the self-sufficiently operated system of the natural presence. The supplement would be veiled as the internally created other. A series of supplementary additions are hence decisively accounted and accumulated to fulfill the idealized destination of the presence.

On the other hand, once becoming predominant to the extent of taking place of the natural presence and then empowering itself as the emergent presence, the supplement as substitution will risk at the hazard of entering the “[d]angerous supplement” the phrase Derrida highlights from Rousseau’s text (149). This dangerous supplement intends to practice “a simple substitution” (148). Because the presence as the absolute signified is too idealized and screened, the supplement as substitution hence creates new possibilities to replace the presence. The supplement as substitution in its extremity makes the former form of presence completely irrelevant and outside under the authority of the present act of substitution. Nevertheless, this logic of substitution still repeats the authoritarian logic of the natural presence. It does not go beyond the logic of one predominant power assimilating and controlling another inferior force. In this sense, both the natural presence and the dangerous supplement serve as pawns to solidify the manipulating value of the presence. The dangerous supplement is what Derrida calls a “*catastrophe*” or “scandal” (147, Derrida’s emphasis), since it further mystifies the veil of the presence:

The dangerous supplement, which Rousseau also calls a “fatal advantage,” is properly *seductive*; it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it toward its loss or fall and therefore it is a sort of lapse or scandal (*scandalon*). [...] The dangerous supplement destroys very quickly the forces that Nature has slowly constituted and accumulated. In “out-distancing” natural experience, it runs

non-stop [*brûle les étapes* literally “burns the halting-points”] and consumes energy without possibility of recovery. (1976, p. 151, Derrida’s emphasis)

The dangerous supplement establishes itself by derogating from the authority of the natural presence. In this way, the negative and contrary sides of the natural presence become the adopted doctrines of the dangerous supplement. This kind of supplement is not dangerous in itself but is necessarily rendered threatening when its target aims against the natural presence. It maintains its own name of danger by “making visible a distancing” (151) away from its opponent. It may be thought as if the dangerous supplement signs a contract with the natural presence to fertilize and compete for the logic of presence. The difference between them only lies in the strategies they respectively map out.

Blindness to the Supplement

The two extremities of the supplement crown the concept of presence as the perfect truth and value. They both overlook the necessity of the presence to be constructed through a process. Even though the natural presence is exalted as the self-sufficient system, it still requires the supplement as the other to enrich and manifest its own predominance. This is why in reading Derrida’s critique, Barbara Johnson indicates a similarity between writing and speech:

What his [Derrida’s] analyses reveal is that even when a text *tries* to privilege speech as immediacy, it cannot completely eliminate the fact that speech, like writing, is based on a *différance* (a Derridean neologism meaning both “deferment” and “difference”) between signifier and signified inherent in the sign. Speakers do not beam meanings directly from one mind to another.

Immediacy is an illusion. Properties normally associated with writing inevitably creep into a discussion designed to privilege speech. [...] Because a gap of

heterogeneity and distance is fundamental to the structure of language, Derrida sees “speech” as being ultimately structured like “writing.” (1990, p. 43, Johnson’s emphasis)

According to Johnson, speech, like writing, also goes through a process of *différance*. That is, the process of constructing speech detours and procrastinates with difference. Neither does such a process go straightforward toward the predestined destination of presence nor will it only tautologically repeat the same path without variation. The featured immediacy is imaginarily and uncritically bequeathed to the concept of presence. Contrary to this placatory requirement of speech and the presence, writing becomes subordinated but simultaneously highlighted in terms of its inferior status as the supplement to the presence of speech. Writing is emphasized and analyzed because the dominance of speech intends to use writing as its supplementary tool to practice and enhance its power of maneuver. In a sense, it can be said that speech relies on writing as the supplement even if speech condemns writing as the inferior one. Writing paradoxically becomes a vital and indispensable element for speech to construct its presence. Johnson therefore propounds the concept of “*graphocentrism*” (47, Johnson’s emphasis), which is not a reiteration of the simple substitution in the dangerous supplement:

The hidden but ineradicable importance of writing that Derrida uncovers in his readings of logocentric texts in fact reflects an unacknowledged, or “repressed,” *graphocentrism*. It may well be that it is only in a text-centered culture that one can privilege speech in a logocentric way. The “speech” privileged in logocentrism is not literal but is a *figure* of speech: a figure, ultimately, of God. (1990, p. 47, Johnson’s emphasis)

The concept of the repressed graphocentrism within the logocentrism of the presence is not unveiled to simply subvert the dictation of the presence. The concept moreover attempts to reveal what is left unacknowledged and concealed under the surface of visibility.

Being the concealed does not mean that writing as the supplement is already given its position as the natural lack. This kind of identity belongs to the logic of the natural presence. The concealment intentionally regulates the inevitability of writing as the supplement under an advantageous control of the natural presence. The strategy of the natural presence contrives a scheme of “[b]lindness to the supplement” (Derrida, 1976, p. 149, Derrida’s emphasis). Despite being aware of a necessity of the supplement, the natural presence nevertheless disguises its generous reception from the supplement, pretending to preeminently send a usage to the supplement. The natural presence deliberately enmeshes itself in the blindness to its irreducible reliance on the supplement. Different from the blind perspective of the natural presence, writing does not narrowly formulate a given identity upon the natural presence. Rather, within the scope of writing, the presence of speech is observed as a figure of speech, which is not necessarily deemed as an intangible concept insusceptible to other possibilities and movements.

The blindness to the supplement reveals that the supplement is not naturally the subordinate one. It does not necessarily be positioned as a given lack that is originally concealed. It is typified as hidden because of intentional dissimulation and assimilation. It is the contrived blindness that makes the supplement manipulated as the condemnable. Johnson further illuminates this point of view in examining the Western authority of colonization that reduces and censors the position of writing:

What enslaves is not writing per se but *control* of writing, and writing as control. What is needed is not less writing but more consciousness of how it works. If, as Derrida claims, the importance of writing has been “repressed” by the dominant culture of the Western tradition, it is because writing can always pass into the hands of the “other.” The “other” can always learn to read the mechanism of his or her own oppression. The desire to repress writing is thus a desire to repress the fact of the repression of the “other.”

(1990, p. 48, Johnson's emphasis)

The control of writing, as the blindness to the supplement, makes writing as the supplement embodied as a maneuvering strategy. Writing is controlled to coax with the wish and need of the authority to rule over the subordinate. Under such an exercise, writing becomes a dictated vicarious representation of the authority. This way of control is also the proper agenda of the natural presence.

The Exorbitant Chain of Supplements

To go beyond the singular logic of the authority, the possibilities implicated in writing do not predict a subversion that merely directs from recto to verso or vice versa. Diversely, in addition to contending the intentional blindness to supplement, writing simultaneously admits that "*Blindness to the supplement is the law*" (1976, p. 149, Derrida's emphasis). The admission of the blindness within writing may be understood from the point that the natural presence can support itself by its own intentional blindness because it has a "blind spot" (163) within itself. The blind spot remains not to be brought into the awareness of the natural presence. By virtue of this blind spot, the natural presence glosses over the significance of the supplement under its own credulity that the necessity of the supplement can be effectively disguised at its will. In this way, the blind spot prevents the natural presence from realizing the impossibility of denying the necessity of the supplement. The blind spot threatens the completion of the natural presence.

As a result, the blind spot is where the possibility of the supplement is reserved. As Derrida says about the supplement, "We speak its reserve" (149). This reserve should not be simply understood as a hoard of the supplement. Instead, the reserve interminably delays a final fulfillment of the natural presence. The final destination of the natural presence is deferred from being systematically and self-sufficiently destined. The deferment does not thus procrastinate without movement. It defers with difference. Derrida explicates such a

deferment with difference as a manifestation of the two crucial values pertaining to his concept of *différance*: “to defer as detour, relay, reserve” and “to differ as discernibility, distinction, separation” (1982, p. 18). While the deferment keeps a distance away from the destination, it also goes through a process of substitution with difference. The deferment delays the immediate reference to the identifiable destination and origin of presence. During the process of deferral, differences are put into “reserve” at “moments of *différance*” (18). At these moments, differences are reserved to recurrently undergo oppositional conflicts between the authority of the natural presence and their own impulses toward differentiating themselves. The conflicts are not to be endlessly retained in an immobile kind of hesitation or dilemma. Rather, they constantly spark new possibilities to highlight the distinction between differences. It is in this way of evoking a distinction that the difference could be focused to create an effect in the deferment. This is a process of the supplement, the *différance*, and writing. The blind spot enables the necessity of the supplement to disentangle the apparently unified knot of the natural presence. Meanwhile, by virtue of the effects of the blind spot, the supplement incessantly relays its necessity within the movement toward the unattainable destination. This paradoxical process is “the chain of supplements” (1976, p. 156):

Through this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception. Immediacy is derived. That all begins through the intermediary is what is indeed “inconceivable [to reason].” (Derrida, 1976, p. 157)

Within the chain of supplements, immediacy of the natural presence is not given but derived and multiplied. Immediacy is an illusion woven into a constellation of supplementary mediations that include both effects of addition and substitution. Confronted

with the illusion, the supplement is an exorbitant “exteriority” (161) that goes beyond the confinement of the metaphysical natural presence, though it would not therefore replicate the binary logic of a simple substitution. Derrida elucidates the simultaneous exteriority and participation of the supplement by evoking the concept of the exorbitant:

But what is the exorbitant?

I wished to reach the point of a certain exteriority in relation to the totality of the age of logocentrism. Starting from this point of exteriority, a certain deconstruction of that totality which is also a traced path, of that orb (*orbis*) which is also orbitary (*orbita*), might be broached. The first gesture of this departure and this deconstruction, although subject to a certain historical necessity, cannot be given methodological or logical intraorbital assurances. Within the closure, one can only judge its style in terms of the accepted oppositions. (1976, pp. 161-162, Derrida’s emphasis)

The exorbitant intends to “*exceed* the metaphysical orb” (162, Derrida’s emphasis) without completely abandoning the established logic of binary oppositions. The rejected logic of thinking would still remain to dictate other similar types of maneuver if it is replaced in a simplified way without supplementary impetus that pushes it to go through changes.

Namely, the rejected logic cannot be comfortably positioned at a false or deserted post, but it is required to be endlessly supplemented and substituted. This gesture of remaining within the accepted oppositions to structure out its supplement without overthrowing the system outright is what Derrida says, “*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (158, Derrida’s emphasis). Only being within the text can the possibility of going beyond the text be reserved.

II. Effects of the Supplement in Epistolary Writing

The Supplement as Addition in Epistolary Writing

Due to the intended receiver's absence caused by the distance, epistolary correspondence serves as a vicarious mediation between the sender and the receiver. Both sides intend to approximate the other's presence through letter exchanges, despite the fact that such a presence is imaginary. Even though both sides may be aware of the imaginary representation as a mere proxy of the other's presence, they would rather grasp this temporary compensation of their desire for each other than give it up. The letter therefore supplements the distance that hinders between the two sides and prevents them from direct contact. The letter, as an exterior supplement, cannot completely overcome the gap of distance but only plays an ancillary role to produce approximate effects beyond the hindrance. The supplementary effects of the letter add to the difficult contact between the sender and the receiver, which enhance the possibility of communication between them.

Thanks to the letter as a supplementary addition, letter exchanges enable both communicating sides to construct and share an imaginary world of presence beyond the impediment encountered in the world of reality. As long as they can receive letters from the other side, it seems that they can more accurately and possibly grasp the other's presence. They would become eager and feel urgent to write and receive more and more letters from the other. They tend to believe that with more reception of the other's letters, the desired other must have thus been further approached. If "[i]mmediacy is an illusion" (Johnson, 1990, p. 43), they accumulate the illusion with a belief that immediacy can be accounted and collected. They accumulate presence, whose nature and truth are supposed to accomplish itself by using letter writing as an advantageous instrument. Based on this way of accumulation, an isolated world can be constructed as unique to themselves only, as particular as their respective apostrophe to the unique "you." Janet Gurkin Altman considers this kind of shared world as one of the characteristics of letter writing:

To write a letter is to map one's coordinates — temporal, spatial, emotional, intellectual — in order to tell someone else where one is located at a particular

time and how far one has traveled since the last writing. Reference points on that map are particular to the shared world of writer and addressee: underlying the epistolary dialogue are common memories and often common experiences that take place between the letters. (Altman 119)

Letter exchanges between the sender and the receiver talk about particular details and intimate emotions that gradually accumulate and familiarize their confined world. Their world appears protective and difficult to be intervened by other people, in which both sides believe in their absolute possession of the desired other.

The Supplement as Substitution in Epistolary Writing

Paradoxically, although letter writing is assumed as a way to decrease the anxiety about the other's absence by textually increasing the other's presence, the complete presence of the other constantly remains unattainable. The sender's eagerness for the other's presence cannot be easily appeased by receiving more letters. Inversely, receiving more letters instigates the sender's stronger desires to keep writing in order to gain more reward and pleasure from letter exchanges. The need to keep writing implies that the presence of the other constantly recedes from being seized. And a continual process of writing to witness and ascertain its momentary presence is called for. In this sense, even though the accumulation of letter writing may supplement the loss of the other's presence, such a proportionate kind of addition cannot singularly and completely take the place of the loss. To a further extent, letter writing "adds only to replace" (Derrida, 1976, p. 145) its created representations of the absent other. When the letter adds itself to the distance to supplement the anxiety caused by the absence, it "produces no relief" (145) but increases and accelerates desires for the absent other. Moreover, the impelled behavior of letter writing also demonstrates the irreducible repression of distance.

As a result, letter writing supplements its ostensible function of dissolving the

distance. The process of letter exchanges repetitively and interminably adds to the gap and substitutes a need of further supplement for a possible fulfillment of the gap. The process proceeds along a “chain of supplements” (156) where “[i]mmediacy is derived” (157) and substituted simultaneously. The supplement as a substitute “is not simply added to the positivity of a presence” (145). Rather, it seeks to represent, undermine, and substitute for the immediate presence.

Shari Benstock redraws this paradoxical supplement within letter writing when examining the genre of letter fiction:

Letter fiction is a highly formulaic *genre* whose law is absolutely rigid: the fiction it promotes can only take place within the letter; the letter contains both the word and the world; the letter substitutes the word for the world, substitutes writing for living; the movement of letters across the distance of space and time fuels the desire that the letters express. These letters both discuss and stand for that which is repressed (by the law of society: desire) and that which is absent (by the law of *genre*: the correspondent); the letter *stands for* desire of the lover (one recalls various scenes from epistolary fiction which show the letter being kissed and embraced by the reader); the letter *stands for* the repressed and absent love object (the letter inscribes loss). [...] letters frame that which is both desired and lost. (1985, p. 262,

Benstock’s emphasis)

Letter writing constructs a textual world beyond the world of reality. In the world of writing, the letter not only evinces the repressed absence of the other in reality but also stirs up desires prompted from the loss of the other. Neither can the letter be entirely and passively categorized as a compensatory addition adequate to the supplement of the repressed absent other. Nor will the letter be employed to contrive a predominantly imaginary world to satisfy both the sender’s and the receiver’s desires. In the imaginary

world, any intervention or impediment from the world of reality could be possibly overlooked and evaded. The letter, as an exterior adjunct and proxy to the representation of the repressed absent other, facilitates a textual formation of the enclosed private space uniquely belonging to the understanding between the sender and the receiver. Nevertheless, the more such an enclosure of privacy is articulated and elaborated, the deeper the gap of distance is emphasized. The space of privacy cannot maintain its attraction by itself, unless it is precipitated into the threat of intrusion. The threat of intrusion emerges from the possibility of disclosure, of becoming public in the process of transmission. The threat of disclosure is unavoidable due to the encumbrance of distance, from which generates the necessity of transmission if communication is demanded. It is the discrepancy between the privacy and disclosure that provokes the sender's and the receiver's desires. Both sides persistently attempt to solidify their represented presence in their private space of written expressions, but simultaneously they cannot refuse the interference of the factor of distance that continually impels them to devote themselves to constructing the other's presence. As a result, letter writing would not champion the prejudice either of the "*blindness to the supplement*" (Derrida, 1976, p. 149, Derrida's emphasis) which subjects writing as an internal "*complement*" (145, Derrida's emphasis) to the presence or of the "dangerous supplement" (151) that simply substitutes writing for the presence. Letter writing constantly and subversively oscillates between the paradoxical addition and substitution of the supplement.

Paradox of the Supplement in Epistolary Writing: Immediacy and Deferral

Letter writing not only substitutes the epistolary presence in words for the absence in reality but also paradoxically reinforces the effects of absence to intensify both the sender's and the receiver's desires. Their desires are persistently and irreducibly instilled with passions in terms of the reserved absence that continually defers the terminal destination of

the real encounter. In other words, the desires survive in the conditional deferment contrived by means of the effects of absence. Such a paradox of letter writing corresponds to Derrida's explication of the simultaneous immediacy and deferral of the presence. On the one hand, the presence gains its pleasure of immediate representation and compensation through the supplement:

The restitution of presence by language, restitution at the same time symbolic and immediate. [...] Immediate experience of restitution [...], *it dispenses with passage through the world*. What is touching is touched, auto-affection gives itself as pure autarchy. If the presence that it then gives itself is the substitutive symbol of another presence, it has never been possible to desire that presence "in person" before this play of substitution and this symbolic experience of auto-affection. The thing itself does not appear outside of the symbolic system that does not exist without the possibility of auto-affection. Experience of *immediate* restitution, also because it *does not wait*. It is satisfied then and there and in the moment. If it waits, it is not because the other makes it wait. Pleasure seems no longer to be deferred. "Why give oneself so much trouble in a hope remote from so poor and uncertain a success, when one can, from the very instant ..." (*Dialogues*). (1976, pp. 153-154, Derrida's emphasis)

Confronted with its inevitable absence, the presence would not endure the temporary damage of its unity. It would not have to wait for its understanding of the other as an exterior addition and substitution to its completion. The presence would abandon that time-wasting task by creating its own immediate supplement, which instantly coheres with its intention and satisfaction. Such an immediacy estimates the values of presence and absence under a conveniently exerted manipulation. The effects of deferral would not play a role in the rules of the presence.

Despite this predominant control of the presence, the immediate representation, on the other hand, also implies a deferral of the presence. It actually substitutes moments of immediacy for the fulfillment of the idealized truth of the presence:

But what is no longer deferred is also absolutely deferred. The presence that is thus delivered to us in the present is a chimera. Auto-affection is a pure speculation. The sign, the image, the representation, which come to supplement the absent presence are the illusions that sidetrack us. To culpability, to the anguish of death and castration, is added or rather is assimilated the experience of frustration. (1976, p. 154)

Concomitant with the various moments of immediate representations, the presence is in fact further deferred. Each moment of immediacy appears to temporarily approximate but still constantly elude the final destination of the presence. Those vicarious representations deviously detour toward the destined presence. Moreover, the presence would not be rendered attainable but only be possibly encountered within persistent frustrations.

The desired presence in letter writing is also constantly constructed and delayed within the predicament caused by the effects of distance. On the one hand, one of the characteristics of letter writing privileges instant writing as the best way to reveal the most genuine emotions of the sender. Through delineating particular moments and details in the letter, the sender is expected to overflow his/her feelings in words without disguise. For the receiver, reading these specific records in the letter helps him/her establish an intimate relationship with the absent other. The receiver feels privileged to observe and approach the other's life in the letter addressed to him/her. Samuel Richardson calls this way of recording momentary details “writing to the moment” (Hu 326, note 17)¹, in which “the

¹ As Chin-yuan Hu points out, Samuel Richardson calls his way of letter writing as “writing to the moment” in his preface to his work *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753): “The nature of familiar letters, written, as it were, to the moment, while the heart is agitated by hopes and fears, on events undecided, must plead an excuse for the bulk of a collection of this kind” (326). In addition, preceding *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson also mentions the particularity of “writing to the moment” in his preface to *Clarissa* (1747-1748). He asserts that

lived event” is contemporaneous with “the narrated event” (327). The lived event refers to what is happening at the moment when the sender is writing the letter. The sender writes down the lived event in the proceeding lines of the letter, which therefore weaves the event into the epistolary narrative. As a result, the event not only lives in the temporal order of reality but also leaves its trace in the sender’s narration. The temporally lived event is meanwhile the textually narrated event. As in the fourth letter of *The Portuguese Letters* (1669), the letter writer Mariana recounts the moments she is pushed by a mail carrier to give in her letter for dispatch: “There is an officer here who has been waiting a long time for this letter;” “The officer who is to bring you this letter has told me for the fourth time that he must go. He is in such haste!;” “I am starting all over again, and the officer must leave” (Guilleragues 420-421). Mariana brings into her letter writing the temporally described events of the schedule for dispatch. The insertion blends her self-constructed writing into the chronological order and further verifies her spontaneity of writing at the moment.

The minimized distance between the lived event and the narrated event authenticates the undisguised and spontaneous nature of letter writing subscribed by both the sender and the receiver. Through reading the authentic and instant accounts, both sides rely on their possession of the absent other’s particular moments to ensure an immediate presence of the other, despite the fact that such a presence is reconstructed within their imagination. The immediacy in imagination, though being illusory, offers the receiver an opportunity to approach the absent other regardless of the hindrance of distance. Responding to the receiver’s attempt at constructing an immediate presence, the sender is similarly eager to depict his/her momentary feelings or incidents to share with the receiver. It is as if they were presently having a dialogue with each other at the moment of reading and writing.

the prolix letters are inevitable, since “they abound not only with critical situations, but with what may be called instantaneous descriptions and reflections” (35). For Richardson, the length of the letter is closely related to the way of “writing to the moment.”

The Portuguese nun Mariana writes this illusory immediacy of the dialogic presence in her letter: “It seems as though I am talking to you when I write; you are brought almost before me” (Guilleragues 420). Writing is a way used by Mariana to approximate her lover’s immediate presence.

With a similar intention to create the effects of immediacy, one of the post cards in “Envois” shows the sender’s eagerness to record the present moment without being interrupted: “I had barely posted the preceding one, in order never to miss a pickup when the opportunity presents itself, and here I am again standing up to write you, standing right in the street, so often standing, incapable of waiting and I do it like an animal, and even against a tree sometimes” (*Post Card* 26). It does not matter for the sender whether the letter is sent punctually or whether s/he has the proper location for writing the letter. The most significant thing for the sender is that s/he catches the immediate presence of the moment, which is cherished as irretrievable at next moment. In the restitution of the presence through the language of writing, both the sender and the receiver intend to grasp and preserve the presence with no delay, requiring it to be presently managed through the vicarious writing.

On the other hand, the presence constellated through a collection of instant writing does not maintain its satisfaction and stability. The distance does not simply remain as an inimical obstruction, but it further produces effects of inducing a stronger desire for the other’s presence in letter writing. The desire transfers the other’s absence from a reluctant circumstance to an intentionally required and covetous position. The other’s absence is an impetus of spurring the sender’s desire to write for an unattainable destination of the other’s presence. The sender in “Envois” describes an uncertain suspension of the other’s presence:

Do I write to you in order to bring you near or in order to distance you, to find the best distance but then with whom? The question is posed when you

are in the next room, or even when in the same room, barely turning my back to you, I write to you again, when I leave a note under your pillow or in the letter box upon leaving, the essential not being that you are absent or present at the moment when I write to you but that I am not there myself, when you are reading, that is, still there, myself, preventing you from breathing, from breathing without me, otherwise than through me. You can't stand it any more, no? (*Post Card 78-79*)

The aim or destination of letter writing originally means to compensate an absence and to shorten the distance. Tantalizingly, writing adds its supplement to the absence and distance, while it also disillusiones that supplement by indulging itself in the substitutions of illusions. The interminable process of displacing supplementary illusions disentangles an organized bond formed by the sender with his/her intended receiver and destination. However, disengagement of the illusions does not assume that the emotional bond becomes loose between the sender and the receiver. Instead, it further creates a different kind of supplementary passion through distance to reinforce the irreducible necessity of their epistolary exchanges:

Let everything become a post card again, they will have only post cards from me, never the true letter, which is reserved uniquely for you [...].

You will tell me that this apparently disdainful detestation (it's not that) contradicts both my cult of post cards and what I state about the impossibility that a unique addressee ever be identified, or a destination either, therefore. [...] And that this is not in tune with the fact that a letter, at the very instant when it takes place [...], divides itself, puts itself into pieces, falls into a post card. Well yes, this is our tragic lot, my sweet love, the atrocious lottery, but I begin to love you on the basis of this impossibility; the impasse devoted to fate cannot leave us to await anything from a chance to see it open itself one

day. (*Post Card* 80-81)

The sender of the post card admits the disturbing impact of the distance on his/her communication with the receiver, which may cause a division of the message and thus damage the idealized interaction between the two sides. The message of the letter becomes divided like that of the post card because it is no longer simply intended to be transmitted straightforward to the intended receiver. It is insinuatingly deferred in a detour where the intended receiver and destination might be rendered as impossible to be reached. The detour implies possible deviations away from the prescribed destination. That is, the message may pass by other receivers' hands before attending to the intended receiver's possession. The sender ineluctably falls into the temptation of such a deviating impossibility, by which his/her desire for the absent other is further triggered, particularly when that impossibility is in conflict with the idealized uniqueness of the receiver.

As a result, it is the impossibility of the intended receiver and destination that paradoxically impedes and instigates the sender's desire for the absent other. Letter writing sways within the impossibility of simultaneously sustaining the uniqueness and deviating away from the destiny of a specific receiver and destination. The impossibility is where the "blind spot" (Derrida, 1976, p. 163) lies and where the possibility elicited from blindness to the supplement is reserved. The blind spot would not be resolved but would need to be constantly found and lost in terms of the blindness. The blindness allows a reserved possibility of what can be found otherwise than what has been constructed and stabilized. The impossibility implied in the blind spot paradoxically reserves an inevitably illusory closure of immediacy in letter writing. Paradoxically, it also advocates and opens a space for letter writing not to be entirely confined within a metaphysical understanding of destination.

The process of letter writing is an incessant pursuit, a "chain of supplements" (Derrida, 1976, p. 156), trying to go beyond the given pleasures accumulated from the

letter to arouse more intense and irresistible desires from the act of writing. The perpetually unfulfilled and frustrating desires make the sender struggle to encounter the absent other in an itinerary composed of sinuous detours. The detours are not only substantiated in terms of the distance but also intensified by the sender's eagerness to immediately fill in the gap with his/her imaginary representations of the absent other. The constructed immediacy inversely creates the effects of deferral, which frames a desperate context for the sender that the letter may not arrive at its destination. In "Envois," Derrida claims that this is "a tragedy of destination" (*Post Card* 23), "the carte of the adestination" (29):

Would like to address myself, in a straight line, directly, without *courrier*, only to you, but I do not arrive, and that is the worst of it. A tragedy, my love, of destination. Everything becomes a post card once more, legible for the other, even if he understands nothing about it. And if he understands nothing, certain for the moment of the contrary, it might always arrive for you, for you too, to understand nothing, and therefore for me, and therefore not to arrive, I mean at its destination. I would like to arrive to you, to arrive right up to you, my unique destiny, and I run I run and I fall all the time, from one stride to the next, for there will have been, so early, well before us. (*Post Card* 23, Derrida's emphasis)

The sender's intention to preserve the specific receiver's identity and privilege is recurrently frustrated, whether as a result of the barrier of distance or of the sender's capricious speculations of that possibility. The frustrations against complete satisfaction seduce the sender to indulge himself/herself in letter writing, which is never a simplified process of preserving pleasures and privacy. Contrary to the undecided paradox evoked from letter writing, the task of the postal networks aims to decrease the ambivalent uncertainty. The postal networks meticulously measure the dangers during the process of epistolary transmission and circumvent the letter from any possibility of going astray from

its intended destination.

Epistolary Writing: Supplement to the Postal Networks

The postal networks consist in an inclination to dispose communication to an ordered and stable process of transmission. Based on this inclination, the postal networks regulate the process of epistolary transmission through a series of consecutive and systematic steps. The operation of these steps guarantees an accurate, punctual, and reliable transmission. It also metaphysically helps establish the authority of the networks by maneuvering the handling of the letter. Such a postal maneuver not only governs a linear process of letter transmission but also reduces letter writing under the determination of a final destination. Achieving the final destination is the standard coherent with the demand of the postal networks to reinforce its singular truth and authority. The destination is managed to be indubitably present within the organized circulation of the networks.

Even if it is possible that some mistakes during the postal process might obstruct the linear path of transmission and make it difficult to send the letter to its addressed destination, the mistakes are simply subsumed and categorized as innocuous to the authority of the postal networks. A section is contrived to cope with the *poste restante*, i.e. the dead letter, whose address or name cannot be identified or found and can only wait for being recognized. This categorized section in the postal networks is called Dead Letter Office. Derrida quotes in “Envois” a description of the function of Dead Letter Office: “*Dead Letter Office. Letters or parcels which cannot be delivered, from defect of address or other cause, are sent to the Division of dead letters and dead parcels post. They are carefully examined on both front and back for the name and address of the sender; if these are found, they are returned to the sender. If the sender’s address is lacking, they are kept for a period, after which dead letters are destroyed, while dead parcels are sold at auction*” (Post Card 124, Derrida’s emphasis). The dead letter is arranged in the postal

networks either to be re-sent to its destination or to be destroyed as the unidentified. The poste restante is therefore a kind of devious supplement inadmissible to the value of the postal networks, which only accept the addressed and managed destination. The devious supplement is only inferiorly recognized in contrast with the preeminent value of presence. In other words, it is identified as the absence opposite to the presence of a linear transmission as well as an additional supplement without any ability of damaging the unity of the networks. The deviation is evaluated merely as the absence affiliated to the dominant presence of the regular circuit.

Similar to the repressed condition of the poste restante, the individual letter writing, suffused with emotions and intimacy, does not constitute the major concern of the postal networks. It is treated as a practice of the privileged value escorted by the postal networks, in which the supplementary effects that may be induced from letter writing can only become defined and reduced. As the dead letter handled in the postal networks, its intrinsic meaning cannot be emphasized, since “Dead Letter Office deals with the materiality of communication, not its supposed spirituality” (Peters 169). As a result, letter writing appears to be subject to the reduction as well as be incapable of undercutting the authority of the networks. This is the point from which Gregory L. Ulmer clarifies the repressed position of letter writing under the metaphysical and logocentric value of presence:

The feature that makes the letter exemplary of the logocentric era (a synonym for “postal era”) is that it is addressed and signed, directed or destined (“destinataire” = addressee). We take for granted the postal institution, thinking of it simply as a service, a technology extending from the runners of ancient times to the present day state monopoly using airplanes the telex, and so forth [...]. The entire history of the postal *tekhnè* rivets “destination” (and destiny, *Geschick*) to identity. (41, Ulmer’s emphasis)

As Ulmer points out, the letter shares a common feature with the logocentric postal

institutions of the postal networks in its designation of a specific receiver and destination. This common feature makes the letter integrated with the concept of the final destination buttressed by the networks. Moreover, Ulmer reminds us not to look down on the function of the networks as merely a kind of service, since such a function may insidiously lay out the scheme of linear and stable transmission in the circulation of the letter. The scheme could possibly prevail because, each time the letter is sent, the letter inevitably repeats the limitation of designating a certain destination and risks becoming consistently regulated within the service of the networks. However, we shall not neglect the unsettled desires stirred up in the process of letter writing, either. The desires go beyond the supervision of the postal networks and inversely become intensified in reaction to the confinement of the stable path of transmission. As a result, the paradox of the interwoven desires and regulation demonstrates the role of letter writing as both the desired and the repressed. The double aspects of letter writing ostensibly appear to be incompatible, but it is the effects induced from both of them that count. The effects of letter writing implement both the substitutive and additional supplements to the postal networks.

In one aspect, letter writing is a supplement that substitutes its private writing space for its monotonous regulation in the public space of postal transmission. Although the letter is orderly transmitted, it is not necessarily contained and assimilated as a complement to the maneuver of the organized postal networks. Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven analyze letter writing as a resistance against the penetrative control of the public services of communication: “the very materiality of the letter, its imbrication in multiple cultural practices, its potentially nomadic trajectory, makes it a form resistant to the construction of grand narratives. Epistolary history is not, we think, a teleological, linear history but rather a narrative of historically specific cultural connections and disconnections” (Gilroy & Verhoeven 20). The letter is susceptible to changes that may be aroused in the process of letter writing and transmission. Though being delivered in the procedures of the postal

networks, the letter is not hence linearly destined toward the prescribed final destination throughout the circuit. The letter covertly challenges the grand narratives constructed on the basis of an organized system of regulated procedures. The challenge is constantly endorsed by the desires stimulated from letter writing. The desires reject the singularity and unity of one package of regulations by suggesting a multiplicity of connections that may bring the letter into the mobility of variations.

One of the post cards in “Envois” reveals the sender’s intention to crack open the logic of the postal networks. This is an event concerning the sender’s returned letter: “At this moment the mailman gives me back, ‘into the proper hands,’ the letter that I had sent you P.R. I had mistaken the postal code and there are several villages with the same name in your department” (*Post Card 76*). The sender writes down this accidental lapse to inform his/her correspondent of a letter not received and read by the receiver. It would be supposed that the sender can resend the original letter by simply correcting the postal code before dispatching the letter to the postal networks. It seems that the incident would not affect the originality of the letter. Nevertheless, the sender of the post card refuses to do so: “I believe that I will not go back on my decision not even to reopen the letter and especially not to send it to you a second time. [...] As for what it contains, I am myself already beginning, I must say, to transform, to deform it, or rather to becloud it, to make it flare out, I don’t know” (76-77). The sender rejects to send the returned letter again, because for him/her the letter cannot be identified as the one previously dispatched, even if s/he does not change a word of the content. The returned letter is transformed into its present status as being given back, due to the temporal distance and difference. The sender has no attempt at dissimulating the difference by putting the letter again in the circulation of the postal networks. Instead, the sender withdraws the letter in order that the difference beyond the postal regulation may be highlighted.

In addition to the refusal of sending the letter for the second time, the sender in

“Envois” discloses the difference in the letter returned from Dead Letter Office. The sender reveals Dead Letter Office as an interceptive mediation of the letter:

A very, very long time ago, I had to deal with this machinery. On a trip, I had sent to myself, Poste Restante, a packet of letters that I did not want keep on myself. I thought that I had a very wide interval at my disposal for picking them up, after my return. Mistake: when I presented myself at the post office, they were unfindable. Personnel confused: they had doubtless been sent to Bordeaux (since this was a time that I hadn't put my address on the back; which was precisely what I wanted to avoid in this case). [...] In any event, everything is opened and read in order to divine, with the best intentions in the world, the name of a sender or of an addressee. When I came back into possession of these letters two months later, they had in effect been opened. Once more become the post cards that at bottom they already were. I have destroyed them since, and quite sincerely I no longer recall which letters were in question. (*Post Card 50*)

The sender regards the procedure of examining the letter as a censoring kind of interception, even though such a step means to send the letter to its accurate destination. In other words, even if the packet of letters in poste restante is sent back to the sender's hold, the letters are already changed with temporal and spatial difference. They can no longer be considered without the difference. The difference is indispensable to their state of interpretation. The letters are post cards with difference, on which the message is publicly displayed though still presumed to be privately indecipherable. The letters in poste restante, though protected to be sent to the intended receiver, are in advance intercepted for the public examination of the postal networks. To manifest the difference generated from the process of retrieval, the sender chooses to destroy and forget any specificity belonging to the packet of letters. The sender's destruction of the letter is diverse from that practiced by Dead Letter Office. For

the sender, destruction and forgetting urge an eagerness for creativity: “burn everything, forget everything, in order to see if the force of starting again without a trace, without an opened path” (*Post Card* 40). Each letter is a post card that recurrently reminds the sender of the paradox between privacy and publicity. The sender intends only in this paradoxical way to preserve the traces of epistolary exchanges: “I ask you to forget, to preserve in amnesia” (12).

In the other aspect, letter writing also adds to the frame of the postal networks, since the sender cannot abolish the necessity for keeping the postal transmission as the mediation between himself/herself and the receiver. The role of postal networks serves as a factor that constitutes possible return of the message from the absent other. When the letter supplements the importance of the postal networks, it comparatively emphasizes its limitation within the private space. Nevertheless, this limitation does not necessarily imprison the dynamics of letter writing. Owing to the supplementary effect of substitution, the letter cannot be simply defined as a metaphorical substitute that may completely replace the absent other and thus add to the sender’s full satisfaction. On the contrary, the letter is a metonymical object, on which the sender projects his/her created representations of desire for the absent other. The letter, as a metonymical object of desire, cannot bring the desire to its completion. It is because of this limit that letter writing becomes an inexhaustible demand for the sender to insist. The postal networks, with the public nature of mediation, play a contrast to the private sphere of letter writing. In the context of the postal transmission, the desire tempted by and articulated in letter writing becomes the unnoticeable triviality or sentimentality. The desire is hence neglected and repressed in the “postal discourse” (*Post Card* 65) of transmission. It is in such an indispensable confrontation with the public sphere of postal management that the conspicuous power of seduction instigated from letter writing may become illuminated. The sender in “Envois” comprehends this unbalanced necessity in the connection of privacy with publicity: “No I

was speaking of the desire to pose or to post myself in a kind of absolute privatization (but in this case there must no longer be any position that holds). The secret without measure: it does not exclude publication, it measures publication against itself” (144). The privacy becomes remarkable in terms of the comparatively oppositional space of publicity. The privacy is guaranteed within its boundary of the private sphere, but its significance can be confirmed only through an interrelation with the public sphere.

Claire Milne Hogarth reminds us of the necessity of the limitation of letter writing: “the persuasive power of the letter terminates with its arrival at an ‘inside’ destination: the name indicated by the letter’s inside address or, in the case of internally relayed letters, some other name indicated elsewhere inside the collection. When a letter travels beyond these singular ends, its power is only exemplary” (12). The intended receiver and address restrict the destination of the letter as well as the sender’s relief of desire. Impeded by distance, the sender, as the mythological character Tantalus, is incapable of touching the specifically predestined absent other. By virtue of such a tantalizing suspension, the sender invests his/her unfulfilled desire in letter writing and prompts letter writing to become a compulsive act for him/her to repetitively practice. The limitation of letter writing impels the sender to persistently challenge and falter at the confinement.

Benstock’s discussion of the genre of epistolary fiction still reiterates such a necessity of the limitation in letter writing: “when the gap closes so does the ‘fiction’: the epistolary novel cannot accommodate action that takes place outside its perimeters and beyond the limits of its law, that is, outside the letter of its law” (1985, p. 265). The law of the letter requires the limitation of boundary to validate the act of writing letters. That is why many letter writers in epistolary novels insist on the act of writing with an attempt at breaking through the imprisonment of the boundary. For instance, in *The Portuguese Letters*, the Portuguese nun Mariana is secluded in the convent, who can only write letters to involve her French lover in her dialogue. Or as in *Letters from a Peruvian Woman* (1747),

the captivated Peruvian princess Zilia uses *quipus*² to write letters in France, with an expectation that she may transfer every moment of her love to her far-distant lover the captivated Peruvian prince Aza. It is due to the limitation of the private enclosure that the act of writing can be prompted.

The connection between letter writing and the postal networks resembles the relationship between the sender and the receiver. The resemblance lies in the paradox between the private and the public shared by both of them. In her analysis of Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740), Chin-yuan Hu points out the paradoxical relationship between the sender's self-withdrawal in privacy and the sender's necessary disclosure of the privacy for his/her intended receiver. On the one hand, "the letter-writing requires that the letter writer retire from the company of those who are around him into himself. It speaks for the need for privacy [...]" (Hu, 1996, p. 334). On the other hand, "[u]nlike the pen that writes the diary or journal, the letter-writing pen works toward the breakdown of privacy; it attempts to create its reader even as it asserts the distance that necessitates that creation" (334-335). The reserved privacy does not mean to be isolated in the individual world, but it also needs an outlet to represent its formation of the self. Similar to the sender's requirement of an intended receiver, letter writing depends on the mediation of the postal networks to transmit the letter between the sender and the receiver. Letter writing interacts with the postal networks on the edge of its own limitation.

The interaction of letter writing with the postal networks accords with Derrida's claim that "*There is nothing outside of the text*" (1976, p. 158, Derrida's emphasis). I understand this axiom from both the textual and the contextual aspects. In the textual aspect, there is nothing outside of the text of letter writing, because the sender's emotions and

² The *quipus* are used as a way of recording in the Peruvians' life. The "Historical Introduction to *Letters from a Peruvian Woman*" (Graffigny 7-15) explains the function of the *quipus*: "Their *quapas*, or *quipus*, replaced for them our art of writing. Cords of cotton or gut to which other cords of different colors were attached reminded them by means of knots placed at different distances of those things they wish to remember. These *quipus* served them as annals and codes, were used at their rituals and ceremonies, and so on" (13-14).

thoughts can be represented predominantly through the epistolary mediation. The textual representations in the letter or the post card are presumed to be the primary way of communication. Simultaneously in the contextual aspect, the private letter writing cannot get rid of the necessity of being transmitted in the public context of the postal networks. The text of letter writing would not transform itself to be accommodated into the regulated procedures, nor would it invariably rest within its own private closure with no awareness of its effects on the postal networks. Letter writing figures the postal networks as part of its supplement that constantly threaten its articulation. In addition, letter writing also persistently goes unnoticed to threaten the authority of the postal regulations. Due to the unremitting threats, the transmission of letter writing cannot cease to retain a certain unshaken stasis as the final destination. Rather, the process would have to go through an interminable transfer in *différance*, in which letter writing defers the linear process of transmission with a difference that both adds to and substitutes for the ordered networks. In “Envois,” the addition to and substitution for the arranged postal networks are paradoxically displayed:

This is where things are the most difficult: because the very idea of the retreat (proper to destination), the idea of the halt, and the idea of the epoch in which Being holds itself back, suspends, withdraws, etc., all these ideas are immediately homogenous with postal discourse. To post is to send by “counting” with a halt, a relay, or a suspensive delay, the place of a mailman, the possibility of going astray and of forgetting (not of repression, which is a moment of keeping, but of forgetting). (*Post Card* 65)

The postal discourse is composed of the ideas of the halt and the epoch, which confirm the concept of a proper destination that can subsume the whole networks under its coordination. A series of steps can be organized and accumulated to converge into an eventual calculation of the destination. The destination is destined as the destiny. It is

suspended and withdrawn within its own retreat without being affected. Divergent from this central convergence, the act of posting offers moments of possible deviations, which are rendered prohibited in the postal discourse. The divergence does not relentlessly subvert the postal discourse without considering its effects along the process of transmission. Instead of abandoning the postal discourse, the divergent itinerary counts and substitutes for it as the supplementary deferral that prompts an “adestination” (*Post Card 29*) of the relay of letter writing. John Durham Peters points out the necessity of involving the postal discourse in the possibility of adestination: “Jacques Derrida has famously argued that all mailed correspondence has the implicit structure of a postcard, that the attempt to restrict the reception of a message to one recipient is always undermined by the scatter of all textuality. His argument is historically possible, and striking, however, only under a certain postal system: the historically recent convention of mail as a secure private channel” (166). The possibility of adestination, of disseminating the multiple textuality in multiple receivers, is measured against the restriction of the postal discourse. The postal networks are involved and transformed to enhance the multiplicity of the epistolary text.

The ideas of the halt and the epoch, homogeneous with the postal discourse, are as a result no longer entitled as the authoritative regulations. Contrarily, they are regarded as multiple and partially effective at certain moments within their limited scope. They are counted as part of the transmission as well as the medium of the letter. The postal discourse, composed of the halt and the epoch, is not bestowed the right to control all the details and deviations of the transmission any more.

In this sense, the postal networks as the medium also defer the linear path of the letter. The path of the letter could no longer promise the final destination but become inclined toward the concept of adestination that focuses more on moments of changes in the process rather than on a determinate conclusion. Involved with such a critically supplementary understanding of the ordered postal networks, the process of the postal transmission can be

further expanded beyond the singularly defined scope:

And the postal principle is no longer a principle, nor a transcendental category; that which announces itself or sends itself under this heading (among other possible names, like you) no longer sufficiently belongs to the epoch of Being to submit itself to some transcendentalism, “beyond every genre.” (*Post Card* 191-192)

The process of transmission cannot be generalized under one identified category. Each category can be merely considered as part of the detour, as a delayed and suspended point, whose identity is temporarily sustained and constantly supplemented. The letter is not reduced and assimilated into an exemplary position within the postal regulations. Distinctly, the letter is an exterior supplement that adds to but also substitutes for the postal networks. The letter functions in the networks of delivery, while it simultaneously escapes from the surveillance of the exclusive postal principle.

The Post Card: Supplement to the Concept of Genre

In asserting the postal principle as going “beyond every genre” (*Post Card* 192), Derrida uses the form of the post card to further illuminate the paradox of the letter—the letter simultaneously being an addition to but also a substitution for the confinement of the postal networks. By means of the post card, he also brings a paradoxical practice of supplement to the traditional definition of the concept of genre. In a general view, as Derrida analyzes in “The Law of Genre” (1980), “The genre has always in all genres been able to play the role of order's principle: resemblance, analogy, identity and difference, taxonomic classification, organization and genealogical tree, order of reason, order of reasons, sense of sense, truth of truth, natural light and sense of history” (252). This explication reveals that the concept of genre tends to limit itself within its own restricted scope without blending other conflicting elements into its supposed uniqueness. Defining

the term genre in this way leads to a strict sense of order, in which certain attributes are regulated into an apparent presence to select and qualify the proper works of one genre. The order establishes a self-evident law, which implies a given boundary that distinguishes one genre from another without a necessity of mutual connection. It is as if the function of the various works were simply added to the replenishment of the already identified presence of the genre. The works are only classified into a variety of categories rather than become effectively provocative to the extent of re-structuring and subverting the organized assembly of literary products. To go beyond the banal addition to the prescribed law of genre, Derrida explores the ambiguous character of the post card to invigorate the substitutive effects engendered from letter writing on the performance of addition. This supplement, carrying both addition and substitution into practice, will keep disclosing the pertinacious blindness on an identified presence that jeopardizes the opportunity of vivifying other unremarkable but reserved blind spots.

Distinct from the letter enveloped under seal of privacy, the post card is displayed interweaving the private space with the public space. Derrida perceives the post card as “half-private half-public” (*Post Card* 62), “neither private nor public” (185). Its form particularly and apparently reveals such a paradoxical connection and transgression. Although it may still be possible to separate the recto and verso of the post card, the separation cannot unambiguously designate either of the two terms to the side of picture or to that with address and name. The binary discrimination between the outside and the inside, visibility and concealment, presence and absence, and recto and verso cannot be undoubtedly supported in the post card. The post card sustains a movement that can variably turn inside out, which makes it unnecessarily rest upon one singular action or presence. It is its indeterminate form that facilitates the post card to go beyond the binary logic of thought.

Moreover, the message inscribed upon the post card oscillates within and echoes the

indeterminate form. In addition to the addressed receiver, other unpredictable receivers may be expected to have a chance reading the message of the post card, since the message is open for anyone to read during the process of transfer. However, even though the message is open to be read by the public, the easy access does not promise legibility or readability. While the post card is overt to the public and censored by the postal networks, it simultaneously sustains an ineluctable closure of uniqueness as the letter does. The multiple receivers' surmises on the message would not thus exhaust the seductive effects of the post card as a private exchange. Paradoxically, it is the dissimulation of privacy in the public field that arouses the most intense desire to excavate the private space. The sender in "Envois" constantly plays the game of speculation on such a paradox. On the one hand, the sender refers to the post card as being observed in an "excess of evidence" (*Post Card 34*). On the other hand, the sender is aware that s/he can create an ambivalent kind of privacy in the act of inscribing messages on the post card:

As concerns the "knowing" letters, you know, you alone, that I have always known how to use knowledge in order to distance the curious and in order to make me loved by you by giving free rein to my jealousy, in order to try to make the most untranslatable, most untransportable, least supportable messages, unbearably idiomatic messages reach you by the post, by all the public *facteurs*. (*Post Card 80*)

The desire is ambiguously aroused from the indeterminacy between publicity and privacy. The desire attracts the receivers to search for the absent and unnoticed individual space under the presence of the regulated postal networks. This search for the blind spot initiates a possibility of undermining the exclusively guarded path of fluent transmission without deviation. David Wills regards this paradox of the post card as a way of evading the designation of a fixed destination and thereby procrastinating a final definition of the post card or the letter:

With a postcard one can never be sure what is most important, the image or the text; the legend, the message, or the address. In this sense it has no distinct outside, and it is usually turned inside out in order to be pinned to the wall. But on the other hand, more than other texts, it has neatly prescribed borders, limits to what it can contain. Similar paradoxes occur with respect to a postcard's readability. Because it can be read by anyone, it adopts various devices and varying degrees of illegibility. It inevitably becomes the apology and the substitute, a sign of deferral, for the letter one never gets to write, being entrusted with the task of informing its addressee that one is still alive, conveyed in French by the vaguest of phrases which marks the limit of signification and the beginning of adestation: *faire signe*, to make a sign. (Wills 24-25)

The post card plays a supplementary role to both closure and adestation of the letter. The post card can be deemed as a more dynamic form to enhance the paradox of the letter, since it has a more limited signification within its prescribed borders and a more exposed but confusing private/public ambiguity. This is the vantage point by using the post card to disturb the metaphysical order of the presence in the postal discourse. From this perspective, Bernhard Siegert distinguishes the practice of Western sexuality in the letter and the post card:

[...] why else had stationery been folded and sealed or concealed in an envelope in the first place, if not to tease the discourse of sexuality from the soul, thus giving rise to its confessions of intimacy the procedure by which the Western individual had to achieve legitimation in the modern period? Because the material conditions for the confidentiality of the letter had been sites for the production of sexuality, the postcard was synonymous with the exhibition of that sexuality. The postcard was scandalous because on behalf

of the economy of information exchange it rejected an intimate mode of speech that had been capable of teasing true confessions from the soul.

Among other things, after all, truth was also the result of the limitations on access to the discourse. (Siegert 148)

Here Siegert may strategically put aside the subversive power implied in the form of the letter in order to make such a power more remarkable in the form of the post card. In Siegert's analysis, the letter is characteristic of providing confidentiality, which endorses an intimate mode of writing and induces a truly revelation of confessions without deliberate dissimulation. The retention of intimacy and the dedication to confessions sponsor sites for production of sexuality. This production and display of sexuality are permitted and confined under legitimate regulation of a system, which pre-determinedly judges and decides the rightful mode of exchange of sexuality. Circumscribed within the constraint, the production of sexuality may be only justified to be present through an intimate mode of confession poured into a letter of confidentiality. This mode of sexuality is produced to be advantageous to the legitimate truth of the system, since the sexuality is safe to be exerted within the prescribed limits. The system not only establishes its rules to regulate possible inimical exceptions of sexuality but also inversely solidifies itself through the repressed condition of the letter. It turns the letter's vantage point of intimate and confessional writing to dissimulate its pretense of offering sexuality its proper presence. The presentation of sexuality is actually subsumed under a legitimized absence, even though the absence would be properly explained under the subterfuge of being properly present.

Divergent from that surveillance over sexuality in the letter, the sexuality is simultaneously exposed and sustained with its uniqueness of intimacy in the post card. The post card is not used to reinforce the maneuver of the system that takes advantage of various strategies to ensure its predominant presence. Like the purloined letter in Poe's story, the post card is put at the seemingly most obvious place where everyone is supposed

to find it easily, though the place is paradoxically rendered the most hidden one. Despite being visible for everyone to look at and oversee, the post card can still evoke its receivers' curiosity about what secret concealed under the surface. Its way of exposure moreover makes itself become too equivocal and enigmatic to be immediately and completely understood. Compared to the letter as an intimate form under cover, the post card makes it uneasy to ascertain its position in terms of a clear-cut boundary between the private space and the public space.

Owing to its implication of uncertainty, Derrida uses the post card to elucidate his concept of the genre. He refers to the post card as a kind of "inadmissible literature" (*Post Card* 9) that goes beyond the organized identification of different genres in literature: "To choose a post card is for me a flight which at least will spare you the too abundant literature to which you would have been subjected if I had dared speak to you of" (9). The too abundant literature may include those various kinds of genres, under which a constellation of rules and characteristics can be collected and used to prove a legitimate literary identity of a work. In this sense, the work is subject to a generic qualification and generalization, which prevents it from participating in other possible movements and transformations as a text. The post card is a way of going beyond the restriction, but it does not simply escape from the taxonomy of genres. Without an attempt at an oversimplification, the post card plays the role of supplement when the taxonomy of genres is involved into its effects of both addition and substitution. As is revealed in Derrida's attitude toward the idea of subversion:

All these disruptive "anomalies" are engendered and this is their common law, the lot or site they share by *repetition*. One might even say by citation or re-citation [*ré-cit*], provided that the restricted use of these two words is not a call to strict generic order. [...] And yet the law that protects the usage, in *stricto sensu*, of the words citation and *récit*, is threatened intimately and in

advance by a counterlaw that constitutes this very law, renders it possible, conditions it and thereby makes itself [...] impossible to edge through, to edge away from or to hedge around. The law and the counter-law serve each other citations summoning each other to appear, and each re-cites the other in these proceedings. (1980, p. 226, Derrida's emphasis)

The post card is adopted to go beyond the stability of the taxonomy of genres, but it operates differently when repeating the taxonomy. The relationship between the taxonomy and the post card is an interaction between the law and the counter-law, in which both summon each other to become present but also constantly substituted. The presence is delayed and differentiated without a finally designated destination. The post cards in "Envois" display this interrelation: although the post card belongs to the "inadmissible literature" (*Post Card 9*), writing upon it still repeats some admissible generic features, such as those of theoretical criticism and epistolary fiction. The post card serves as an epistolary form to transmit messages between the sender and the receiver, as the letter does. It shares certain common characteristics with those letters compiled in epistolary novels, such as the specificity of dates and the apostrophe to the absent intended receiver. Although the post card mainly transports the recording of private emotions, it is simultaneously blended with the sender's critiques of Freud, Lacan, and the intellectual genealogy originated since Socrates. The form of the post card is a mixture of different genres. Moreover, its condition of mixture does not simply subsume the different genres under its form without any change. Instead, the post card puts the identified generic characteristics in an uncertain oscillation. The post card includes the exemplary modes of genres in its text, but it does not instill in their stable reinforcement. Being susceptible to variations, the post card repetitively and vicariously adds to and substitutes for the stability, threatening its comfortable identity with the possibility of adestation. The post card manifests that the organized genres can be analyzed and changed. They are not immutable once being set up.

Moreover, the indeterminate inclusion of different elements in the post card also implies that the concept of genre is not a naturally given presence and identity. The scope of a genre does not presumably regulate its periphery for the texts to embed themselves into the circle. In a reverse way, a variety of texts conflict and interact with each other to produce certain effects that can be momentarily added to an approximation of a genre's presence. This supplement remains only approximate to the presence and unremittingly substituted. By virtue of the approximate adestation, Linda Hutcheon explicates the formation of genre: "classifications of genres are paradoxically built upon the impossibility of firmly defining genre boundaries" (Hutcheon 22). Because the boundaries are continually substituted and shifted, the taxonomy of genres can be only a temporarily effective approximation of a final presence. The incessant movement of approaching the presence without achieving it renders the final presence unattainable and impossible. Distance is constantly approximated but still irreducible. The concept of genre recurrently remains unfulfilled. Its replenishment continues to be unfinished in process. As for Derrida, the post card is not a certain defined completion of genre but an exterior supplement characteristic of a proliferation of genres, whether the genres are represented by the organized media of knowledge or by a dispersion of untrammelled ideas:

As soon as, in a second, the first stroke of a letter divides itself, and must indeed support partition in order to identify itself, there are nothing but post cards, anonymous morsels without fixed domicile, without legitimate addressee, letters open, but like crypts. Our entire library, our entire encyclopedia, our words, our pictures, our figures, our secrets, all an immense house of post cards. A game of post cards [...]. (*Post Card* 53)