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## DERRIDIAN *DIFFÉRENCE*: IS A SPELLING MISTAKE TRANSLATABLE?

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**Abstract:** The article examines Polish translations of the Derridian term *différance*. Polish philosophical discourse uses the following renditions of *différance*: *róż(ni)c oś*)ć by Bogdan Banasiak, *różNICa* by Tadeusz Sławek, *gra-na-zwłokę-o-różnicę* by Stanisław Cichowicz and the most popular: *różnia* by Joanna Skoczylas. Should a mistake be deliberately committed in Polish, as it was done in the original? Or should it be corrected, and if so – how to explain the correction? The suggestion to translate the controversial concept by means of a Polish neologism, the neographism *różnica*, may be productive and such a solution may be open to a number of interpretations. Thanks to its ambivalence, *różnica* introduces a majority of Derridian motifs and may generate new ideas and concepts. Moreover, it allows a successful critique of logocentrism and phonocentrism of Western philosophy as well as a subversion of binary oppositions, a fixed and solid subject and desire for self-presence. Finally, the misspelled *différance* may be viewed as an example of grammatical alterity.

**Keywords:** deconstruction, Derrida, *différance*, *różnia*, *różnica*, spelling mistakes in translation

The discussion concerning Polish translations of the Derridian *différance*<sup>1</sup> was at its peak in the 1990s and accompanied the publication of Polish versions of Derrida’s work, but it seems to have lost its impetus. Still, it is only now, when one does not need to fear the rejection and marginalization of the very idea of deconstruction, that the time is ripe for a reflection on the following question: is it possible that in their attempt to explain and bring

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever the relationship between the French original and its Polish translations is discussed, the original French *différance* is used; otherwise, for reasons presented in the article, the ungrammatical “differance” is employed instead of the French borrowing, the solution advocated e.g. by Spivak (translator’s note).

closer the French term the individual translations of *différance* have in fact obliterated its proper meaning and, even more importantly, have deprived it of its subversive and dynamic potential? I will start my discussion with the analysis of the existing translation proposals (by Bogdan Banasiak, Tadeusz Sławek, Stanisław Cichowicz and Joanna Skoczylas) and move on to consider the possibilities of rendering into Polish the term *différance* with its inherent spelling mistake, which could play on incorrect Polish versions of the term as *różnica* or *ruźnica*. In order to do that I will look at the Derridian *différance/différence* through the lens of iterability, i.e. resemblance that is pervaded by displacement and alterity. I hope to demonstrate what consequences and what interpretive perspectives may be generated by a translation proposal that stresses the notion of iteration. I also ask whether the mistake made deliberately by the French philosopher should be corrected in the Polish critical thought and whether the correction is justified. At the same time, I investigate whether such an atypical, alternative translation matches other terms coined by Derrida, e.g. “supplement,” “pharmakon,” “deferral,” “espacement,” “trace” or “dissemination.” I am convinced that on the basis of the misspelling inherent in *différance* it is possible to outline the way in which grammatical alterity stands the chance of entering the order of language.

The initial plurality and prolific originality of the first Polish translations of *différance*, favouring one or two characteristic features of the controversial term, has already been limited and standardized. The choice has been made on the strength of the philosophical *usus* that at the moment is inclined towards the proposition of Joanna Skoczylas (her *różnia*) or alternatively towards the seemingly neutral and therefore relatively attractive original French term. Indeed, it is possible that the notion of *différance*, of paramount importance to deconstruction, will share the fate of the Heideggerian *Dasein*, which, after many futile translation attempts, has been accepted in the Polish academic practice as an untranslatable term that can always be explained and discussed.<sup>2</sup>

Bogdan Banasiak, who translated *Of Grammatology*, suggested in his preface to the Polish version of Derrida’s work that *différance* should be translated as *różnicność*, a word which could take a double form of *róż(nic)ność* or *różni(coś)ć* and therefore embrace both *nic* (nothing) and *coś* (something). This proposal seems to articulate quite convincingly the

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<sup>2</sup> Note such Polish equivalents as e.g. *jestestwo* (being) coined by Bogdan Baran or *byt przytomny* (conscious being) used by Krzysztof Michalski.

undecidable oscillation between turning into nothing and becoming something: these two antagonistic tendencies coexist with each other, as neither would be able to prevail.

This twofold term seems to refer with every single reading to an entirely different scope of meaning (nothing/something), which allows it to enter the space of ambivalence, of scintillating activity. The complicated *róż(ni(c)oś)ć*, that is and at the same time is not, proves an interesting translation project in keeping with the spirit of Derrida, as it strives to avoid the reduction to either presence or absence. Unfortunately, it does not seem to be a construction open enough or, above all, meaningful enough to allow for an unimpeded display of all the philosophical issues typical of deconstruction which should, according to Derrida himself, be evoked by the term.

Another, quite intriguing, idea was *różNICa*<sup>3</sup> coined by Tadeusz Sławek, the first Polish translator that paid attention to an entirely different set of features connected with the notion of *différance*. He was very much aware of the fact that *différance* is not only a new word with an unheard-of meaning, but also a neographism. The difference between the two resides in the very graphic tissue of the word that is tied directly to print and not to a new logos that is made present and would be carried over by a neologism meant to have an intellectual life of its own. Sławek is basically the only translator that notices and makes use of the fact that *różNICa* is inaudible to the human ear and that it mocks the metaphysics of presence. Still, despite all its merits his translation proposal is not free from imperfection. First of all, the very use of the capital letters which serves here to expose the difference seems to fall short of Derrida's intention, as he himself would claim that *différance* "governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter" (Derrida 1982: 22). Another drawback of the proposition is the emphasis its author puts on the monstrously exaggerated, monumental NIC (NOTHING). On the one hand, this peculiar graphic operation provides an excellent indication that *różNICa* is nothing present and even more so, it can never become completely present, as it remains silent. On the other hand, this kind of notation unintentionally throws the whole deconstructionist endeavour into the abyss of non-presence. By invoking nothingness with all its explicitly

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<sup>3</sup> Sławek's proposal was appropriated, among others, by Jacek Kochanowski, who used it in his book *Fantazmat zróżNICowany. Socjologiczne studium przemian tożsamości gejów* (A Differentiated Phantasm: A Sociological Study of the Changes in Gay Identity.)

nihilist inclinations and negative undertones, the term becomes truly overwhelming.

An entirely different approach was assumed by Stanisław Cichowicz, who was not intent on becoming an author of a neologism or a neographism, but rather on providing the Polish readers with an overall idea of differance. On that account he brought together several characteristic features of the concept, revealing in this way the network of relations between them. For this reason his suggestion *gra-na-zwłokę-o-różnicę* (play-for-time-for-difference) conveys quite efficiently those qualities of the Derridian term that are absent elsewhere. The resulting construction underlines above all the play with repetition that carries within itself an undeniable element of pleasure as well as addictive tension typical of gambling, where what is at stake is difference. Moreover, this translation makes excellent use of the idiomatic expression *gra na zwłokę* (play for time), which projects an image of a specific movement that resists the required speed and does not reach the desired destination. On the contrary, the term suggests that it is a kind of activity that strives to prevent something from happening at all cost; it is an atypical combination of passivity and activity.

We can trace the experience of deferral and delay, the so-called “not-yet,” only in the term created by Cichowicz. Nonetheless, his proposal is not free from flaw just as all the other Polish versions. Due to its form (the use of hyphens) *gra-na-zwłokę-o-różnicę* very closely resembles such Heideggerian constructions as “being-in-the-world,” “readiness-to-hand” or “not-being-at-home.” In spite of all the respect Derrida had for Heidegger’s philosophical achievement, he himself coined his concepts in a similar manner on a much less frequent basis and his own notional parlance was based predominantly on homophony, word puns and ambiguity.

Another equally significant issue is the insufficiency of the proposed solution that has been created out of a sequence of words which cannot be finite if it is to fulfill an opening function. That is why *gra-na-zwłokę-o-różnicę* seems to be an unfinished project existing *in statu nascendi*; it is quite literally a string of words that keeps one on a string to string it out with yet another feature suggestive of differance. On the other hand, such a translatory choice allows us to stipulate that Cichowicz’s proposition is an attempt at doing justice to Derrida’s supplement, as the Polish term consists of too many words that will always turn out to be too little.

The last translation provided by Joanna Skoczylas is *różnia*, and this is the choice that has quickly become the most frequent, widespread and

the best recognizable version of Derrida's concept (Derrida 1978: 374). It seems that *różnia* is a verbal noun (derived from the verb *różnić się*; "to differ"), which would suggest a deliberate word formation reflecting the ambivalent, active-passive character of the neologism. Additionally, the term proposed by Skoczylas fulfills the role of a matrix or a "hatchery," where entities are generated as if spontaneously. We are not able to pinpoint the doer of the action (its *agens*, actor), while we are confronted with the performed action and its effects or consequences. That, however, is the limit of the interpretative potential of the proposed translation, which essentially does not conform to the majority of the conditions for *différance* set by Derrida himself. It is also noteworthy that *różnia* associates with such philosophical categories as *jednia* (unity) or *pełnia* (totality), which refer directly to the absolute, complete presence as well as to the notion of perfection. Why then has the term suggested by Skoczylas been so willingly accepted and why has it been so eagerly received within the field of the Polish humanities?

The answer is simple and not particularly sophisticated or unconventional: most of the discussed translation proposals are too long (*różnicowość, gra-na-zwłokę-o-różnicę*) to be used with ease. What is more, the degree of their complication (*różNICa*) – not to say: their oddity – makes them additionally cumbersome and impractical. It seems that *różnia* does not aspire to the status of a translatory firework that would illuminate plurality of the philosophical issues at play in the concept itself, but it is a winning suggestion exactly because of its undeniable simplicity, its neat form and the ease with which it can be used. It is a civilised, polished version of the scandalous *différance* that does not entail any problems or inconvenient complications, and even more so, it does not confound or create resistance. If this version of *différance* has made itself at home in the Polish philosophical reflection, it has done so to the detriment of its deconstructive potential, as *différance* should invoke the feeling of uncanniness rather than the sense of security and stability.

## Derrida's mistake or translators' error?

Unfortunately, none of the described Polish versions of *différance* are as striking and as extraordinarily simple as the unique operation performed by Derrida, who with one misspelt letter managed to shake the solid founda-

tions of the European thought and confound philosophers. It is also easy to notice that none of the Polish translations fulfills a major condition: they are not misspelt. The unwarranted, but almost paralysing fear of translators who are afraid of the very possibility of committing a linguistic mistake led to the situation where the so far inaudible Derridian concept was offered a whole gamut of various sounds. Differance does not only turn out to be dangerous; it also becomes endangered as it is threatened by those who desire the realm of past or future presence (cf. Derrida 1998: 34). The fear of that speechless and unspeakable force allowed us to hear and to articulate *różnia*: instead of disseminating the metaphysics of presence the Polish term becomes subservient to it by the very virtue of its phonic differentiation.

If *różnia* has already made itself present, we can only ask about its sense: what exactly is it? Nonetheless, we know only too well that it is an endeavour doomed to failure, as Derrida's concept does not inhabit the sphere of logos, therefore once again we need to turn to writing and trace the almost criminal history of a certain mistake that not only is a mistake no one wants to claim but also, and that is even more intriguing, it is a mistake no one is willing to make.

An especially interesting case is presented by the extraordinary *casus* of Bogdan Banasiak, who seems to completely and with full conviction reject any possibility of conveying *différance* in Polish:

It can be assumed without doubt that potential translation propositions which would make use of a misspelling such as *ruźnica* or *rórznica* would be too risky considering the acutely **glaring** nature of this sort of mistakes in Polish (1999: 11; emphasis A.M.; trans. A.K-P.).

We should consider whether every linguistic mistake is glaring in itself by the very virtue of its essential incorrectness, especially if we take into account the informed opinion of French linguistic purists who are notorious for their strictness and severity of judgement. We can risk a claim that there is no need for the mistake to be cardinal to freely represent just a blatant lack of correctness. It is worth adding that Banasiak does not underline the shrill or clashing nature of inappropriate forms of language that would pertain to the sense of hearing but instead stresses their visibly glaring character that is beheld solely by the eye. If we decide to refer back to the French original and trace the first sentences alluding to *la différence*, we will see that Derrida assures us as to the grossly mistaken character of his intention,

for he uses the expression *grosse faute* (see Derrida 1972: 3) which can be translated as a “gross, serious mistake” or, as Janusz Margański suggests, a “common mistake” (a mistake that is widespread).

Still, in his not yet published translation Banasiak renders *grosse faute* as a “glaring mistake.” Such a translatory decision, based on the repetition of the earlier categorical claim can first throw us into a state of surprise that will then give way to a series of urgent questions. If *différance* is predominantly a glaring misspelling, as both the philosopher and his translator assume, why cannot this concept be rendered in Polish with the use of a mistake that would be equally glaring and gross?

Banasiak uses the same adjective both to underline the essential characteristics of the Derridian term and to discredit as well as reject its Polish rendering, which he evidently finds bedazzling. However, if the aporia has already been brought to light, one needs to find a possible solution to the resulting conundrum. It was Skoczylas who was the first translator of Derrida’s essay in 1978 and who used the expression *rażący błąd* (lit. “glaring mistake”).<sup>4</sup> One of the simplest and quite probable explanations that come to mind here is that Banasiak regarded the solution provided by his antecedent as concordant with his own intentions and decided to include it in his own translation.

However, if we treat the whole issue somewhat more suspiciously, but without imputing the willingness to contradict oneself to the translator, commentator and philosopher in one, the situation becomes somewhat more complicated. Banasiak claims that such translation propositions as Polish *ruźnica* or *różnica* are glaring spelling mistakes, but he has earlier assumed that *différance* itself is a shocking trespass against grammar: his argument creates an impression that there is implicit reasoning hidden there; a singular set of instructions which Banasiak does not want to utilize (for reasons known only to him). He seems to signal with this mysterious conduct that he is perfectly aware of the solution to the enigma of Derrida’s translation, but he chooses to propose a safer alternative. He prefers *różnicowość* that steers clear of incorrectness, but is rooted in and inspired by the highly idiosyncratic poetry of the Polish symbolist, Bolesław Leśmian. Ironically, Banasiak performs the very activity that Derrida describes in the very same work that is rendered in Polish with the use of *różnicowość*:

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. [http://bb.ph-f.org/przeklady/derrida\\_roznicosc.pdf](http://bb.ph-f.org/przeklady/derrida_roznicosc.pdf) (26.08.2010) as well as Derrida 1978: 374.

One can always, *de facto* or *de iure*, erase or reduce this lapse in spelling, and find it... grave or unseemly, that is to follow the most ingenuous hypothesis, amusing. Thus, even if one seeks to pass over such an infraction in silence, the interest that one takes in it can be recognized and situated in advance as prescribed by the mute irony, the inaudible misplacement, of this literal permutation. One can always act as if it made no difference (Derrida 1982: 3).

Putting aside the intentions of individual translators that at times seem to be more enigmatic than Derrida's original texts, we should direct our gaze at the linguistic displacements and defractions (*clinamen*). One does not require great acumen to realize that Derrida made his gross mistake consciously if not to say: with premeditation. Nonetheless, as he himself attests, he did not do it just in order to scandalize readers or grammarians (cf. Derrida 1982: 3). We are not dealing here with a typographical error, but with a deliberate move that cannot, should not be corrected. More than that, every translation striving to correct or eliminate the mistake inscribed into difference becomes an error itself, and that error is not of Derrida's making, but of the translator's. The whole situation seems to be aptly subsumed by Heidegger's remark that only great thinkers are able to make gross and glaring mistakes: *Wer groß denkt, muß groß irren* (see Wodziński 1994: 67).

The question that has remained unanswered so far is as follows: in what way should a misspelling be translated? Undoubtedly, one should not introduce any corrections, but rather make the mistake oneself, subjecting oneself for a moment (now that we speak of authorities) to the precepts of Seneca the Elder: *errare humanum est*. If we still hesitate before taking that seminal decision, the founder of deconstruction will come to our aid asking: why should the mother tongue be protected against the effects of writing described as "an action of a deformation and an aggression"? (Derrida 1998: 41)

If we can risk the assumption that we have freed ourselves from the paralysing fear of an inevitable error indelibly inscribed into the nature of difference, we are ready to face that error and estimate what kind of research perspectives it can open for us. The argument that follows is not so much an explication or a justification of that error, but rather an insistent intensification of its play (Derrida 1982: 3).

The first translation proposal that was supposed to be the effect of (*orto*) graphic slackness was the term *ruźnica* mentioned by Banasiak. *Ruźnica* is on no account a word, a concept or a neologism; neither can it be pro-

nounced, and therefore made present. These are its indubitable advantages which can be noticed at first glance, and which give the term created by changing one letter some reason for pride. A closer look reveals, however, that *ruźnica* definitely points to a significant loss which stems from the conversion of the closed, full *ó* to an open, abysmal *u*. The resulting absence would still be bearable if the very notion of openness or responsiveness were revealed and emphasized, but the arising graphic deficit connects in a rather peculiar manner to the root word *nic* (nothing) and is linked with the acute awareness of the misspelling that can be understood as a lack of sorts: after all, a misspelling is a lack in education.

Thus, this form of notation turns out to be absolutely overwhelming, as was *różNICość*, the already discussed translation by Sławek. *Ruźnica* should be discarded as soon as possible, because by itself it does not provide the compensation for the loss or absence; neither does it offer any counterweight for it. In addition, this version of *différance* does not open for investigation any of its diverse interpretive paths and does not contribute in any particular way to the task of demonstrating the characteristic features of deconstruction. Accordingly, it does not reveal much besides its own inapplicability.

## Róznica

The very idea of rendering Derridian *différance* as *róznica* is linked directly with the notion of iterability, as it is a translation proposal which seems to be an atypical repetition of Skoczylas's *różnica* (difference); its twin or doppelgänger that difference can come into resonance with. What is interesting is the fact that only at the moment when we allow for this controversial displacement/deviation, Derrida's claims start to speak with the force he would desire. It follows that *róznica* is "a kind of gross spelling mistake, a lapse in the discipline and law which regulate writing and keep it seemly" (Derrida 1982: 3).

We need to agree with Derrida that putting things in such a perspective does not make things easier; rather, it creates problems. This, however, is a direct result of the problematic and confrontational nature of difference (Derrida 1982: 5). *Différance* rendered in Polish as *róznica* is immediately conspicuous (*com-specere*), for as we already know, it cannot just happen to be heard and reach the state of audibility so desired by the listeners, in

order to set itself apart owing to its own alterity. Above all, this singular neographism disturbs our conception of the origin, as there is no explanation for its appearance: it does not offer any solid warrant in the form of a dictionary equivalent, definition or a real designatum. Those willing to discover its etymology might rest assured that it is equally difficult to trace its roots, and therefore it is hard to outline the linear, historical evolution of the term or its tradition, its genealogy. That is not all: *różnica* cannot find those who would like to claim it as their own and no one will subscribe to it or authorize it; that is why it does not have an author or an owner. Because of that lack of origin the very beginning of the reflection on this unique creation must commence somewhere within it, in its interior marked by the ambiguous digraph *rz*.

The absolute lack of foundedness of *różnica*'s should not be concealed, as without any foundation it can very easily become a substitute (a chain of substitutions) and pretend to be something it is not. It does not form any basis or a homogeneous core, which allows it to evade binary oppositions that would like to seize it and interrupt its play of differences. It takes a substantial risk in order not to mean anything, so from the perspective of logocentrism it will not have any warranted, fixed sense (see Derrida 2002: 17). With its unutterable, indistinguishable *rz*, *różnica* makes a silent break with the tyranny of phonocentrism. For that very reason it is hard to give it a voice or to request any pronouncement on its side, as it is itself buried in ineffability. In his conversation with Henri Ronse, Derrida refers to the sense of sight, while claiming that the sense of hearing and speech (which fulfills a function complementary to hearing) are absolutely blind:

You have noticed that this *a* [which in the Polish version can here be supplanted with *rz*; A.M.] is written or read, but cannot be heard. And first off I insist upon the fact that any discourse – for example, ours, at this moment – on this alteration, this graphic and grammatical aggression, implies an irreducible reference to the mute intervention of a written sign (2002: 8).

The fear of the Polish translation of *différance* based on a misspelling which is not to be explained away is most probably the outcome of insatiate desire for the presence of meaning. In one of his texts, “Tympan,” written on the margins of philosophy, Derrida describes that phenomenon as the fear of ear puncture which would successfully prevent the presentation of logos, and in this way would disable the whole metaphysics of presence. The French philosopher cites the case of a certain oblong insect called

European earwig (*Forficula auricularia*), or just earwig. Its ability to dig winding canals in fruit contributed to a notoriously widespread belief that the insect likes crawling inside the human ear and – while penetrating the vulnerable organ – punctures the tympanum so that it can quite comfortably chew on the brain. In some regions of Poland the earwig is called *uszol* (ear-thing): it is a name which not only provides a telling illustration of its ostensible customs, but also reveals the relationship between speech and the immanent fear of becoming deaf. One can argue that *rórnica* indeed catches the eye or even seizes it, but it can happen only after we have been let down by our sense of hearing: it is suddenly taken from us by the Derridean acoustic mine, *rz*. Fetishists of hearing who give an ear to meanings of words i.e. those ideas that keep (to) their word, experience at this point a confusion/contusion of the senses. Derrida seems to ask them a question concerning their future, while repeating after Nietzsche's Zarathustra: do we need to puncture their ears to teach them to hear with their eyes too? (Derrida 2002: xiii).

If we have lost our sense of hearing – and believe me, it is surely not the doing of any insect – we move away from the life-giving breath of the voice, that is the main creator of presence for itself. Instead we enter the domain of writing that, according to Derrida, is a betrayal of life threatening not only the breath, but also the spirit and history understood as the spirit's relationship to itself (cf. Derrida 1998: 25). Writing, to use Blanchot's saying, is tantamount to dying (*écrire/mourir*). The mistaken spelling of *rórnica* is possible only in the editor's absence, when the warrant sleeps – ultimately this sleep turns out to be eternal. There is no one who can read *rórnica*, as writing is a death certificate for the coherent, stable subject. It is only now that we have discovered where the grave silence of writing comes from: this silence in no way resembles a funeral lament which attempts to reach the afterlife with its downpour of tears.

The inexpressible, grave silence of writing announces the unavoidable end of man; it remains silent and unable to find in itself the requisite grief and sadness. It comes easy to us to announce the death of God, and it is just as easy to claim the end of the subject: a more arduous task is to prove it or to articulate it properly. For this reason, it seems only too right to ask: where is the human body? where is the corpse? These are questions filled with suspicion and unbelief but also with hope. It is difficult to find the corpse of the subject that in his/her intellectual raptures and spiritual pursuits has seemed to be almost incorporeal. As the subject has never been

devoid of the body, finding its corpse will be a daredevil feat, but it is not impossible.

The double sign of *rz* is the tomb slab of the Derridian *różnica*: here rests the subject. It is the resting place of the sovereign who is the only warrant of the metaphysical order. “This stone – provided that one knows how to decipher its inscription – is not far from announcing the death of the tyrant” (Derrida 1982: 4).<sup>5</sup> However, the silence and the tomb are not the only things hidden in the abysmal and dangerous *rz*, which is primarily a sign of decomposition. This singular, ambiguous, dismembering movement devoid of a fixed centre is the only possible dynamics of what is long dead and still. In the case of a corpse we never know what exactly moves inside it: this lack of knowledge ultimately becomes repulsive (object) to the observer and fills him/her with disgust. In Polish the remains of an individual are always addressed in plural as *zwłoki*, which strongly underlines the ambivalence and indistinctiveness that we encounter at the time. It seems that the individual has to die so that the painfully hidden plurality and relationality could be brought to light again. The change of the fixed and solid *ż* into a diffuse horizontal *rz* explodes the unity of difference, which turns into a creative heterogeneity. Its effectiveness is based on an incessant pursuit of plurality, diffusion and proliferation (*dissémination*) (cf. Derrida 1981).

*Różnica* is a passive/active structure, which means that it represents an exceptional dynamics, similarly to a decomposing corpse and therefore it is paradoxically full of life. What is then ingrained in the term is the activity that resembles wandering devoid of its source, subject or even goal. For this reason, the only thing that we can claim in relation to *różnica* with more than the usual modicum of self-assurance is that it invalidates and suspends the binary opposition of passive/active. It is impossible to describe the term with these already obsolete categories, for they turn out to be absolutely unsuitable for rendering the subtlety and diversity of phenomena. In a manner similar to that of a decomposing body (corpse), which is both a subject/object, passive/active, dead/alive, *różnica* finds itself in-between these dualist categories and is unable to decide between them.

Let us scrutinize the nature of that exceptional, creative active-passive oscillation. First of all, as a grave and faulty notation *różnica* produces a unique kind of commotion in the monolithic, logocentric subject who

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<sup>5</sup> In “Différance” Derrida compares the letter “A,” the source of the French monumental mistake, to an Egyptian pyramid, a tomb of the sovereign.

attempts to interpret it. It may not be a scandal but definitely a looseness, a loss of coherence and a displacement of boundaries caused by becoming engrossed in the deconstructive *vibrato*. *Rórnica* engenders a certain impulse, a disturbing trembling, a shudder or agitation. That is why it is impossible to write about these feeble and stifled phenomena as if they were pure, unequivocal acts that might be the work of the unmoved mover. They should be rather considered in the context of weak surface discharges which should not be treated with contempt as they have enough power to induce ecstasy or pierce to the bone. A shiver can never turn into an actual touch, but it is a trace, a commotion that in an inexplicable way is suffused with death.

Secondly, it is worth paying attention to the commotion that does not occur in the reader of the graphic notation, but is nested in *rórnica* itself. The digraph *rz* does not only cause a general upheaval, but is seen primarily as a crosswise espacement of difference. This apparent diffusion is connected with reluctance and a lack of willingness to fulfill the goal (*τέλος*) and seems to be a typical play for time. The dynamics of difference enters the experience of the always already present reality that we know so well and in its own singular fashion interferes with its two dimensions: time and space.

If we take into consideration time and its flow, we will have to face procrastination, or even a kind of laxity which is the typical transitional state of the (bodily) remains (of time). The accretion of letters, the overproduction occurring once *rz* is introduced entails a perfect fusion of the economic and productive aspects of *rórnica* with the notion of deferral. An unexpected intervention of heterogeneity and the obscene, erroneous excess inherent in the term prevent us from completing our reading of *rórnica*: we are bogged down and come to a halt by the digraph *rz*, because it sticks in our throat and will not be uttered.

This temporal delay (the not-yet), which resembles waiting for Godot, is called by Derrida deferred presence (see Derrida 1982: 9). Deferred presence occurs when we focus on the arbitrary sign which promises to refer its readers to something that exists outside and beyond it, but in fact it is not willing to do that at all. That is why, it only gives us its word, endlessly delaying the moment of precious reference which the connoisseurs of presence desire so ardently.

If we were to underline the spatial, extensive character of *rórnica*, we should refer to espacement, a movement that displaces meanings and is to be held accountable for the gap that occurs between *r* and *z*. The chasm

that we see is visible only in the graphic notation, but it remains inaudible and will never make itself present in speech. It can be merely suggested by a sudden break in the utterance or hesitation accompanying the attempt to pronounce *róznica*.

However, the lacuna or fissure that is created in such a way cannot be mistaken for a negatively understood blank, for a blank would refer us back to the empty space of non-presence or sheer lack. The spacing observable in *róznica* is supposed to point to the openness of structure and to expose a surface ready to accept whatever cannot be made present. It is a displacement and a simultaneous entrance, a march (*marge/marche*) to the margin of error. Only in this fault of writing there can appear something that was unaccounted for so far: alterity. We gain access to it through the gap created by the disturbing *rz*:

spacing designates *nothing*, nothing that is, no presence at a distance, but is the index of an irreducible exterior, and, simultaneously, of a *movement*, a displacement that indicates an irreducible alterity. I do not see how one could dissociate the two concepts of spacing and alterity (Derrida 2002: 81).

*Różnica* (difference) is a pure and perfectly unequivocal concept, but the same cannot be said of *róznica* (differance), as in its case we are confronted with a haunting strangeness, a sign of radical alterity. Alterity as such can be accessible only in the form of a trace, something that from the perspective of ontology has an extremely ex-centric status, as it is just a remnant of past existence which is never fully present, but which by remaining something is neither fully absent. For this very reason we can experience alterity through what is left over, through remains: these usually take a formless shape of something effaced and blurred that is excruciatingly difficult to recognize and bring to light. That is why the unnameable can be spoken of only in terms of something impure and strange. Hence *rz* is like a trace of a stranger, an intruder we do not wish to deal with or come to know, because his otherness (*altérité*) fills us with fear. The territory of language that we know so well has been thus marked by a strange sign: this confuses us and arouses in us an uneasiness. It is as if something situated outside the limits of the sense that we acknowledge has already ceased to be present, but has left a trace.

What is worth mentioning at this point is the well-known French reluctance to use and therefore assimilate the words of foreign origin which could contaminate, pollute and weaken the mother tongue. The body re-

sponsible for the defence against foreign influences as well as for the correctness of the French language is the French Academy, which strategically safeguards it against all borrowings. Among other things, the institution creates in French the equivalents of foreign loanwords that trespass onto the French territory, most of the time together with technological innovations. It will suffice here to provide just several instances of the French reaction to English words treated like uninvited guests: *computer* – *l'ordinateur*, *walkmen* – *baladeur*, *software* – *logiciel*, *tie-break* – *jeu décisif*.<sup>6</sup> In this respect the Polish language behaves in a much friendlier fashion towards borrowings, as all the above expressions function in it in an unchanged form (with a minor modification in the case of the word *computer*).

It is on these grounds that *róznica*, itself rejected as impure owing to its orthographic transgression, is able to smuggle the Other into the structure of language and open itself to diverse contexts; what makes this possible is exactly its strange and unrecognizable element, the non-phonetic trace. The digraph *rz* reveals a lacuna, spacing which is predominantly the space of hospitality (see Derrida 2000), where whatever is irreducibly other, hostile and confrontational can find a place on its own. That is the reason why alterity can occur in-between *r* and *z*, and create fission. Thanks to *róznica* the homogeneous chain of the same becomes interwoven with difference, heterogeneity, alterity and non-normativity. The endlessly reproduced one, coherent and absolute sense (*λόγος*) strengthens the universe of the same, but in the course of incessant repetitions it moves sideward: by moving sideward (*λοζός*), it creates a gap – a place for everything that exists as if in-between.

Owing to its relational, sheaf-like *rz* Derridian *róznica* points to “the complex structure of weaving, an interlacing which permits different threads and different lines of meaning – or of force – to go off again in different directions, just as it is ready to tie itself up with others” (Derrida 1982: 3). In *Positions* Derrida interprets the Greek letter  $\chi$  (chi) derived from the word chiasm (*χίασμα*), treating it as a symbol of “quadrifurcum, a fork, a grid, a key or a trellis” (2002: 70). This asymmetrical intersection (where one of the points extends its range further than the other) is to express the interconnectedness and doubleness of science and sense (*la double séance/sens*), but these – as we can clearly see in French – can-

<sup>6</sup> We can find more on the subject of the defence of the French language on the website of Académie française: <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/> (26.08.2010).

not be repeated in the same way, hence a subtle displacement, a sideward movement of senses that relate to one another.

The relational interpretation of *różnica* as a crossroads makes way for a different approach to written works, and as a consequence does not allow us anymore to treat them as coherent, original, pristine creations owned by one author. From the very onset a text is a multiplicity, and only superficially does it take on the appearance of the homogeneously arranged blocks, those neatly laid out rows of letters and words, all of which have a distinct source and a clean-cut goal. One never writes in absolute solitude; writing is usually a group activity born in a network of allusions and it is almost like functioning in a herd or in a nexus with those that cannot speak otherwise but through these texts. Because of its openness and the dead/alive structure, writing seems to be ceaselessly haunted by alterity and starts seething with traces of somebody else's presence; these can become threads of thought for commentators following a chosen sheaf. We start writing by standing at the crossroads and usually we move on in a good company that we acknowledge in footnotes. The question is: what travel companions we want to go unacknowledged? They can hope only for a shadowy presence in our text, as traces, spectres, elusive forms that emerge through the chasms in our writing. Only text can play host to alterity, exactly because it is not able to overwhelm it with full presence.

The openness and ambivalence of difference gives us access to the endless chain of substitutions and seductive replacements and introduces us to other Derridian concepts. The first in a row, "supplement," which can also be loosely translated as "addition," is distinguished by a special kind of excess that simultaneously reveals some acute lack. This term, characteristic of Derrida's deconstruction, finds its perfect graphic exemplification in the proposed Polish rendering of *différance*. We notice at first glance that the digraph *rz* represents excess, whereas *różnica* is marked from the perspective of economy by too many, almost redundant letters. On the other hand, the resulting surplus, the literal overabundance is not able to cover in any way for the fact that it carries too little meaning and as a common mistake, evidence of recklessness, it becomes a lack, a gap in education.

Another term which similarly to "supplement" brings to the fore the undecidability and indeterminacy inscribed into the notion of *różnica* is the concept of the two-edged sword: "pharmakon."<sup>7</sup> This concept that

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<sup>7</sup> For more details see Derrida 1981.

Derrida derives from the Platonic dialogues means a beneficial cure and a deadly poison in one. Because of its ambiguous power, writing appears as both dangerous and seductive, as it is connected with a sense of irreducible doubleness. Surrendering unequivocality for the sake of unpredictable lability makes us forsake the territory of the same and open ourselves to marginalized otherness and uncontrollable plurality. That is why, from the perspective of the metaphysics of presence, an act of introducing the doubleness of *rz* into the term *różnica* (difference) may seem to be tantamount to opening Pandora's box. The Polish letter *ż* present in the word *różnica* functions here as a keystone or a seal creating a sense of security and strengthening the metaphysical *status quo* with all its binary oppositions, logos, phonocentrism, unitary, solid subject and the insatiate desire for self-presence. Derrida does not conceal the advantages stemming from such an opening, but he realizes the hidden dangers of writing: "Within the chain of supplements, it was difficult to separate writing from onanism. Those two supplements have in common at least the fact that they are dangerous. They transgress a prohibition and are experienced within culpability" (Derrida 1998: 165).

It turns out that there is no path that would lead to *différance* otherwise than through writing; but one can arrive there only by erring; more than that, one can never reach the destination straightforwardly and unmistakably (Derrida 1982: 8). Translating Derrida's controversial term with the Polish neo-plasm, or neographism, *różnica* does stand a chance of becoming an exceedingly prolific idea open to a plurality of interpretations: these in their endless profusion may induce well-justified anxiety in the lovers of unity. The proposed Polish rendering of *différance* does not only allow for a successful critique of logocentrism and phonocentrism but, owing to its equivocality, introduces the majority of Derridian concepts: supplement, pharmakon, the end of man, deferral, spacing, iterability, alterity, trace, dissemination, clinamen and numerous other so far unacknowledged.

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