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Spectral Response to the Declaration of Independence: Deferment of the Death of America in *Arc d'X*

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I

America – it is not a name for the nation, the United States; but a metaphor for a certain ideal state that the United States has long dreamed of and tried to identify itself with. Steve Erickson, saying that “America [...] will insist on reducing its future to physical rubble if only to be free of it once and for all. It’s a future [...] that waits to understand it’s now only the United States” (*Leap Year* 11), finds what drives its people to reduce the present to a physical rubble in favor of the future, in the Declaration of Independence, in *Arc d'X*. With the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson,ⁱ the third President and the Founding Father, made the States a self-governing state by leaving behind a shadow of its former self as a British possession. What becomes the issue in this book, however, is the very performativity of the Declaration: although the Declaration performatively states not only the birth of America but also its extinction, America does not actually meet its death and rather the death of America is continually deferred.

In *Arc d'X*, Erickson’s magic realism brings characters in disparate times and spaces together by connecting the late 18th century America with various other times and spaces, such as Berlin, Paris, and America in the late 20th century and Aeonopolis, a dystopian city state. Trajectories of their lives intersect, forming X-shaped arches,

a venue where individual dramas are tangled together and intertwined into the historical text, causing catalytic actions that incessantly rewrite the official history. Of all the catalyses, the love-hate relationship between Thomas and his slave/lover Sally Hemings plays the pivotal role. “X” is, as it were, a switch on the track which determines the future course of history, and the most decisive turning point arises in the Paris of 1789 when Thomas asks Sally if she will come back to America with him. Sally is suspended between the two alternatives: Yes or No. “X” is also considered a variable point existing in the historic coordinates and waiting for Sally to substitute some value for the point. Sally is unknowingly standing on a point of divergence where she is forced to cast a dice that may engender a radically changed history. It is the Declaration of Independence that compels Sally to cast the dice.

Erickson puts “America” under a traumatic spell cast by the wording of the Declaration of Independence: “certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson 16). Originally, the Declaration of Independence was inspired by John Locke’s belief that under the state of nature one should be endowed with the rights of life, liberty, and property; Thomas Jefferson altered “the right of property” into “the right of pursuit of happiness.” So far as the Declaration is supposed to be open to everyone, not only Anglo-Americans but also African-Americans deserve the right to pursue their own happiness. However, this right was never guaranteed to slaves, because it infringed on the “rights” of the slave-owners. The American plutocracy, whose happiness was based on black slavery, actually required the possession of slaves. Such being the case, the wording from the Declaration of Independence, seemingly generated from philanthropic motives, actually justifies black slavery. The noble ideal which lay the cornerstone of America is thus flawed by an ethical dilemma: fulfillment of one’s desire requires possession of another. In *Arc d'X*, the flaw of America echoes the drafter’s secret life with the same dilemma: fulfillment of his sexual desire requires Thomas to possess Sally. In his monologue, Thomas, looking back upon the moment of signing on the document,

confesses as follows:

I've invented something. As the germ of conception in my head it was the best and wildest and most elusive of my inventions. [...] I've set it loose gyrating across the world. It spins through villages, hamlets, towns, grand cities. [...] But I know it's a flawed thing, and I know the flaw is of me. Just as the white ink of my loins has fired the inspiration that made it, so the same ink is scrawled across the order of its extinction. The signature is my own. I've written its name. I've called it America. (46)

This “America” is not the nation of Thomas’s ideal. His statement, “I’ve set it loose gyrating across the world” means that “America,” born through Thomas’s signature, is a monstrous creature with its own will entirely independent of its creator/master. “America” tore itself away from Thomas’s grip, becoming monstrously self-propelled. His confession that he put his signature to the Declaration of Independence with the “white ink of his loins” makes his signature a metaphor of ejaculation, which allows us to consider Thomas’s rape of Sally as a representation of his signature. Thomas, in raping Sally, makes her the womb from which “America” is supposed to be born. But under slavery “America” cannot acknowledge Sally, a slave girl, as its mother. While Thomas, as “the slave of a great idea” (35) “who [treats] history and culture simply as ideas” (Spinks 233), declares the birth of an idea called “America” in public, he as the slave of his lust causes the birth of a dark private America, whose mother is Sally. The relationship between Thomas and Sally, in this respect, eloquently states the birth and oncoming death of “America.”

The relationship between Thomas and Sally begins in Paris 1789, where American slavery is invalid. It is not a master-slave relationship, but a relationship established on sexual love. Though what triggers the new relationship is of course Thomas’s rape, Sally gradually comes to enjoy her days, not as a slave but as an individual, in

exchange for sexual abuse. One day Sally finds herself unexpectedly calling him “Thomas,” not “the master.” Blaming herself for calling him by his first name, Sally “told herself she would lop off her tongue before she ever allowed it to call his name like that again” (27). When she actually seizes a knife, however, her target is not her tongue but Thomas.ⁱⁱ Considering that Sally is the object of Thomas’s private desire, we can see that the scene metaphorically suggests that Thomas’s destructive lust in the end consumes “America” from within. This scene, in short, is no other than the actualization of the death of “America,” which is sentenced by the Declaration of Independence. But Sally’s knife ends up penetrating not Thomas but the white bed where he lies and from which a black horde of moths appear. Though the Declaration sentenced “America” to death, Thomas as its embodiment is not killed immediately. On the contrary, his death is deferred till the story comes to its final section. In this respect, Sally’s failed murder attempt actually defers the death of “America” and problematizes the performativity of the Declaration of Independence itself. This paper is to examine what effect the deferment of Thomas’s death has on the death of “America” sentenced in/by the Declaration, from the point of why Thomas is not immediately killed in *Arc d'X*.

II

The thematic center of *Arc d'X* lies in the relationship between possessor and possessed, but not simply because the relationship between slaveholder and slave plays a pivotal role in the story. According to the book, “the nature of American freedom” is, in the first place, “that he was only free to take his pleasure in something he possessed, in the same way it would ultimately be the nature of America to define itself in terms of what was owned” (38). In America one can learn who one is only through possession; identity is gained by transforming something or someone into property. In

Arc d'X, however, this identity, the relationship between possessor and possessed, does not remain stable but is always in flux, with the characters unable to tell whether they are in reality or someone's dream. And so the reader: in reading the book, we cannot be sure which character or setting we can believe to be reliable. Erickson's characters suffer from the contemporary plight of identity crisis: they cannot truly know if they are in reality, so how can they know that they themselves are real? Struggles for self-orientation are everywhere in *Arc d'X*, the power relationship shifting between possessor and possessed. Attention should be paid to this in terms of the relay of narrative voices.

The narrator in *Arc d'X* is never fixed, with each character taking that role in turn. After answering Thomas's decisive question in Paris, Sally takes over the main narrative voice from Thomas. Saying "Yes," Sally accepts her return both to America and to slavery. After their return to America, Thomas is elected as President and then abruptly disappears.ⁱⁱⁱ After a long trip in search of him, she ends up sleeping in an Indian village. Upon waking, however, she finds herself in a hotel room in Aeonopolis, a futuristic totalitarian city state where priests reign. Our most plausible interpretation here is that Sally is still in her dream and Aeonopolis must be the setting of her dream. But the fact is that Aeonopolis turns out to be a real world.

"America" she said. She woke and there was blood on her pillow. [...] Someone was lying in the bed with her and his head was flowing with blood; and she was startled to have found him again, and wanted to ask what had happened to him and where he'd gone, except that she knew he couldn't answer. Then in the next moment she forgot *her dream* entirely, only the flotsam of it washing in and out with the tide of her consciousness; and though the tall man in the bed next to her looked familiar, she could no longer remember his name. (52, emphasis added)

At the moment she wakes up in Aeonopolis she still has memories of her reality, including Thomas and America. But gradually her memory about the world where she had been seeps away, metamorphosing itself into “her dream.”

In the next section of the novel, narrative voices are taken by residents of Aeonopolis. In other words, Sally, in Aeonopolis, is not allowed to have a voice to proclaim to the reader that the city state is only a fiction, only her own dream. Hence, when narrative voice is displaced from Sally to Wade, a black police officer in Aeonopolis, Sally, suffering from disorientation, is left to accept Aeonopolis as reality. After releasing Sally, suspected of murdering a man who is not officially registered as a resident of Aeonopolis, Wade begins visiting Fleurs d'X, a strip club located in Arboretum. Arboretum is a zone in Aeonopolis which is so pervaded by the disorder of human desire that Church Central cannot control it and therefore leaves it untouched. There Wade spots a stripper called Mona who calls up suggestions of Sally.^{iv} He regards the club as his own dream while the strictly regulated zones of Aeonopolis are his reality. “You stepped into my dream,” Wade says in the strip club, “it's not that I've stepped into yours. It's that you've stepped into mine” (79). But a theft of the narrative voice again: after Wade rapes Mona as a substitute for Sally, the narrative voice is shifted from Wade to Mona, Fleurs d'X displaced from Wade's dream into Mona's reality.

Thus in *Arc d'X* the relationship between possessor and possessed is established by characters stealing the narrative voice. The character who possesses the narrative voice performatively seizes identity and, if only temporarily, reality. Characters without the narrative voice are bound to supplement his/her performativity. In other words, it is the possessed who are subservient to the possessor's reality and identity.

Along with the narrative voice, another object is stolen by the characters: a piece of stone from the Berlin Wall with the inscription “pursuit of happiness.” Every character who steals and possesses the stone, is urged to pursue his/her own happiness. It is Georgie, a young German in the late 1990s, who brings the stone into Aeonopolis.

Stealing the stone from an American writer named Erickson, Georgie cannot but regard the stone and its inscription as “something infectious, swarming with moral bacteria” (259). It suggests that those who possess the stone are, as if delirious with fever, forced to launch their own pursuit of happiness and are put in a dilemma between love (the possessor-possessed relationship) and freedom (from ownership).

III

In *Arc d'X*, no one is free from the possessor-possessed relationship. Not only can this relationship be easily reversed, but also both possessor and possessed become obsessed not with each other but with another separate being. The third person always exists as a spectral being between them. A scene well exemplifying this is Thomas's first rape of Sally.

It thrilled him, the possession of her. He only wished she were so black as not to have a face at all. He only wished she was so black that his ejaculation might be the only white squiggle across the void of his heart. (25)

While assaulting Sally, he wishes that she were blacker. But the fact is that, being a mulatto, Sally is “too white to be quite black” (14). Thomas wants Sally to be black in order to “[perpetuate] a loathsome but unofficially tolerated social code of American slave ownership” (Murphy 472). The reason for this is his trauma over the death of a black woman named Evelyn who was burnt alive as punishment for killing her master who had sexually abused his slaves when Thomas was a five-year-old. Evelyn, his spectral “mistress” ever since, appears to Thomas right before his rape of Sally, and Thomas thrusts his penis into her. By raping spectral Evelyn, he successfully subverts the possessor-possessed relationship between them and becomes the master of his

mistress. The reason why Thomas needs to rape Sally as his “black” slave is no other than to overcome his traumatic memory of the black slave woman, Evelyn, not only his dream but in reality. Considering this, the referent of “her” in “It thrilled him, the possession of her” becomes indeterminate; “her” refers to both Sally and Evelyn. In other words, through his sexual violence, Thomas identifies the spectral Evelyn with Sally, which alienates Sally from her physical reality into an indeterminate pronominal self. When Sally’s body is displaced into a vehicle to represent the invisible specter, Thomas can overcome his childhood trauma in reality. Hence, the sexual relationship between Thomas and Sally is always obsessed spectrally by Evelyn as the third being.

The sexual relationship between Etcher and Sally in Aeonopolis, likewise, is obsessed spectrally by Thomas as the third being. Etcher, a Church Central archivist who falls in love with her, believes firmly that his happiness is to free Sally from her obsession. Though their relationship does not apparently involve any ownership, the fact is that “possession [is] everywhere” in their love-making, and it is Sally herself who desires to be possessed.

[Sally] was touched that Etcher would make love to her so tenderly but she felt no choice except to insist on ferocity: possession was everywhere, and now she demanded it. [...] “You,” she said, because she couldn’t remember his name, “oh, you,” she said, waiting for him to claim her. (132-33)

Waiting for “him” to claim her, Sally ties her own wrists, as Thomas did when they made love. This proves that Sally tries, with Etcher as a partner, to replay her encounters with Thomas. Therefore Sally’s utterance, “You,” can refer both to Etcher and Thomas. The sexual intercourse between Etcher and Sally is always performed in the presence of the spectral Thomas. By way of Etcher’s body, Sally is making a clandestine meeting with the spectral Thomas; this inevitably causes Etcher’s identity crisis.^v

Sexual activity of Erickson's couples always involves the spectral presence of the third being.^{vi} The point is that the spectral third is nothing less than a product of the possessors' paranoia. Every character, compelled to choose his/her happiness, feels the paranoia of "What if?"^{vii} Whichever happiness—love or freedom—is chosen, he/she is obsessed by the other happiness which he/she has given up. What engenders the spectral third is, in this sense, the repressed desire for the happiness given up in exchange for the chosen, pursued happiness.

Thomas, for example, calls the ashen Evelyn, a symbol of resistance to the slave masters' sexual violence, into the sexual relationship with Sally. Thus his obsession with Evelyn suggests that Thomas has long cherished a desire to abuse his slaves as the other slaveholders do. The ashen Evelyn represents his undesirable desire which he as a philanthropist has to repress. His undesirable desire, which must be repressed, visits him in the form of the spectral Evelyn. It is inevitable that the ashen Evelyn, the representation of the tragic flaw in Thomas's philanthropic idea of America, haunts the Declaration. When he rapes the ashen Evelyn through the medium of Sally's body, therefore, he rapes an "Other of the Other" that he himself has created. In doing this, he at last successfully forces the ashen Evelyn yield to him, which means that he gains the alternative happiness, love, in place of the freedom which he chose as a signer of the Declaration. As for the spectral presence of Thomas in the relationship between Sally and Etcher, it is nothing less than an "Other of the Other" created by Sally, who is obsessed by the idea of meeting Thomas again. Thus by engaging in a sexual encounter with an "Other of the Other," an alternative history can be born.

There are two kinds of happiness to be pursued for the possessor, love in the form of the possessor-possessed relationship, with its attendant spectral third; or for the possessed, freedom from this sexual triangle. Love provides a paranoid self-orientation by allowing the possessor to construct a self-image as a possessor. Freedom demands schizophrenic disorientation through the fact that the possessed must reject his/her identity as possessed. Following the triangular scheme of possessor-(spectral third)-

possessed, the trauma of possession shifts the triangular relationship from Thomas-(Evelyn)-Sally to Sally-(Thomas)-Etcher, and Wade-(Sally)-Mona. This chain reaction of triangular sexual relationships drives the narrative structure of *Arc d'X*. For this reason, the sexual relationships in *Arc d'X* never become immobilized and exclusive, but rather open so that these relationships always dislocate themselves into new ones, with a sense of contagion.

IV

The chain reaction of triangular sexual relationships, though originating from Thomas's signature on the Declaration of Independence, seems to gradually displace Thomas as the story unfolds. However, we cannot miss the motifs observed frequently throughout the book, such as the smell of ashes, the swarm of moths, and the Vog in Aeopolis, all of which are metaphorical embodiments of Thomas's childhood trauma. In this sense, we can say that all the characters in the book are somehow obsessed by Thomas, though most of them neither know about him at all, nor are they contemporaries of Thomas. In other words, every scene in the book is haunted by Thomas's trace even if he is not present. Also, the characters work as vehicles to transmit Thomas's trauma through their own pursuits of happiness. "America," as his invention, is genetically damaged by his private trauma. The fact that Thomas's trauma drives him to two incompatible acts, the pursuits of love and freedom, forces the characters into the same incompatible pursuits. What obsesses Erickson's characters is in this sense Thomas's trauma and the primordial damage to "America," both of which the characters transmit unknowingly by establishing triangular sexual relationships with others in their pursuits of happiness.

The fact is, however, that Erickson's characters are not only passively haunted by the traumatic origins of America; the energy created by the pursuit of happiness in the

chain reaction of triangular relationships actively but unknowingly rewrites history. Etcher is the key figure in this rewriting. Believing that his own happiness lies in liberating Sally from her obsession with the spectral Thomas, Etcher decides to steal from his workplace *The Unexpurgated Volumes of Unconscious History*, a series of books about a history in which Thomas is elected as President. Because Aeonopolis exists outside time, Church Central regards anything suggestive of human memory as being subversive. *The Unexpurgated Volumes of Unconscious History* is subversive in this sense and must be hidden. After Etcher removes volumes, Aeonopolis begins undergoing geological changes. These changes are described as the “[frays of] the psychic fabric of this city.”

[S]omething began to fray the psychic fabric of this city that existed outside time. A trolley car disappeared. An obelisk moved several feet. [...] When the pages of the volumes began to trickle back into the vault, one or two or five or six at a time, depending on Etcher’s whims, the process of this fraying was, for the moment, suspended. (166)

Greatly depressed after Sally’s death, Etcher confines himself in a shed on the outskirts of Aeonopolis and begins to revise the pages of *The Unexpurgated Volumes of Unconscious History*. By creating an alternative history in which he does not meet Sally, he can be free from grief. This is why Etcher, whose life is buffeted by Sally, the spectral Thomas, and the “America” Thomas invents, literally rewrites history. He customizes history in order to forget and become liberated from Sally; as a result, changes occur not only in Aeonopolis but in the other world.

As his heart had been undone, as he would undo his own memory in some pointless effort to forget her, he would now undo history minute by minute, detail by detail. He gave history its false cues, he misspoke its passwords.

[...] The earth of Etcher's new history shimmered with the fission of reactor meltdowns, and wars that had once ended in four years went on for forty. (278)

The changes in history occur as the result of Etcher's pursuit of happiness. Revising one event after another in *The Unexpurgated Volumes of Unconscious History*, he, in a spectral manner, haunts and possesses the real world. Consequently another version of history comes into being at the historical turning point "X" when Sally answers Thomas's decisive question.

Again in the Paris of 1789, Thomas asks her if she will go back to America with him, and this time, Sally engenders an alternative history by answering, "No." Sally chooses to remain in Paris alone, and spends the rest of her life as the mistress to many revolutionaries. She does not set foot in Aeonopolis in this version of history; hence, Etcher never meets her. Back in another America, Thomas does not run for the presidential election, willingly degrades himself to slavery, and spends the rest of his life as a slave to those who once had been his possession. In the decline of his life, old Thomas falls asleep, suffering from a migraine headache, and wakes up to find himself in a dream. He is in Aeonopolis. A sleeping girl he finds in a hotel room is no other than the Sally Hemings of the unrevised version of history, who answered, "Yes," came back to America with him, started out on a journey in search of Thomas, and strayed off into this dystopian city state. Here, Thomas and Sally, respectively from the two different versions of history, meet in Aeonopolis, an ahistorical space which works as a historical space by ceaselessly producing new versions of history in a circular way; each version generating from and rewriting the traumatic origin of America. The chain reaction of sexual triangles of which Etcher's historical rewriting is an integral part, both driven and driving, is a spectral response to the America which Thomas invented.

V

Thomas and Georgie meet in a hotel room in Aeonopolis; the former from 18th century Virginia, and the latter from Berlin via America in the late 1990s. Georgie, who has a “profoundly ambivalent and furiously mystic obsession with the idea of America” (221), kills Thomas because, when he asks the old man who he is, the old man answers, “America” (259). The irony is that he beats Thomas to death with the “pursuit of happiness” stone. In this scene, readers can finally witness Thomas’s death. His death, however, cannot be regarded as a representation of the death of the America of the Declaration. This is because once this version of history is rewritten by others-to-come, like Etcher, through their pursuit of happiness, another possible version of history unfolds, and this creates another Thomas who faces again the dilemma that he himself invented, that is, the dilemma between love and freedom.

Historicity in *Arc d'X* is “a mode of indetermination” (Spinks 229): as observed above, at the historical turning points, a new course of history opens up and in the end it “arcs back” (Spinks 230) into the past via chain reaction of happiness-pursuit. Erickson successfully insinuates such subjunctive moments into History, a singular and uniform narrative. The subjunctive spectral moments are purely products of paranoia, and it is the paranoid characters who weave the spectral moments into the fabric of history. When such subjunctive historicity causes the deferment of the death of Thomas/America, it is these paranoid characters who invalidate the death-doomed performativity of the Declaration of Independence. More precisely speaking, the spectral moments emerging from the chain reaction of the “private pursuit of happiness” reach back into Jeffersonian America and mutate it genetically, thus eventually deconstructing the death of America as sentenced in the Declaration. This flexible and elastic historicity keeps deferring the decisive moment of death of Thomas/America within the text.

What should be noted here is the fact that Thomas Jefferson signed as one of

“the representatives of” and “in the name” of “the good people” (Jefferson 19), and that these paranoid characters represent “the good people” of the Declaration, who are to supplement the performativity of Jefferson’s signature retroactively.^{viii} They make themselves the “good people” by engaging in their own pursuits of happiness. Therefore, as long as American citizens living after the Declaration, like “the good people” in the book, pursue their own happiness in response to the traumatic primordial damage of the nation, death of Thomas/America in the Declaration can be deferred. They, in other words, can supplement and help Jefferson become the signer in a retroactive manner. In other words, joining “the good people” through the pursuit of happiness involves incessant revision of America from within, which confers continuing-performativity upon Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence, in this respect, did not invent America; it allowed America to be invented in the future perfect tense by others-to-come, and drives them to pursue their own happiness. America finds its possibility to live, here, within its citizens and the deferred accomplishment of their pursuits of happiness.

Turning “the pursuit of happiness” into a deferred, negative discourse, America shapes its people into paranoids who believe they are possessed/obsessed, while these paranoids reshape America through their pursuit of happiness. The death of America, sentenced by the Declaration of Independence, is deferred by others-to-come through their own responses to the Declaration, from which emerges the dynamics of the interaction between the nation and the individuals.

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Notes.

ⁱ This paper distinguishes Thomas Jefferson, the historical figure, from the fictional character in *Arc d'X* by calling the historical figure Jefferson (or Thomas Jefferson) and the character Thomas.

ⁱⁱ Sally, in the following scene in *Aeonopolis*, awakes, the word "America" escaping her lips. Considering that the addressee of Sally's utterance "America" is Thomas dead next to her, Sally's tongue here serves as suturing two possible versions of history, both of which originate in the same moment when Sally is asked to choose her happiness, love or freedom, at the turning point of history. Sally's tongue in choosing yes or no at the decisive moment of the novel can be seen as a "chromosome" (285). It is paradoxical that although Sally tries to kill Thomas, the Father of America, her tongue itself carries the genes of America.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas, once registered as the President in the official history, disappears from the book abruptly. The implication of this is that this book is about subliminal or unconscious histories that will never be told in the official history.

^{iv} We learn later that Mona is Sally's daughter in search of the Sally who answered "No" to Thomas at the decisive historical point in 1789 Paris.

^v After a while, in fact, Etcher happens to hear Sally call Thomas's name in her sleep. Etcher begins to doubt if Sally, with her utterance "You" in lovemaking, addressed not him but a man whom he does not know, named Thomas. He thus feels himself possessed by Sally and Thomas.

^{vi} This may remind you of another novel by Erickson, *Tours of the Black Clock* (1989), preceding *Arc d'X*, which employs the triangular sexual relationship. In *Black Clock*, Banning Janelight, who is asked to write pornographic novels by Hitler and becomes a pornographer under exclusive contract to him, rapes Dania whom Banning has assumed to be the model of his novels. Banning finds Hitler somehow in the corner of the room watching Banning rape Dania (called Geli below).

“Is he here?” you ask, and when I look, sure enough, he is. I guess I never believed he’d come. I know you said it all along; I guess you were right. Do you want him? You look up at him; he rustles in the corner, shrinking away into the dark: “He’s rather a puny one, isn’t he?” Yes. I’ve seen him before: he isn’t much. “Is he as big as you?” Of course not, I laugh. What a question. I push myself into you; he holds the corner of the wall so hard I can see the blood fall from his fingers. Geli, Geli. “Oh my God, my God, my God, my God,” you’re nearly screaming it. To me, though; not him. (*Black Clock* 166)

The triangular relationship in *Black Clock* closely resembles the one in *Arc d'X*. The difference, however, is that the *Black Clock* relationship remains closed. In *Black Clock*, displacement of the dominant position is limited to the fixed members of the triangle, that is, Banning, Dania, and Hitler. In *Arc d'X*, on the other hand, the triangular sexual relationship is open and shifting, always displaced into new relationship.

^{vii} For example, Thomas says, “And what if she had answered yes? When I asked her to go back to America with me, what if she had promised different? [...] What if my life had chosen my heart rather than my conscience? What if I’d put a price on her head and shackled her naked in the cabin of my ship like the property she was, what if I smuggled her back to Virginia pleasing my heart every day for the rest on my life and left my conscience to God or the hypocrites who claim to serve him?” (260-61)

^{viii} Jefferson signed as one of “the representatives of” and “in the name of the good people.”

We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled, appealing to the supreme judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do in the name, and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states, and that as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. (Jefferson 19)

Derrida points out that “the good people” did not exist before the Declaration. If “the good people” did not exist before the Declaration, how is it possible for Thomas Jefferson as the signer and the representative of good people to have existed before the Declaration? The existence of the signer cannot be recognized until “the good people” begin their existence. With the term “fabulous retroactivity” (Derrida 10), Derrida asserts that the authority of the signer and the performativity of the signature are guaranteed and supplemented *post factum* by the good people performatively produced by the Declaration itself.