Our theme will be that of deconstructing the text of philosophy or alternatively that of Derrida reading (Neo-) Platonism. A more precise account of what follows would, however, stress the simultaneity of the generic and specific aims.

The “text” which is to be deconstructed with respect to philosophy corresponds not to that of a book—the everyday usage of the term—but to that which exceeds the book—a peculiarly Derridean conception. In the latter case, text is understood as a container of spaces, each of which, if folded back upon itself, exceeds its own limits—text, space, and fold therefore indicating various aspects of the underlying idea of reference to the Other. According to Derrida’s usage, text is quasi-synonymous with trace and writing. In different intertextual situations, “trace” can be delineated in relation to the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl where its connotation of temporality is revealed, in the light of Levinas’ ethical thought where the reference to the Other emerges most strikingly, and in relation to the psychoanalytic teaching of Freud where its connotation of non-causality is uppermost.
For Derrida, the handling of writing is perhaps more complicated than the handling of trace. “Writing” contrasts with language not in a physical sense but in that writing represents on the one hand the formalism of language and on the other the excess of language—a duality concomitant with the writer’s simultaneous ability to control and inability to control language’s semantic resources. Some other features of trace and/or writing should be noted here. For example, the specialized meaning of the terms is frequently suggested by introducing them with prefixes as “arche-trace” and “arche-writing.” The possibility of metonymically substituting the terms for one another and with terms like “difference” and “supplement” is also indicated. One should also briefly mention some controversies surrounding trace, writing, and the like. To what extent can they be understood as “infra-structures?” To what extent are they “conditions of possibility” in the Kantian sense? In anticipation, one could also mention the link between trace, presence, and absence established by Derrida in his reading of Plotinus the Neoplatonist.

The “philosophy” with respect to which the text is to be deconstructed is alternatively styled “metaphysics,” “logocentrism,” and “ontotheology.” Primarily under the influence of Heidegger at this point, Derrida discerns a unity of a profound type underlying the history of western thought, although for Heidegger this unity represents the tradition running (roughly) from Parmenides to Nietzsche, whereas for Derrida it is in the tradition running (roughly) from Parmenides to Hegel where the unity resides. This philosophical tradition is unified through