

RE-TRACING THE FRAMES, BORDERS, EDGES  
AND MARGINS OF DERRIDA'S DE-CONSTRUCTION(S)<sup>1</sup>

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If we are to approach a text, it must have an edge ... all those borders that form the running border of what used to be called a text, of what we once thought this word could identify, i.e., the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, and so forth. What has happened, if it has happened, is a sort of overrun [*débordement*] that spoils all those boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a "text," ... that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces.

Derrida, *Living On: Border Lines*

1. Derrida makes it clear that there is no such thing as deconstruction in the singular: "There is no one, single deconstruction. Were there only one, were it homogeneous, it would not be inherently either conservative or revolutionary, or determinable within the code of such oppositions. That is precisely what gets on everyone's nerves. ... Deconstruction, in the singular, is not "inherently" anything at all that might be determinable on the basis of this code and of its criteria. It is "inherently" nothing at all; the logic of essence (by opposition to accident), of the proper (by opposition to the improper), hence of the "inherent" by opposition to the extrinsic, is precisely what all deconstruction has from the start called into question. ... Deconstruction does not exist somewhere, pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflictual and differentiated contexts; it "is" only what it does and what is done with it, there where it takes place" *Limited Inc.*, p. 141.

## Re-Tracing The Frames, Borders, Edges and Margins of Derrida's De-Construction(s)

What is the *topos* of the title? Does it take place (and where?) in relation to the work? On the edge? Over the edge? On the internal border? In an overboard that is remarked and reapplied, by invagination, within, between the presumed center and the circumference? Or between that which is framed and that which is framing the frame?

Derrida, *The Truth of Painting*

Let us space. The art of this text is the air it causes to circulate between its screens. The chainings are invisible, everything seems improvised or juxtaposed. This text induces by agglutinating rather than demonstrating, by coupling and decoupling, gluing and ungluing [*en accolant et en décollant*] rather than by exhibiting the continuous, and analogical, instructive, suffocating necessity of a discursive rhetoric.

Derrida, *Glas*

### I

(Out of nowhere a roll of the dice)

#### THE PROMISE OF *ALLER*

Our title — a token and a pledge — has already conveyed a commitment, has bound us in a promise to trace “frames, borders, edges, and margins.” Can the promise<sup>2</sup> inscribed and borne by the thesis entitled “Derrida’s deconstructions” ultimately take place and where? In the texts signed with the name “Jacques Derrida” stacked on my desk? In the vast parasitic critical literature piled atop these texts, that commands from above by mimicing and violating its host, devouring with a cannibalizing desire to dis-pose (make Derrida biodegradable?), perhaps consum(m)ate a vaulting hegemony that veils a fascination with transcendency (always the possibility of unpleasantness that surrounds the environs of pleasure, especially the mouth). Can we bring this promise to an conclusive end and, if so, where? In other words: can a commentary truly speak for someone else, double for, be-come or dis-pose of another’s text? In still other words, how can one text displace another, translate another? Furthermore, what if

2. From a Derridean perspective as soon as we open our mouth, that is, as soon as there is Text, we are engaged in a promise; but, that pure promise, can it be delivered, can it in all seriousness arrive? The Text (which both contains the promise and through which the promise promises arrival) forever eludes totalization — there is always a surplus, an incalculable remainder which limps behind, that is forever arriving, in its own self-conscious presence, too late. See Mark C. Taylor, “Non-negative Negative Atheology,” for a demonstration of the slipperiness of a promise in his discussion of Jacques Derrida’s, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials.”

that someone else — someone known for (or at least accused of) untranslatability — has himself engaged in commentary upon other commentary, fed us on endlessly regressive referential citations, has entangled us “in hundreds of pages of a writing simultaneously insistent and elliptical, imprinting ... even as it erases, carrying off each concept into an interminable chain of differences, surrounding or confusing itself with so many precautions, references, notes, citations, collages, supplements,”<sup>3</sup> are we, if not paralyzed, at least thrown into a gagging stumble.

We situate on the rim looking down into the reflecting pool of *atheis*. Here a promise happens [*arriver*]<sup>4</sup> yet we know that we are going ahead where we ought not to have gone, engaging in a promise that ultimately can not arrive. Even before taking a first step [*pas*] in this tracking [*pas du programme*], our thesis and its promise appear to step [*marcher*] ahead of us, as if we (both? betwixt who?) were/are tracking and leaving traces, going and never catching up to arriving, as if we are tracking a promise which delivers only on a promise of denial.

Engaging such a promise we caution the reader to bracket and enclose our sayings in imaginary marks of quotation thus putting everything under-glass.<sup>5</sup> Shall we begin by incanting-mimicking the style of propriety—the liminal oaths inscribed in the formulary: “I hereby take full and fundamental irresponsibility for all transgression (thus protecting oneself from possible double jeopardy—the result of a double-b(I)nd). One must exert vigilance when playing in the rough and tumble sea of the double-edged,

3. *Positions*, p. 14.

4. In Derrida’s *The Post Card*, “*arriver*” acts as a “switch point” which “watches over and speculates on that-which-must-happen, on what it indeed might mean *to happen, to arrive, to have to happen* or *arrive, to let* or *make happen* or *arrive, to destine, to address, to send, to legate, to inherit*, etc.” The translator’s note in a prefatory glossary traces a trajectory of usage which throughout our proceedings we will keep in mind: “*Arriver* derives from the Latin *arripere*, meaning “to come to shore,” and there is a constant play on the *rive* (shore) in *arriver*. As always, the question is, Can any shore (*rive*) or border (*bord*) be determined such that mooring to it is certain? For *river* also means “to rivet”: does ar-rival imply non-riveting, much as the postal principle (a letter can always not arrive at its destination) implies the at-thesis, i.e. the sort of *concept that cannot be riveted to the spot*, [my italics] that is constantly on the go” *The Post Card*,” p. xvi.

5. In the footnote which runs the full length of “Living On: Border Lines,” Derrida discusses the “under-glass” quality of Text in translation, and thus of every mark. Quoting from *L’arrêt de mort*: “... I saw her again, through a store window. When someone who has disappeared completely is suddenly there, in front of you, behind a pane of glass, that person becomes the most powerful sort of figure (unless it upsets you). [ ... ] The truth is that after I had been fortunate enough to see her through a pane of glass, the only thing I wanted, during the whole time that I knew her, was to feel that ‘great pleasure’ again through her, and also to break the glass. [ ... ] The strangeness lay in the fact that although the shop window experience I have talked about

the double entendre, where play and laughter are subversive, suspect, proscribed, and pre(summed) as tainted with deceit, duplicity, perhaps even madness.<sup>6</sup>

### A BLINK, A BARGAIN, A 'TRANSGRESSION!'

So, where are we? Where, we must ask, will this trans-gression,<sup>7</sup> this over-stepping, this in-fringement finally take place? As we take this giant step [*pas-de-g ent*] from off the rim, beyond the limits, across a boundary, beyond the margins, over a barrier, in violation of law and commandments (especially divine law and the limits of Being),

held true for everything, it was most true for persons and objects that particularly interested me. For instance, if I was reading a book that particularly interested me, I read it with vivid pleasure, but my very pleasure was behind a pane of glass: I could see it, appreciate it, but not use it up. In the same way, if I met someone I liked, everything nice that happened between us was under glass and thus preserved, but also far away and in an eternal past ... And perhaps I would have known something about its [*ses*] intentions which even it [*elle*] could never have known, made so cold by my distance that it was put under glass..." "Living On: Border Lines," pp. 139-42.

6. "The Sage, that is to say he who is quickened with the spirit of Our Lord, he who has the divine formulary at his finger tips, does not abandon himself to laughter save in fear and trembling. The sage trembles at the thought of having laughed; the Sage fears laughter, just as he fears the lustful shows of this world. He stops short on the brink of laughter, as on the brink of temptation. There is, then, according to the Sage, a certain secret contradiction between his special nature as Sage and the primordial nature of laughter. In fact, to do no more than touch in passing upon memories which are more than solemn, I would point out - and this perfectly corroborates the officially Christian character of the maxim - that the Sage *par excellence*, the Word Incarnate, never laughed ... the Sage takes a very good look before allowing himself to laugh, as though some residue of uneasiness and anxiety must still be left him. And secondly, the comic vanishes altogether from the point of view of absolute knowledge and power. Now if we inverted the two propositions, it would result that laughter is generally the apaanage of madmen, and that it always implies more or less of ignorance and weakness" Baudelaire, *The Mirror of Art*, p. 134.
7. For Derrida there is no such thing as "a pure and simple" transgression and landing "into a beyond of metaphysics" since "... even in aggressions or transgressions, we are consorting with a code to which metaphysics is tied irreducibly, such that every transgressive gesture reenclodes us - precisely by giving us a hold on the closure of metaphysics - within this closure. But, by means of the work done on one side and the other of the limit the field inside is modified, and a transgression is produced that consequently is nowhere present as a *fait accompli*. One is never installed within transgression, one never lives elsewhere. Transgression implies that the limit is always at work" Derrida. *Positions*. p. 12.



engaged as we are in cracking the already crumbling walls of the sacristies, crossing-up over the sacrosanct boundaries of all disciplines and departments, prioritizations, hierarchical subordinations, warping the frame, dislocating and disjoining all “logical,” “rational” statements of “truth,” relocating the “limits” which set up the framework for the simulacrum of our so called personal and private self (our “inner sanctum”), that is to say, our invested categories of consciousness from which issue the logical and reasoned judgments that inform our so called thinking, we blink. We set off [*se mettre en marche*] in a blink. And in this blink of a blink get something more than we bargained for, something else<sup>8</sup> has been thrown into the bargain [*par-dessus le marché*].

Where then are the boundaries drawn, the stone markers laid, the fence posts positioned and the barbed wire strung; the signs nailed to trees:



You are  
**TRESPASSING!**  
 Trespassers will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law  
 Beware the dog!

(Here, nailed to the tree is an uncannily differentiated reminder, a condensation of the sign which marks the “X” the  $\chi^9$  or “ex-,” of that which is excluded, the laminate history of a sign of exteriority: the wall, the curtain, and the veil; the re-

8. We return to this “other” further along the way when we arrive at the signpost of the “hymen.” For the high sea adventure into the philosophical underpinnings of Derrida’s thought (East and West) see Robert Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*. Here, we reflect on a dark “glimmer,” an intimation. The eye blinks.  And ... then, opens. 

9. “... everything passes through this chiasmus, all writing is caught in it . . . frequents it. The form of the chiasmus, the X interests me greatly, not as the symbol of the unknown but because there is here a sort of fork (the series crossroads, quadrifurcum, grid, grill, key etc.) which is moreover unequal, one of its points extending its scope [*protée*] further than the other: a figure of the double gesture...” *The Truth in Painting*, p. 66, Cf. also pp. 66-8.

pressed and prohibited, ("bound" in texts of rules and law<sup>10</sup>); and on another stratum, the marginal and peripheral: the inscription of exile and wandering outside the door, in the outer darkness after the expulsion and the Fall into darkness, the Fall "out of" and the Fall "into" (debasement both physical and moral); Christ's cruci(fix)tion,

10. "We need here to distinguish very carefully if we are not to succumb to the facile solutions and ideological consensus of the *doxai* of right or left. I will return to this in an instant. Every police is not repressive, no more than the law in general, even in its negative, restrictive, or prohibitive prescriptions. A red light is not repressive. If one insists on considering its prohibitive force as being "repressive" (which is not to be absolutely prohibited in a context yet to be determined), then this repressive character must be distinguished from that associated, in an evaluation that is never neutral, with the unjust brutality of a force that most often violates the very law to which it appeals. This distinction is sometimes difficult, but it is indispensable if one is to avoid hastily confounding law and prohibition, law and repression, prohibition and repression ... But every institution destined to enforce the law is a police. An academy is a police, whether in the sense of a university or of the Académie Française, whose essential task is to enforce respect for and obedience to [*faire respecter*] the French language, to decide what ought to be considered "good" French, etc., but I never said that the police as such and a priori, or "the very project of attempting to fix the contexts of utterances," is "politically" suspect. There is no society without police even if one can always dream of forms of police that would be more sublime, more refined or less vulgar.

"But if the police as such is not politically suspect a priori, it is never politically neutral either, never apolitical. Political evaluation, suspicion for example, will always be formulated in a given context, starting from given forces or interests, against another manner of determining the context and of imposing this determination. This context is not only or always a discursive context. One politics is always being played against another (and perhaps, virtually, one police against another). This political dimension is not always apparent. It often dissimulates itself, articulates or translates itself through mediations that are numerous, differentiated, potential, equivocal, difficult to decipher. It often depends upon codes that are still poorly apprehended, allowing therefore for different possible implementations, given the *mobility of contexts that are constantly being reframed*. But who can believe that our discourses, which appear to be purely theoretical, on the status of the parasite for instance, are not at the same time highly political in nature? Once it has been demonstrated, as I hope to have done, that the exclusion of the parasite (of divergences, contaminations, impurities, etc.) cannot be justified by purely theoretical-methodological reasons, how can one ignore that this practice of exclusion, or this will to purify, to reappropriate in a manner that would be essential, internal, and ideal in respect to the subject or to its objects, translates necessarily into a politics? Politics of language (which can lead, even if it does not always do so, to violences committed by the state), politics of education, politics of immigration, behavior with regard to the "foreign" in general, etc. This touches all the social institutions – and it is not even indispensable to mobilize the code of class struggle to recall it. More generally, it touches everything, quite simply everything: style of "life," of "speech," of "writing," etc." *Limited Inc.*, pp. 132-3, 135-6.

which nails a bloody, violent, and brutal sign to the tree for all to see in an attempt to erase that sign, transcend it (the serpent of salvation rising over the serpent of doom), the paradox and ambiguity of the good thief and the bad thief on either side of him; the very nailing of the braces of the cross the tree as pillar, the very Arbor philosophica of psychic development with its roots (to apply the psychological idiom) in the dark unconsciousness of the earth, and its leaves sheltering the nests of the denizens of light (both shading and casting into darkness while sheltering and protecting and nourishing, etc.)- the upright and traverse of all spatial hierarchies, and the distinction between heaven and earth, Occidental and Oriental; the “crossing over” to the other side of the river, the other shore as well as the “cross references,” notations and directions (disseminating endlessly regressive navigations at the limits of Being sur(round)ing the circumference of the circle, without center) to iterations that reside in “other” places, outside a text, inside other texts, etc. Liminal, vertiginous circlings- riding the semantic drift of Derridaspume crossing and crisscrossing thresholds which divide and de-limit. Can we locate ourselves, *here*, outside a text (is that possible?) dangling, perhaps upside down, from the limb of the gallows tree, rem(a)inder of both crib and cradle, the coup de grâce and what follows, what falls, where mandrakes grow: a sheathed vulnerability, threatening and threatened: Trespassing! And these concatenated notes which (remain)der/remember, inscribe, and embed yet another imaginal, fictional reference as they outline and reanimate an infinitely netted and reticulated tissue of Text that began (where? here?) with the mark of The Tree: its roots and branches (and leaves) that sign a compulsive tranche-ference/recurrence<sup>11</sup> of the same, that reference the teleogenetic origi(a)nality of sin (unerasable trace and excess of a différance<sup>12</sup>), evolutionary progression, branching [ ... ]

## ALL ABO(A)RD

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial- out of profundity.

Nietzsche Contra Wagner

11. See Derrida on transference in psychoanalysis in *The Post Card*, pp. 499-521.

12. See Derrida's address on *différance* in *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 3-27.

## Re-Tracing The Frames, Borders, Edges and Margins of Derrida's De-Construction(s)

The finger which points to borders, edges and boundaries, points not away but to itself, to the "scratching"<sup>13</sup> on the very surface<sup>14</sup> of Text, the profoundest of surfaces where shimmering marks echo, setting to vibration the taut membrane of the simulacrum, engendering reverberations on both sides of the thin membrane of the tympanum.<sup>15</sup> This play around edges, this crossing of limits and borders, and the overflow and spillage [*débordement*] of texts beyond frames and boundaries,<sup>16</sup> is carefully articulated (as if one can be scrupulous and vigilant when it comes to playing with mutations and propensities that ring of the unconscious, that by definition thwart reason and must remain undermined and riddled with undecidables<sup>17</sup>) and moves in a

13. "Still *scratching*, I would like to write with both hands, and the one, as we did one day, would draw between your eyes and on your stomach, by pasting those little stars you had bought God knows where and that you had kept on without washing for several days" Letter of 9 September 1977 in *The Post Card*, p. 90.
14. Derrida's delight with sound, texture, etymologies, anagram, and cryptogram, verges on an *erotomania* of the word: "... and I write to you that I love the delicate levers which pass between the legs of a word, between a word and itself to the point of making entire civilizations seesaw" *The Post Card*, p. 78.
15. "We know that the membrane of the tympanum, a thin and transparent partition separating the auditory canal from the middle ear (the *cavity*), is stretched obliquely (*loxos*). Obliquely from above to below, from outside to inside, and from the back to the front. Therefore it is not perpendicular to the axis of the canal. One of the effects of this obliqueness is to increase the surface of impression and hence the capacity of vibration. It has been observed, particularly in birds, that precision of hearing is in direct proportion to the obliqueness of the tympanum. The tympanum squints" *Margins of Philosophy*, p. xv.
16. Derrida is endlessly at play with the semantic possibilities of edges and borders, especially in "Living On: Border Lines," where content and form (style) ply an inseparable double braid: "if we are to approach [*aborder*] a text, for example, it must have a *bord*, an edge" (p. 81). "What tack shall we take [*depuis quel bord*; lit., "from what side," "edge," "border," "shore" ... ] to translate the ambiguity of an in-other-words? I know, I am already in some sort of untranslatability. But I'll wager that will not stop the procession of one language into another [and *here* into still yet another], the massive movement of this procession, this cortège, over the border of another language, into the language of the other" (p. 77). The French word "*bord*" with its sense of "edge" and "overrun, "overflow," and "off to the side" (marginal), "on the brink" [*au borde de la tombe*] and "throw overboard," seem, like other Derridean appropriations (i.e., "supplement" and "hymen"), to have been waiting (offstage in the wings) for Derrida to put them on stage.
17. "Certain marks, shall we say ... that by *analogy* (I underline) I have called undecidables, that is unities of simulacrum, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever



natural strategy that Derrida has fortuitously chosen (or that has chosen him) in order to untie, unravel and undermine (but not obliterate) a sedimentary, dominant, and valorized way of thinking to which Derrida has given the epigraph "logocentrism."

Although Derrida's writing has primarily interrogated philosophic texts, nevertheless the thrust of his writing (and what has contributed to his importance and appeal in departments of English and Comparative Literature, especially in the United States) has been an overriding concern with language, specifically, the literary aspects of philosophy. Derrida planned a state doctorate in 1957 entitled *The Ideality of the Literary Object*, but never carried through his project. However, in 1980, an oral defense based on books that he had already published was finally held<sup>18</sup> and in the text of that defense (*The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations*<sup>19</sup>) Derrida emphatically marks his motivating interest: "For I have to remind you [his jury of examiners], somewhat bluntly and simply, that my most constant interest, coming before even my philosophical interest I should say, if this is possible, has been directed towards literature, towards that writing which is called literary."<sup>20</sup> Literary deconstruction (especially as practiced in the United States) is denigrated by its critics as mimicry, as an overly facile, and thus hollow (mis)appropriation (which, according to Derrida, would be an impossibility<sup>21</sup>) of Derrida's deconstructions. Nevertheless, "works that take into account the

leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (the *pharmakon* is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essential ... thus defined, the "undecidable" which is not contradiction in the Hegelian form of contradiction, situates, in a rigorously Freudian sense, the *unconscious* of philosophical contradiction, the unconscious which ignores contradiction to the extent that *contradiction belongs* [my italics] to the logic of speech, discourse, consciousness, presence, truth, etc." *Positions*, pp. 42-3, 101.

18. See Norris, *Derrida*, p. 12.

19. "The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations," in Alan Montefiore (ed.), *Philosophy in France Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

20. See Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

21. "Deconstruction in the singular cannot be simply "appropriated" by anyone or by anything. Deconstructions are the movements of what I have called "exappropriation." Anyone who believes they have appropriated or seen appropriated something like deconstruction in the singular is a priori mistaken, and something else is going on. But since deconstruction is always "something else," the error is never total or pure.

"If nevertheless there is indeed, to a certain extent, still very slight, a certain multiplication of practices that are deconstructive in style (research, writing, reading, teaching, publication, etc.) in the university, it would be necessary, before speaking of appropriation, to know if the system that seems to appropriate something is or is not modified by that which it believes it is appropriating. Even though I do not believe appropriation to be possible in general, I am not

deconstructive problematic or make reference to it in one manner or another are on the increase and are above all diversifying themselves in fields that are part not only of philosophy or of literary theory, but also of the social sciences, law, architecture etc."<sup>22</sup> As the dimension and proportions of this "movement" (deemed "terrorist obscurantism"<sup>23</sup> by its opponents) exponentially proliferates and quickly situates itself within the mainstream of literary critical strategy, we should be pleased those who desire passage but perhaps anticipate the difficulty of taking the first step [*fair un pas en avant*]- if we could find a channel of approach [*aborder*] or some stepping stones [*marchepied*] toward the texts that bear Derrida's signature. Or, shall we begin from the vast commentary, the gloss upon gloss of clinging vines, parasitic<sup>24</sup> cysts (and as Derrida repeatedly reminds us, all texts partake in the re(past) of iteration, repetition, and citation and are thus, by definition, parasitic, must this prove to be yet another one?) that, in their turn, offer themselves as host? Or shall we heed those who prefer us to first incorporate ourselves in the complete body of the philosophemes of logocentrism, slowly eating our way through ([e]scatological reve[a]lling)<sup>25</sup> assuring us that we must, as they too did, eat our way through before we can enter the inner sanctum, bow at the altar of the high priest and receive the sacred host.<sup>26</sup>

opposed to what you call "appropriation": it is inevitable that something resembling appropriation take place in order for the university, for example, to be affected by it. Otherwise, the only hope for deconstruction's remaining happily intact and pure would be for it to be utterly ignored, radically excluded or definitively rejected" *Limited Inc.*, pp. 141-2.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 139 and its footnote, p. 158.

24. For the full archive of "host" and "parasite" as well as Miller's position (in 1979) on Deconstruction, see J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," *Deconstruction and Criticism*, passim pp. 217-226.


25. The archive here is irresistible: *velare* [to cover], *velum* [the veil], the divine inspiration that betrays as it discloses, and "reveal" [*re + val*], the vale, the opening (of a window), revel, revelation: the wild apocalyptic celebration at the unveiling, etc.

26. Norris, in *Derrida* (1987), insists "that any adequate reading of Derrida will have to go by way of that prolonged, meticulous encounter with the texts of philosophy that has brought him [Derrida] to the point of suspending not annulling such time-honoured distinctions [the distinction between literature and philosophy]" (p. 22). It may be noted here, *Derrida*, which was written for "the Modern Masters series," procures for Norris the role of Derrida's masterful interpreter. However, mastery seems to turn relentlessly against itself: "No philosopher has done more to disown the idea that his writings embody some kind of masterly or authoritative wisdom. And the irony is compounded by the fact that Derrida goes out of his way to resist any kind of adequate treatment in a book like this" (pp. 14-15). Norris sets up a hierarchy within the Derridean canon by privileging earlier texts as more "philosophical," as the "more substantial and significant portion of his work," while dismissing Derrida's later works as

“literary” texts which simply exploit “opportunities for experiments in style” (p. 21).

Claiming to speak for Derrida he clothes his writing in the vestments of authority of the high priest: “Deconstruction is *not*, he [Derrida] insists, either a ‘method,’ a ‘technique’ or a species of ‘critique.’ Nor does it have *anything* to do with textual ‘interpretation’ of the kind developed to a high pitch of subtlety and refinement by literary critics from Coleridge to Eliot and beyond [precisely where does Derrida make such uncharacteristically, absolutist proclamations?] ... *Sometimes* Derrida disclaims all responsibility for such misreadings, regarding them as a kind of *déformation professionnelle*, the result of grafting deconstruction on to an activity (that of literary criticism) with its own very specific needs and requirements. This would then be a case of that powerful institutional pressure that works to *domesticate* new ideas and *reduce* them to the *stock-in-trade of a seasonal academic novelty*” [my italics] (p. 20). And continuing, “... Derrida has been read by those (mainly American) admirers who find in deconstruction a welcome pretext for breaking with ‘old’ New Critical ideas of hermeneutic tact and decorum. Nor can this response be written off simply as a case of willful misappropriation [sic!], since there are indeed texts of Derrida -- mainly those written with a view to translation for American readers -- which exploit such a rhetoric of *free play* and limitless interpretative license. But to take these texts at face value is, I shall argue, nonetheless a *failure* to engage fully and responsibly with Derrida’s arguments. What such readings have to ignore is the rigorous *work* of deconstruction that occupies the other, *more substantial and significant portion of his work*” (p. 20). After establishing this canonical hegemony with an almost unconscious persistence, Norris reminds us of “... Derrida’s repeated insistence: that deconstruction should not be content simply to invert certain cardinal oppositions (speech/writing, philosophy/literature) so as to leave the *inferior* term henceforth firmly established on top” (pp. 23-4).

Norris repeatedly displays an ambivalence, first repeating Derrida’s caution to avoid a one-sidedness but then, in the very next breath, either finding himself tripped up in precisely that trap, or shuffling about to excuse his apparent intellectual tottering: “Let us pursue this *via negativa* and ask more specifically just why deconstruction is neither ‘method’ on the one hand nor ‘interpretation’ on the other. In fact it is not too difficult *to come up with a concise formulation* that would make it sound very much like a *method*; and yet describe quite accurately some of Derrida’s most typical deconstructive moves. What these consist in, *very briefly*, is ... So there is at least a certain *prima facie* case for the claim that deconstruction is a *method* of reading with its own specific rules and protocols. And indeed, as we shall see, *the above brief account* of Derrida’s deconstructive strategy does provide at least a fair working notion of what goes on in his texts” [my italics] (p. 18-19). These citations are in no way an attempt to poke fun at someone who has been forced into a painfully contorted mimicry, who with one hand must pretend to imitate Derrida’s voice, a voice which speaks of the impossibility of simplistic conceptualization, while with the other hand stifling (but never quite so) his desire [*vouloir dire*] to disavow Derrida’s voice as he gropes about for some “concise formula.” Norris’ critique remains stalled in a perpetual stutter:

Derrida (says he) can’t, (but *look*)  can!

And, finally, the high priest: "... perhaps they are going to find this writing too adroit, virtuosic in the art of turning away, perhaps perverse in that it can be approached from everywhere and nowhere, certainly abandoned to the other, but given over to itself. Why, they ask themselves, incessantly let the destination divide itself? You too, perhaps, my love, you too question yourself, but this perversion first of all, I treat. It is not my own, it belongs to this writing that you, you alone, know me to be sick of. But the song of innocence, if you love me, you will *let it come to you, it will arrive for you.* [my italics]"<sup>27</sup> What kind of philosophical ideas dare we extract

More pertinent to our present discussion, these citations point to a sediment of interpretative practices – finding a center, discovering an overall theme, reduction, simplification, and categorization – which Derrida has labored to recirculate. Norris, first warns us against the “institutional pressure” to “domesticate” Derrida, then proceeds to compulsively stuff Derrida through the old-fashioned logocentric wringer. This is not to say that Derrida’s texts will not squash through such a (w)ringing but rather, that such a procedure is inadequate and thus inappropriate and can only result in mangling and desiccating Derrida’s style and flow. In fact, style and approach, that is, Derrida’s so-called *literary* quality is not merely an adornment, something “extrinsic,” something that can be pushed aside when discussing his work, but rather is the necessary strategic wedge which forces a sedimented logocentric structure to cleave open thus providing some space in which new and old formulations can recirculate. Norris’ *wish* to *suppress* the importance of Derrida’s writing style, leaves marks of omission. In Norris’ bibliographic listing, for example, *La Verite en pienture* is not included in the list of “principle references” but is relegated to the “selected” reading list. One wonders if Norris has, in fact, read and understood the interplay between *parergon/ergon* which Derrida dislocates throughout that text. It is also astounding that someone who is pretending to give us the authoritative Derrida can dispatch (though with characteristic ambivalence) Derrida’s masterwork, *Glas*, with just one brief sentence: “I shall not have very much to say about *Glas* since it is a work (like *Finnegans Wake*) that defeats the best efforts of descriptive analysis or summary” (p. 46). There is surely more than a touch of irony in Norris’ identification of the “more substantial and significant” elements in Derrida’s work. Norris here seems wholly out of step with an element basic to many of Derrida’s critical readings, i.e., paying attention to the marginal and peripheral. Excluded textual elements (footnotes, marginal notes) have often provided Derrida with the critical levers [*levier d’intervention*] whereby he is able to dislocate earlier contextualist readings. One would have expected Norris to be alert to the possibility that what he was excluding might have importance precisely for the reasons that led him to put them to the side. One wonders if it is possible for someone who has written four books on deconstruction to be suffering from such acute aporia. More probably, this side-stepping enables a reading tailored to Norris’ personal philosophic interests. If there has been (and it surely seems there has!) conscious misappropriation then Norris’ critical enterprise becomes highly suspect, and must bear a mark of engagement in an act of bad faith.

27. *The Post Card*, p. 223.

from such a text? This is not to say that one could not offer all sorts of speculations on the philosophical or psychological implications of such a text. But that would only produce another text (perhaps better, perhaps worse, but distinctly a text with a *différance*) perhaps in the step of a military march, [*pas redoublé*] rather than the gay step one assumes on going out for an evening of dancing. Derrida writes in a space that “tempts itself, tenders itself, attempts to keep itself at the point of the exhaustion of meaning. To risk meaning nothing is to start to play, and first to enter into the play of *différance* which prevents any word, any concept, any major enunciation from coming to summarize and to govern from the theological presence of a center the movement and textual spacing of differences.”<sup>28</sup> Derrida’s texts never arrive (*arriver*) but rather just go [*aller*]. They do not stop (interwoven (text)ures) though the pace or the speed [*allure*] varies. Traveling linearly, from a riveted point of beginning first ste(e)ping ourself in Derrida’s early writings and moving, step by step, book by book, toward a matured, culminating Derridean thinking and postulation in anticipation of arriving at some fixed and final conclusions trips us [*faux pas*] into a protocol of progressive development which redeposits the sedimental predicates and structural foundations which allows for a tracing back to some idealized origin thus returning [*revenir*] and remanding us to the whole complicitous system of implications that are bound and irresistibly tied to the logocentric center or point of origin.<sup>29</sup> So, I propose here that we purchase the round-trip ticket [*aller-retour*] and get going. Or, have we already begun?

I have proposed the round trip ticket. This promises that we will board, cross borders, and deboard at the same point. But then, there is the blink, and so an interval, a *différance*. All abo(a)rd.

## CROSSING THE BORDER

We head first across the borders of literature into its neighboring terrain of philosophy. Must we show our passports, our credentials, declare our purpose in enter-

28. *Positions*, p. 14.

29. “What we must be wary of, I repeat, is the metaphysical concept of history. This is the concept of history as the history of meaning, as we were just saying a moment ago: the history of meaning developing itself, producing itself, fulfilling itself. And doing so linearly, as you recall: in a straight or circular line ... The closure of metaphysics, above all, is not a circle surrounding a homogeneous field, a field homogeneous with itself on its inside, whose outside then would be homogeneous also. The limit has the form of always different faults, or fissures whose mark or scar is borne by all the texts of philosophy.

“The metaphysical character of the concept of history is not only linked to linearity, but to an entire *system* of implications (teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing, accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, or truth, etc.)” *Positions*, pp. 56-7.

ing the precincts of philosophy?<sup>30</sup> Derrida's deconstructive practices and strategies have sought to vigorously interrogate a repressed, dissimulated, and excluded problematic inherent in all language—be it philosophic or literary—of an “unmarginable surplus,” which, when demonstrated, sets in motion a force which skews and fissures conceptual boundaries and limits, dislocates and recirculates univocal meanings, and produces a general undermining and crumbling of walled, institutional structures. As Derrida has continually pointed out, deconstruction is concerned with a general displacement and de-structuring of all forms of organization<sup>31</sup>—institutional and conceptual—and so his predilection for images and tropes which naturally cohabit the lexical environs of borders, boundaries, and frames, edges and limits, centers and origins. There are also other “words” or “concepts,” which have become “focal points of economic condensation, sites of passage necessary for a very large number of marks, slightly more effervescent crucibles,” a list of words which have “no taxonomical closure, and even less [do] not constitute a lexicon,”<sup>32</sup> inscriptions which permit a circulation and movement

30. *Glas*, Derrida's masterwork of double writing, ruptures the boundaries between literature and philosophy by using “two texts, two hands, two glances, two listening posts.” In the left-hand column Derrida interrogates Hegel's conception of the family and family relations, and concatenates this with discussions of the Holy Family, Immaculate Conception as well as Hegel's personal family relations. Facing Hegel (the author of *The Philosophy of the Right*) in the right-hand column, the author of *Our-Lady-of-the-Flowers*, the thief and homosexual, Jean C  net and citations and discussions of his work that explode—amidst erections and ejaculations—etymological and phonological chains and resemblances, and play with the significance of *proper* names and signature. There is an unavoidable *parley* between columns: the sublime (philosophy) and the obscene (literature), property/theft, orthodoxy/heterodoxy, spirit/body, paternal/maternal; the spillage and resulting contamination/germination between boundaries and domains, images and ideologies of the most radical sort, produces the characteristically dislocating Derridean effect.

“Penetration is crossing a limit, that is (with) a *march* separating two opposed places. And which, however, naturally continue, like Czechoslovakia and Poland, resemble each other, regard each other, separated nonetheless by a frontier all the more mysterious, concealed in the crossing, because it is abstract, legal, ideal: ‘I passed, from Czechoslovakia into Poland, the frontier, it was noon, summertime. The ideal line ...,’ that is, the invisible, artificial, non-existent line, that you transgress without seeing, with a single step [*pzs*], in a limit instant like noon, no, that you do not pass presently but that you are going to pass, that you have passed...”  
*Glas*, p. 189.

31. “... deconstruction, as I have often had to insist, is not a discursive or theoretical affair, but a practico-political one, and it is always produced within the structures ... said to be institutional”  
*The Post Card*, p. 508.

32. *Positions*, p. 40.

betwixt and between the boundaries and limits of binary opposition, (i.e., trace, spacing, blank, supplement, *pharmakon*, margin-mark-march, hymen etc.).

Which side? Step back, step forward, quick now! In the blink-of-a-crossing which suspends and resituates opposition, we find ourselves, in one step [*d'un pas*], on the other side of the imaginary line that separates literature/philosophy, beauty/truth, *parergon/ergon*. Let us tour the grand monuments reading, on their inscribed columns carved out of the air, the epigraphic history of Western thought, the marks of logocentrism.<sup>33</sup>

The monuments are laid out conveniently in a ring with covered archways allowing passage from one to the other. Our attention is drawn first to a monument which we assume to be of central importance, as it looms immensely larger than the others, its outer ring of magnificent gold columns towering well over the rest. There are passage-ways between each pair of columns which allow worshipers (for this is surely some temple, some center of faith) entrance to an inner-sanctum (we are told, there is an interminable mirroring within of this outer set of columns and inner sanctum); inscribed on each column a circle with a mark at its center. The center of the center. The



## AT THE CENTER: UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR

Here then, the primary, originating source of a problematic. By tracing this sign and its wondrous condensation of philosophemes, we can perhaps, with a supreme economy, dispense with our grand tour.

The center as it appears in the history of all structures, not only functions “to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure

33. “Logocentrism” (a “centering” on the “Logos” of speech, reason, logic, the Word of God) is used by Derrida to mark the valorized first term of binary opposites produced by systems of thought structured on the notion of self-presence: being/nonbeing, identity/difference, and (what Derrida describes as the “first and foremost logocentric”) the opposition between speech/writing. For a more detailed discussion of Derridean deconstruction from Hegel to Heidegger see Gayatri Spivak’s introduction to *Of Grammatology*.

would limit what we might call the play of the structure.<sup>34</sup> The concept of a centered structure is grounded on an ambivalence which, as Derrida has pointed out, *both* wishes to fulfill *and* to repress a desire; here on the one hand, the desire for play and, on the other hand, a desire to repress the play, a desire for a "reassuring certitude which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude, anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset."<sup>35</sup> Fear of uncertainty and indecision: uncertainty as to the outcome of the struggle, uncertainty about what lies under the veil, under the covers, in the dark background of the mind; uncertainty and indecision as to where to go for help, for cover, for assurance; the uncertainty that comes when the mind chooses what the body rejects; our uncertainty as to what is "reality" and, in its most profound image, uncertainty about death. Thus there arises a need for reassurance, a desire for protection: a mother's arms, a familiar room, a temple or sanctuary, some belief or dogma to grasp onto, a center or ground on which to stand, lest one fall and drown in the dark bottomless pits of uncertainty and doubt.

From out of this center of uncertainty and ambivalence the radiating filiations of metaphysics have been spawned. "... a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix ... is the determination of Being as *presence*<sup>36</sup> in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos*, *archē*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, exist-

34. "Nevertheless, the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation for transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained *interdicted* (and I am using this word deliberately)" *Writing and Difference* pp. 278, 279.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
36. One must be reminded here that this "Being as presence" subsumes the "I" of the Cartesian *cogito*, the "I" of the "I am I," the originating factor which recognizes and validates itself by invoking the "I" which is present to itself in the very act of thinking, and which validates the meaning of its own utterances by an appeal to a presence in mind, i.e., a tautological appeal which insists that what one has in mind is, in fact, *what one has in mind*. For more on the "metaphysics of presence," see Culler, *On Deconstruction*, pp. 91-5.




ence, substance, subject) *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness. God, man and so forth.”<sup>37</sup>

Here, deposited in the “metaphors and metonymies” that radiate from the center one may chart all the tropological operations in the history of thought which are involved in any enterprise which has strategically sought to return, in idealization, to an origin or a priority. To begin, is to begin from out of a center (or better still, from out of the center of centers) which grounds itself on that which is “other,” external, and extrinsic. An idealization which returns strategically to a center, to a source, to a fountainhead, to an origin, is the metaphysical gesture *par excellence*. It is an easy stride from here to the idea of some absolute truth or reality (emanating from a source, issuing from God, arriving as divine logos, etc.), its mirroring or simulation in art (the parable of the cave) and then from there, just another step, and we are in the company of a host of binary, privileged oppositions: nature/art, reality/fiction, speech/writing, truth/*différance*, etc.

The yearning for a center, one discovers, is chained to all speculation and supposition which rests on foundations, fundamentals, first principles and causes, and which, concomitantly, invites an unconscious solicitation to privilege and thus valorize one side of a binary, the eye (“I”)<sup>38</sup> which looks out from an inside, which looks down from above. Here in this idealization of a center or origin, in this privileging of one side of an idealized boundary, is condensed the entire history of Western culture which might be read (has it not always been thus read?) as the Master Interpretation which speaks from behind all interpretations and glosses like the furtive hand of Plato which reaches out from behind Socrates’ back and performs some questionable double-handedness.<sup>39</sup> Here is the entire cloth of opposition in which Western culture—its art, philosophy, and literary criticism—has been draped and investitured: identity/difference, centrality/marginality, congruity/incongruity, authentic/mimetic, speech/writing, nature/art, etc. *Here* in the presence of presence *will have been* arrayed all the histories (that appeal and invoke this ideality) of sublime critical performances, the vast arsenal of encrypted

37. *Writing and Difference*, pp. 279-80.

38. “... incapable of putting itself onstage, pure consciousness therefore cannot give itself any image of itself? but this itself can be said only if, by means of an ancient and unperceived image, one already has made this consciousness into an eye  and the source into a spectator. In order to speak of the source, which remains interdicted, first it has had to be *turned*: by means of a trope, it must yield to being seen and yield to seeing. The trope does not first consist of speaking, but of seeing. And more precisely, of seeing the invisible, that which only is said, in order blindly to say the interdicted” *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 284.

39. See Derrida’s *The Post Card* for the picture of Plato and Socrates engaged in some three handed writing, and “Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination* where Derrida speculates on Plato’s *Phaedrus* and philosophy’s privileging and valorization of speech over writing.

unconscious strategies embedded in the very thought of the thought which have sought: to demonstrate by recourse to principles and fundamentals; to grasp some meaning by force of reason or through the providence of intuition; to make clear by casting a light; to show what is the case by a logical presentation of arguments; or to reveal some truth by ripping away a veil. Here also can be traced all the grand biologic and organic critical models (the *logos* indebted to the father), the genealogy of reason and the semenating thread which father's our thought, engendering and animating our thinking.

Dazzled and dazed by our encounter with presence there is the impulse to retreat back across the border, perhaps into more familiar terrain but, I dare say, "I have forgotten my umbrella."

### THE FORGOTTEN UMBRELLA

What's holding us up? Get going [*aller*]! Did we not purchase the round-trip ticket, have you forgotten your promise ... the borders, the boundaries, ... we seem to be stuck! And this talk of the forgotten umbrella? Why, we seem to be idling, gibbering, get on with it, get on with the narrative, present *The Conclusion*, the final curtain, and get through with it!

(First, the forgotten umbrella. Perhaps an esoteric citation (but, then again, *there was no footnote*). Or perhaps, "I have forgotten my umbrella" contains a more or less secret code, a cryptogram only accessible to me and those of my friends in the know. But what if there really is no meaning here, what if I was only pretending to say something? In fact, it is even possible that this sentence was not mine, that it was raining and the topographer had indeed forgotten his umbrella and simply added that sentence in mischievous play. But reading, which is to relate to writing, is to perforate an horizon or hermeneutic veil and so we might here pursue a psychoanalytic decoding, the umbrella's symbolic figure is well known, or supposedly so. For example, the hermaphroditic spur of a phallus which is modestly enfolded in its veils, an organ which is at once aggressive and apotropaic, threatening and/or threatened, and so perhaps this aphorism is of some significance, and it epigrammatically summates an entire philosophy, perhaps the author's [which author Freud? Derrida? mine? and where does it summate?].

There is no end to the parodying play with meaning of any piece of writing which should remain forever secret, secret not because it has some secret, but rather because of the *possibility* that it might *only be pretending* to be simulating some hidden truth within its folds. And even if I had meant to say something, might it not be just that *limit to the will to mean* which is always divided, always in question. And suppose further that in some monstrous way the totality which I (so to speak) have presented thus far is also an erratic, even parodying, graft. What if this totality, *all* that we are

saying and have said, should eventually be of the same sort as an “I have forgotten my umbrella”?)<sup>40</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

(Here, a throw of the dice and a chance inte(r)mission, a fortuitous folding and squaring into acts and parts. A scission thrown into the bargain. Y marks the disseminating, branching crossroads, splayed, and spread-eagled, acts and scenes of primal separation—“scratching ... And beneath *that* [ ... ]”—possibilities rolled on their heads. To come: fictional rites of passage (and omissions), Being at the Limits, some blows (*coups de style*), before enter the “*entre*,” (the membrane that stands between desire and fulfillment), and then, debo(a)rding. Yet another promise of beginnings [*aller*] dys-time (it will have been) under the umbrella, at the borderline of footnote 40 (*as if* it could have been otherwise), *Toute Pensé emit un Coup de Dés.*)

40. This incision or graft between *bo(a)rding* and *debo(a)rding* (which is not apparent in the thickness of the text), is enclosed between the marks of parenthesis, which separates text from itself, thus allowing for a disarticulation. “The heterogeneity of different writings is writing itself, the graft. It is numerous from the first or it *is not*...” Layer upon layer, graft upon graft, re-marked. Scratching away the textual matter, concealed beneath the epidermis, a second writing. And beneath *that*, ... Here we play out one more time Derrida’s parodying graft on the words, “I have forgotten my umbrella” which were found, isolated in quotation marks, among Nietzsche’s unpublished manuscripts. See *Spurs*, pp. 123-39.

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