

# SCE REPORTS 8

DECONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM:

DIRECTIONS

FALL, 1980

"DECONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM: DIRECTIONS"

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## FOREWORD

Some of the best minds of the present generation have taken up deconstruction. Who are these people?

Several groups comprise the "corporation" of deconstruction. First, there is a loose band of French intellectuals, associated in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the journal TEL QUEL, including most prominently Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva. All in alphabetical order. Second, a stellar enclave of American literary critics, residing at Yale University since the early 1970s, encompasses Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. Teaching regularly at Yale since the middle 1970s as a visiting professor, Jacques Derrida binds these two companies. Third, a klatch of young French intellectuals, linked with Derrida during the late 1970s in connection with the Parisian publishing house Flammarion, adds to the group Sylviane Agacinski, Sarah Kofman, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy. Fourth, a small cadre of American literary scholars, identified since the mid 1970s with the journal BOUNDARY 2, involves Paul Bové, Joseph Riddel and William V. Spanos. A number of other ranking intellectuals, connected with one or more of these groups or people, brings to the "movement" Gilles Deleuze, Eugenio Donato, Rodolphe Gasché, Barbara Johnson, Jacques Lacan, Jean-François Lyotard, Jeffrey Mehlman, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. The list of "interested parties" is not nearly complete. One could add dedicated translators, vehement opponents, emerging British devotees, and still others. Positively or negatively, many minds are taken with deconstruction.

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As a scholarly group, the "deconstructors" exhibit professional ties with or serious interests in phenomenology, structuralism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and semiology. Any particular deconstructor may devote herself to one, several or all of these fields. In any case, the major forerunners are Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure and Heidegger. And the leading contemporary is unquestionably Jacques Derrida; his works constitute the canonical texts. In America the major figure is Paul de Man. The most unforgiving purists might (and lately do) excommunicate numerous pretenders and piddlers, but Derrida and de Man remain singularly above any heresy or vague suspicion.

When in the mid 1970s deconstruction as a movement expanded, taking in new adherents and numerous opponents, it reached a crisis stage, which has continued up to the present moment. The "doctrines" appear in danger of dilution or distortion. Surprised, shocked or disturbed, the early "founders" sometimes express inchoate regret or knowing pessimism at this turn of events. The charm of their churning emerges in a snippy nostalgia.

Coming into the onrush of deconstruction in 1976, I was exhilarated to find an energetic alternative to pallid formalism tinged with historicism, which my pooped-out teachers had all more or less propounded. What seemed a period of decay to the "founders" of deconstruction struck me as a time of intellectual frenzy and new freedom. I have borne such sentiment for five years now. In this I seem one part Miranda and one part Pollyanna. Altogether too youthful and naive. Withal too cute. A five-year smile. Yet the spread of deconstruction remains good news to me.

Charged with organizing the fifth annual joint Discussion Session of the Modern Language Association

and the Society for Critical Exchange, I decided to concentrate the meeting on "Deconstructive Criticism: Directions." I convinced my colleagues on the Organizing Committee, then set out to recruit Barbara Johnson, a young Yale deconstructor, to deliver the main paper. After Professor Johnson agreed, I invited Joseph Riddel and William Spanos to serve on the panel as respondents. Meanwhile, I sent out through the MLA NEWSLETTER a nationwide call for proposals on the announced topic. From the numerous proposals received, three were selected: Jerry Aline Flieger, Jerrold Hogle and Andrew Parker all generously offered to contribute written responses to Barbara Johnson's position paper. Finally, I enlisted Richard Barney to put together a Selected Bibliography of Deconstructive Criticism, which complements existing and forthcoming lists. All these materials--the main paper, the responses and the bibliography--make up Number 8 of the SCE REPORTS.

Taking up the topic "Deconstructive Criticism: Directions," Barbara Johnson begins with the continuing crisis: the diminishment of deconstruction through dilution and dogmatism. She suggests a strategy, a tactics of ignorance, to keep vital the analytical energy of deconstruction. For his part Joseph Riddel questions whether or not deconstruction, as rigorously operated by Derrida and de Man, has actually spread beyond a very few other practitioners. Along the way Riddel portrays several dominant modes of reduction that turn deconstruction into a domesticated systematics. Attacking deconstruction frontally, William Spanos dramatizes Derridean practice as a falling off from Heideggerian destruction. He characterizes deconstructive interpretation as an ahistorical and formalist critical mode, doomed to rapid institutionalization and unavoidable collaboration with technocratic culture.

In her response, Jerry Aline Flieger extends the project of deconstruction by grafting its "strange logic" onto the Freudian-Lacanian logic of the Unconscious. In doing so, she demonstrates a striking consonance between the "analytics" of deconstruction and of contemporary psychoanalysis. Disturbed by Johnson's "strategy of ignorance," Jerrold Hogle problematizes the ubiquitous desire-to-say or will-to-meaning--the programmatic intentionality--which drives all deconstructive analysis. He urges inquiry into the suspicious "rational" discursive practices of deconstruction and into its increasingly complacent and predictable lust for sure success. Taking off from Johnson, Andrew Parker examines the ambiguous relationship of Marxist discourse to Derridean deconstruction. Rather than confirming the apparent "absence" of Marx in Derrida's texts, Parker situates the Marxist problematics, an encrypted "thematics," somewhere within the ego of the deconstructionist consciousness.

In its most virile and virulent form deconstruction shows itself more metacritical than critical: its objects of analysis are critical beliefs and practices. When it turns away from metacriticism, all involved--insiders and outsiders, friends and foes, prophets and pests--get suspicious or uneasy. And sometimes plain nasty. The dynamics of such disturbance emerge variously and unconsciously in most discussions of deconstruction. The essays in this issue testify one after another to this curious drama. The issue of the "meta" needs to register on the record. Questions of lineage, pedigree and rights remain. A disputed future looms. Problems of inheritance and fortune. Tax us.

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#### NOTHING FAILS LIKE SUCCESS

As soon as any radically innovative thought becomes an -ism, its specific groundbreaking force diminishes, its historical notoriety increases, and its disciples tend to become more simplistic, more dogmatic, and ultimately more conservative, at which time its power becomes institutional rather than analytical. The fact that what is loosely called deconstructionism is now being widely institutionalized in the United States seems to me both intriguing and paradoxical, but also a bit unsettling, although not for the reasons advanced by most of its opponents. The question I shall ask is the following: how can the deconstructive impulse retain its critical energy in the face of its own success? What can a reader who has felt the surprise of intellectual discovery in a work by Jacques Derrida or Paul de Man do to remain in touch not so much with the content of the discovery but with the intellectual upheaval of the surprise?

I would like to begin by examining briefly two types of accusations commonly directed against deconstruction: the literarily conservative, which accuses deconstruction of going too far, and the politically radical, which accuses deconstruction of not going far enough. The first type comes from well-established men of letters who attempt to defend their belief in the basic communicability of meanings and values against what is said to be the deconstructionists' relativism, nihilism, or self-indulgent love of meaninglessness. What I shall try to determine

is not whether misunderstanding is a mere accident or the inevitable fate of reading, but rather what the relation is between deconstruction and the type of logic on which these opponents' accusations of relativism and solipsism are based. Consider the following sentences taken from well-known critiques of deconstruction:

In revisionist criticism the first consequence of calling discourse itself into question is the proposition that all criticism amounts to misreading, and thus one reading is as legitimate as another.<sup>1</sup>

But if all interpretation is misinterpretation, and if all criticism (like all history) of texts can engage only with a critic's own misconstruction, why bother to carry on the activities of interpretation and criticism?<sup>2</sup>

In the absence of any appeal to such a coercive reality to which the plurality of subjectivities can be referred, all perspectives become equally valid.<sup>3</sup>

Certainty and piety of all kinds are systematically undermined in favor of a universal relativism of values and judgment. Just as the revisionists are led to reduce the act of criticism to a given critic's subjective preference, so do professors relegate judgment of all sorts to the students' subjective preferences.<sup>4</sup>

What Deconstruction urges is not a new system of thought but skepticism toward all the old ways, which are construed as really only one way.<sup>5</sup>

The logic behind such utterances is the logic of binary opposition, the principle of non-contradiction, often thought of as the very essence of Logic as such. The arguments can be reduced to the following logical formulas:

1. If all readings are misreadings, then all readings are equally valid.

2. If there is no such thing as an objective reading, then all readings are based on subjective preferences.

3. If there is no absolute truth, then everything is relative.

4. To criticize is to be skeptical; to put in question is to dismiss.

In other words, if not absolute, then relative; if not objective, then subjective; if you are not for something, you are against it. Now, my understanding of what is most radical in deconstruction is precisely that it questions this basic logic of binary opposition, but not in a simple, binary, antagonistic way. Consider the following passage from Derrida's Dissemination:

It is thus not simply false to say that Mallarmé is a Platonist or a Hegelian. But it is above all not true. And vice versa.<sup>6</sup>

Instead of a simple "either/or" structure, deconstruction attempts to elaborate a discourse that says neither "either/or", nor "both/and" nor even "neither/nor", while at the same time not totally abandoning these logics either. The very word "deconstruction" is meant to undermine the either/or logic of the opposition "construc-

tion/destruction". Deconstruction is both, it is neither, and it reveals the way in which both construction and destruction are themselves not what they appear to be. Deconstruction both opposes and redefines; it both reverses an opposition and reworks the terms of that opposition so that what was formerly understood by them is no longer tenable. In the case of the much publicized opposition between speech and writing, deconstruction both appears to grant to writing the priority traditionally assigned to speech and redefines "writing" as différance so that it can no longer simply mean "marks on a page" but can very well also refer to that aspect of spoken speech that is normally occulted by traditional notions of what speech is. In the case of the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, deconstruction seems to locate the moment of meaning-making in the non-objectivity of the act of reading rather than in the inherent givens of a text, but then the text seems already to anticipate the reading it engenders, and at the same time the reader's "subjectivity" is discovered to function something like a text, that is, something whose conscious awareness of meaning and desire is only one aspect of a complex unconscious signifying system which determines consciousness as only one of its effects. To imply that subjectivity is structured like a machine, as Paul de Man does in his essay "The Purloined Ribbon", is both to subvert the opposition between subject and object (since a machine is considered to be an object) and to displace the traditional notion of what a subject is. If the original opposition between subject and object corresponds, as Gerald Graff would have it, to the opposition between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, what deconstruction shows is that there is something else involved

that puts in question the very separability of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, something that continuously generates effects that can be explained by neither. Freud called this something the death instinct, but this death instinct is to be understood as what ceaselessly escapes the mastery of understanding and the logic of binary opposition by exhibiting some "other" logic one can neither totally comprehend nor exclude. It is the attempt to write with this "other" logic that produces the appearance of obscurity in many deconstructive texts. Any statement that affirms while using a logic different from the logic of binary opposition will necessarily not conform to binary notions of "clarity".

Hence, if deconstruction focuses on the act of reading rather than on the objective meaning of a text, this in no way entails any greater degree of self-indulgence than the belief in conventional values does -- on the contrary, at its best it undoes the very comforts of mastery and consensus that underlie the illusion that objectivity is situated somewhere outside the self. Thus, the incompatibility between deconstruction and its conservative detractors is an incompatibility of logics. While traditionalists say that a thing cannot be both A and not-A, deconstructors open up ways in which A is necessarily but unpredictably already different from A.

Now we come to the second type of critique of deconstruction, which accuses it of not living up to its own claims of radicality, of working with too limited a notion of textuality, and of applying its critical energy only within an institutional structure that it does not question

and therefore confirms.<sup>9</sup> This charge, which judges deconstruction against its own claims to an unflagging critical stance, is one which deconstruction must in fact continuously make against itself. Any discourse that is based on the questioning of boundary lines must never stop questioning its own. To reserve the deconstructive stance solely for literary criticism without analyzing its institutional underpinnings and economic and social relations with the world is to decide where the boundaries of the very critique of boundaries lie. To read a text apart from the historical and biographical conditions and writings that participate in its textual network is to limit a priori the kinds of questions that can be asked. Why, therefore, do some deconstructors tend to avoid going beyond the limits of the literary text?

There are, I think, three reasons for this unwarranted restriction. The first is entailed by the current institutionalization of deconstruction: the more it becomes entrenched as the self-definition of some literary critics in their opposition to other literary critics, the more it will resist problematizing the institutional conditions of literary criticism as such. The other two reasons spring out of an oversimplified understanding of certain aspects of deconstructive theory. To say, as Derrida has said, that there is nothing outside the text is not to say that the reader should read only one piece of literature in isolation from history, biography, etc. It is to say that nothing can be said to be not a text, subject to the différance, the non-immediacy, of presence or meaning. Even the statement that there is nothing outside the text cannot be taken to be the absolute certainty it appears to be, since it

has to include itself in its own consequences. If there is nothing outside the text, then how can any locus of research or action be considered a priori as illegitimate?

The final reason for the conservatism of some forms of deconstruction is more pervasive: in questioning the nature of knowledge and causality, deconstruction has often given nothing but negative help in the attempt to read literature or philosophy with history and biography. In saying that history is a fiction, a text subject to ideological skewings and mystifications, and that it cannot be relied upon as a source of objective knowledge, deconstructive theory sometimes seems to block all access to the possibility of reading explicitly "referential" documents in conjunction with literary or speculative texts. Yet in practice, we find Derrida drawing upon Freud's life and letters in his analysis of Beyond the Pleasure Principle (in La Carte Postale), and DeMan often beginning an article with a historical account that in some way doubles the rhetorical problem he is about to discuss. The question, then, is how to use history and biography deconstructively, how to seek in them not answers, causes, explanations, or origins, but new questions and new ways in which the literary and the non-literary texts alike can be made to read and rework each other.

I would now like to outline a few general remarks about how to avoid becoming too comfortable in the abyss. To go back to the original objection that "if all readings are misreadings then all readings are equally valid," how is it possible to maintain that some readings are better than others in a way that cannot be entirely reduced to a binary opposition? Since it is obvious that



no deconstructor actually thinks all readings are equally valid, what kind of evaluation does deconstruction permit?

The sentence "all readings are misreadings" does not simply deny the notion of truth. Truth is preserved in vestigial form in the notion of error. This does not mean that there is, somewhere out there, forever unattainable, the one true reading against which all others will be tried and found wanting. Rather, it implies 1) that the reasons a reading might consider itself right are motivated and undercut by its own interests, blindnesses, desires, and fatigue, and 2) that the role of truth cannot be so simply eliminated. Even if truth is but a fantasy of the will to power, something still marks the point from which the imperatives of the not-self make themselves felt. To reject objective truth is to make it harder to avoid setting oneself up as an arbitrary arbiter. Therefore, the one imperative a reading must obey is that it follow, with rigor, what puts in question the kind of reading it thought it was going to be. A reading is strong, I would therefore submit, to the extent that it encounters and propagates the surprise of otherness. The impossible but necessary task of the reader is to set himself up to be surprised.

No methodology can be relied on to generate surprise. On the contrary, it is usually surprise that engenders methodology. Derrida brings to his reader the surprise of a non-binary, undecidable logic. Yet comfortable undecidability needs to be surprised by its own conservatism. My emphasis on the word "surprise" is designed to counter the idea that a good deconstructor must constantly put his own enterprise into

question. This is true, but it is not enough. It can lead to a kind of infinite regress of demystification, in which ever more sophisticated subtleties are elaborated within an unchanging field of questions.

How, then, can one set oneself up to be surprised by otherness? Obviously, in a sense, one cannot. Yet one can begin by transgressing one's own usual practices, by indulging in some judicious time-wasting with what one does not know how to use, or what has fallen into disrepute. What the surprise encounter with otherness should do is lay bare some hint of an ignorance one never knew one had. Much has been made of the fact that "knowledge" cannot be taken for granted. But perhaps rather than simply questioning the nature of knowledge, we should today reevaluate the static, inert concept we have always had of ignorance. Ignorance, far more than knowledge, is what can never be taken for granted. If I perceive my ignorance as a gap in knowledge instead of as an imperative that changes the very nature of what I think I know, then I do not truly experience my ignorance. The surprise of otherness is that moment when a new form of ignorance is suddenly activated as an imperative. If the deconstructive impulse is to retain its vital, subversive power, we must therefore become ignorant of it again and again. It is only by forgetting what we know how to do, by setting aside the thoughts that have most changed us, that those thoughts and that knowledge can go on making accessible to us the surprise of an otherness we can only encounter in the moment of suddenly discovering we are ignorant of it.

## NOTES

1. Peter Shaw, "Degenerate Criticism", Harper's, October, 1979, p. 97.
2. M.H.Abrams, "The Deconstructive Angel", Critical Inquiry, Spring 1977, p. 434.
3. Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 39.
4. Shaw, op. cit., p. 93.
5. Denis Donoghue, "Deconstructing Deconstruction", The New York Review of Books, vol 27, N<sup>o</sup> 10, p. 37.
6. Jacques Derrida, La Dissémination, Paris: Seuil, 1972, p. 235. My English translation of this text, entitled Dissemination, is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press.
7. Paul de Man, "The Purloined Ribbon", Glyph 1, 1977.
8. Op. cit., p. 65.
9. Cf., for example, Jeffrey Mehlman, "Teaching Reading", Diacritics (winter 1976); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Michael Ryan, "Anarchism Revisited", Diacritics (summer 1978); John Brenkman, "Deconstruction and the Social Text", Social Text 1 (winter 1979); and Edward Said, "Reflections on Recent American 'Left' Literary Criticism", Boundary 2, vol. 8, N<sup>o</sup> 1, Fall 1979.

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What Is Deconstruction, and Why Are They Writing  
All Those Graff-ic Things About It?

Criticism (re: literary) has become a serious, if not outright dour, business, the academician's hedge against inflation of the word. And any attempt to re-touch it (recall Mallarmé's mocking phrase about those who touched verse) is liable to arrest by the gendarmes of genre. Woe betide the pun-gent, for he threatens high seriousness. Worse awaits him if he walks amid the alien corn of French thought. One need not fish for examples of this touchiness which some want to call a "crisis." Criticism today (here? now?) is in danger, we are told, from laxness in the immigration laws. The deconstructive element has invaded the frontiers of grammar.

In her concise, economical response to today's most rancorous episode in the "crisis" (some natives call it the double-crossing?) of American humanism, Barbara Johnson offers the decisive term for the "derangements" which, many protest, have infiltrated literary discourse: the "other," or the "surprise" encounter of the "other." Professor Johnson does not expand her observations upon the radical significance of this other, perhaps because it is altogether familiar (even in the form of the unfamiliar or "uncanny") to the continental discourse with which she is more easily conversant than most of us. Yet, the "other" is precisely what we have always thought our discourse dealt with--and "dealt" with effectively, instrumentally, even when we had to recognize the "other" in the existentialist sense of the "absurd." In other words, the "binary logic" which Professor Johnson demonstrates to be the reigning and privileged

structure of literary discourse (whether one thinks of this as the discourse of literature or the discourse on literature), has always been able to account for the "other" within an orderly movement --whether in the sublative movement of a dialectical triad, the regathering and return of historical and/or narrative becoming and narrative closure, the intentional positioning of the imagination or consciousness, or the structural stability of diacritical signs.

In regard to our classical notion of "literature," the literary form contains the "other," orders and displays, expresses or represents, the uncanny; and the critical reading circumscribes the boundaries of the literary text, its other, with its own proximal logic or boundary. This binarism, as Johnson argues, works because it produces and reproduces the expected hierarchy of relationships, the subordination of one term to another, and one text to another, a structure in which the lesser term often "turns out" (both in the sense of *Altheia* and trope, reveal and conceal) to be a completing and clarifying addition. And it is the task of criticism, this logic of criticism, to resist this addition, this logic of doubling the text and putting it within frames, enfolding the genre literature within the genre criticism--it is the task of criticism to resist its addition from becoming a "dangerous supplement," as the language of deconstruction reminds. Thus, literary criticism must stage and frame literature as its other by privileging the unity of the literary discourse, or by marking how literature is at once the "other" of "reality" and its "proper" representation or "meaning." Criticism, then, as W. K. Wimsatt once augured, would be an adequate, "approximate" discourse of understanding of/on literature, the discursive translation of an "autotelic" or self-reflexive totality, a "concrete

universal," into manageable terms. You will recall Wimsatt's (literal) simile of criticism's formulaic: "In each poem there is something (an individual intuition--or a concept) which can never be expressed in other terms. It is like the square root of 2 or like pi, which cannot be expressed in rational numbers, but only as their limit. Criticism of poetry is like 1.414 ... or 3.1416 ..., not all it would be, yet all that can be had and very useful."<sup>1</sup> Criticism, then, marks its own limit as a logical boundary to that which overflows the limit. Literature's pure inside and inexhaustible depth incarnates the truth or "universal" or has a "special relation to the world of universals."<sup>2</sup>

Now, it is this threat of criticism to overrun its limit and to contaminate the "literary" space, which, according to Johnson, motivates the reactive hostility of American criticism to foreign imports. Deconstruction is read as the anarchy of discourse which threatens to undo the *archē* or presence (universal) of the Work so necessary to justify the "usefulness" of criticism. I will avoid evoking the discourse of the parasite (para-site) here; but will interject an aside on the rhetoricity of Harold Bloom, which is often indiscriminately attacked for imitating the unbridled behavior of deconstruction and violating the generic limit of criticism, arguing instead for literature's as well as criticism's intertextuality, or simply that the two are never fully separable because of their topological nature.

What then of this "deconstruction" which threatens to displace literature with discourse, and thus not only, as Johnson notes, expose literature to relativistic commentary but, what is worse, make it so relativistic that it cannot

relate its "presence," its unity of form, intention, meaning? Johnson is correct to note that part of the problem may be traced to the fear of the "import," of the strange, though she seems to agree with the conservative that deconstruction in the United States is an "-ism" and that any translation of it or transaction with it ideologizes it. Or then again, since she doesn't want to offend the critical left, does not ideologize it enough, thereby turning it into a conservative "method" or "-ism, a kind of "fate of mis-reading," as it were. She is no doubt correct to say that "deconstruction" as practical criticism is as much victimized by its friends as mis-represented by its enemies, the former being those who appropriate "it" (whatever it is) as a mode of reading which produces what the latter condemn as predictable exercises, void of significance because they prate of the significance of the void. (Why is it that these new ideologues are always, as Denis Donoghue churlishly asks in the essay Johnson quotes from --asks in the spirit of humanism's need to "believe" in fictions it knows not to be true, as Wallace Stevens might have and did say--why must the arbiters of critical law be so quick to indict the graduate students or the young professoriate as epigones of "graphology"? What of the humanist epigones of "Graff-ology," which is always already epigonism? Why are those like Donoghue, who posture from the sinecure of humanistic "chairs" and from the ideological forum of liberal reviews which have more principal than principle, so quick to attack the avatars of deconstruction for engineering a new "elite"?<sup>3</sup>)

I am not altogether certain what Johnson means by the "success" of deconstruction, or whether it has become an "-ism," except as it is misconstrued by those whom it threatens. Just as I am not at all convinced that it is practiced (as if it were a practice) with the consistency that allows

friends and enemies alike to identify it as a "method," one among others, of that genre we call literary criticism. True enough, it is scaring the hell out of a lot of people, but they are about as clear about what scares them as they are about the monstrous "great beast" of Yeats. American criticism fears "seminal adventures." Perhaps "deconstruction" belongs exclusively to Derrida, and to a few of his philosophical acolytes. Surely as a form of literary criticism we see it in this country in its decisive form only in the "readings" of Paul de Man, and some younger comparatists. But it is time to recognize that Derrida simply did not invent a method for literary criticism, and that any identification of deconstruction as a mode of reading has to mark what can and cannot be appropriated, grafted, translated, and adapted to regional strategies. In other words, as Rodolph Gasché has shown, in what remains the most brilliant and precise exposition of the question of "Deconstruction as Criticism,"<sup>4</sup> while deconstruction evolves from philosophical questions, it is not a derivative of a philosophical system, but inhabits that system as a crux, as literature indeed inhabits philosophy and threatens its coherence or self-reflexivity. Deconstruction "-ism-ed," then, is not deconstruction, and something else must have had its "success."

Still, one must ask if there has been so much ideologizing of the strategy (and here I use strategy in opposition to "method," though even strategy has its ideological tinge) as Johnson insists. Certainly the reactionaries, and Graff's work is a reductive example, contain the question by turning what they understand of deconstruction --having turned it first into a "buzz" word--into a series of summary ontological statements, and

then denouncing those statements as illogical. This seems to be Graff's way of reading anything, not simply philosophy, or philosophically oriented essays, deconstructive or otherwise, and it is characteristic of the American way of applying philosophy rather than reading it. As Johnson shows, these "strict constructionists" (and this is, after all, a term of political rhetoric) of American criticism understand discursive texts to make "truth" statements as well as "value" judgments which are at the same time "useful" and limited. One has only to follow Graff's picky way through Of Grammatology, waiting for the sentence that seems to cohere into dogmatic assertion, or what he thinks is a coherent statement about incoherence, to understand why so many think of deconstruction as an up-to-date nihilism.<sup>5</sup>

Johnson's analysis of the present controversy, of the American dilution, of the dangerous conservatism of a strategy becoming an "-ism," could not be more to the point, though one wishes she might have tried to respond to the new left ideologues who want to appropriate "deconstruction" for a sortie beyond the text or want to resurrect a dialectical "way" out of the abyss of the "text" and the conservatism they (and Johnson) fear will end in what Foucault called a stale pedagogy. There is no time to take up the question here except to point out Gasché's answer once again, that such concerns begin by literalizing and materializing the notion of the text, depriving it of the suppleness deconstruction had found, and thereby deceive us into thinking that such leaps, beyond the question of language and the play of signifiers, are easily made. This binds us to the fact that deconstruction, rather than confining itself to the textual crypt, has been a rigorous exploration of all textual enclosures (and of the way all systems are composed as texts) and a marking

of their limits.

Considered strictly as literary criticism, then, the strategy of deconstruction produces something of an anomaly. If we understand literary criticism as a form of commentary or analysis in which a discursive text addresses a pure text, then deconstruction can only be understood as an intervention into and disruption of that classical hierarchy, or an analytic of criticism. There seems to me a two-fold problem not addressed by Johnson, for reasons enough, but which must be considered in any assessment of the "fate of deconstruction" (so different yet so like a "fate of reading"). The first I have previously mentioned in regard to the question of ideological expropriation, or the tendency to import a strategy as a "method." The second touches on the question of what this strategy produces when it is grafted onto the American critical logic. In part both questions touch on how we have exploited a strategy that was derived from philosophy and reinscribed into philosophy as an internal critique--a strategy, then, best understood in terms of the Derridean title "Marges de la philosophie" or that kind of commentary which interrupts within the margins of texts, deploying and manipulating the grounding concepts of the text in a way that exposes their archi-textural or fabricated nature. The European practice of deconstruction, therefore, is not simply another method, amending, correcting, and systematizing earlier methods derived from a history or system of thought. Rather it is a practice which functions as athletic critique, a practice which questions the very basis of "method" and exposes the subterfuges by which a methodology establishes its consistency, coherence, and authority. It therefore cannot even be called an anti-method or a nihilism, no matter how it works at disturbing

and undermining fixed concepts, any more than it can be expected to produce another and superior method.

Yet, when deconstruction tries to describe its own practice, or to account for its own methodology by remaining self-conscious of its maneuvers, it can only, as Johnson reminds us, expose its own limits as the limit of method. When, therefore, we read in Derrida what seems to be his own discourse on his method, we may be deceived into thinking his description of the strategy of reversal and intervention to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, and simply a negative dialectics. The reversal is read as a counter-method or malicious negation, and the intervention as a relativizing of all reading. Now, the strategy of reversal and intervention is not in itself easily understood in the descriptive or programmatic language which deconstruction has to borrow from methodology (or metaphysics), and there is no time here to take up the intricate rhetorical maneuvers which allow deconstruction to avoid the pitfalls and pratfalls of what we ordinarily understand as criticism: a critique which explains the text in the mood which Derrida calls "doubling the commentary" or denounces it as a failure of unity, either formal or symbolic.

Gasché, in the essay previously mentioned, has described the deconstructive strategy as the locating of a dominant, privileged, or master term or concept (in a literary text, say, a symbol or image cluster which orients all the others; in a philosophical text, the apparent governing concept), then re-marking the doubleness, ambivalence, and potential incoherence and non-sense of the grounding term/concept/figure. This may also include, as in much of Derrida's work, the uncovering of key figures which the text itself has

relegated to its margins and effaced. The re-marking deprivileges (or reverses) the figures (in the manner in which an erasure allows the trace of the figure to become more evident), but then doubles the emphasis. The erasure is therefore reinscribed into the work as a part of the critical commentary. The originally privileged figure returns as a ghost to undo itself, undermining its own archaic and archeological privilege. The reinscription disrupts the method of reading but produces, rather than a textual void, a heterogeneity of readings, of meanings, that a logical commentary can no longer order or contain.

Thus Derrida in "Parergon," his essay on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, and by extension on Kant's "aesthetics" as a crucial mediate region in his philosophical system, isolates and re-marks the curious yet central emphasis in Kant's canon of a notion like boundary, border, margin, frame, or that which allows us to distinguish and discriminate the categories of thought as genre or to move in an orderly and economic way from one generic field to the other.<sup>6</sup> Like so many other terms in the history of philosophy--which Derrida finds structurally necessary to maintain the binary differences between inside and outside, work and world, self and other, and so on--the notion of "parergon," which seems confined to Kant's discussion of aesthetics (working in such a way as to separate artistic space off from what it represents) is first re-marked in its incoherence (is the frame outside the work? is it an ornamental border or does it enhance the inside of which it is not integral, etc.?), and then is reinscribed into the discourse on aesthetics in a way to put its founding concepts in question. It therefore disrupts the orderly discourse between an inside text (say, literature) and an outside text (criticism on the one hand, reality on the other).

But perhaps more significantly, Derrida's critique reveals the crucial pivotal role aesthetics must play in Kant's system, and indicates that the problematic of the "parergon" inhabits the entire system.

There is much more to be said about this essay and this strategy, but suffice it here to point out that the deconstructive discourse, which locates itself in the margins, in the asides, in the apparent suburbs of the text, exposes not only the decentralizing play of that text but of the entire system which seems to sustain and verify the coherence of the text. It exposes the "constructed" system of philosophy--in the case of Kant, it reveals how urgent is the mediate place of aesthetics (also the place of man) in allowing one to move from the sensible to the supersensible, man (and therefore the aesthetic) being the figure of the eschatological and teleological. Thus the crucial and incoherent place of the border, edge, frame (also *bord*, ship, and therefore voyage, and all the sygnification of transfer across borders, etc.) in aesthetics which has to have a regulating function in the metaphysical system.

Now, the second problem to which I referred is the fact that we have not simply tended to import deconstruction in the form of a "method" or anti-method, but have displaced it from its function in critique to that even more regional quasi-science called literary criticism. We expected it to perform in the missionary position of a hermeneutic relationship, to provide us with rich new "monological" readings of the text and hence to verify the internal unity or self-reflexiveness of the text's sign system. When it deferred, resisted, or simply refused all wise passiveness, when it re-doubled the commentary, it had to be indicted as Satanic and anarchic.

For deconstruction not only challenged the privilege of literature by deprivileging it, but it re-privileges or reinscribes literature into a discourse on philosophy as its "other," as an intervention which produces critique. We are suddenly asked to recognize the vertiginous and monstrous freedom of literature as the analytical scene. Even when we continue to think of literature as an autotelic, bounded field, we are asked, as in *de Man*, to recognize the play between signs and figures as an *aporia*, as an irreducible and illimitable play between what is in the broadest sense called philosophy (a rhetoric of cognition) and poetry (a rhetoric of persuasion). Moreover, the discursive critique itself is already bound up in this *aporia* and cannot be purified of the very "literary" play it would at once command and reflect. The effect/reflect between two texts that are neither literary nor philosophical, both and neither, produces a vertigo by breaching the coherent boundaries logic has erected in order to permit a clear reading. Or, to take the example of Derrida's essay on Mallarmé quoted by Johnson (entitled "La double séance"); it is not simply a critical reading of Mallarmé's work but an appropriated reading of that work as the work is understood within a classical reading of it by J.-P. Richard, a reading which established "Mimique" as the exemplum of literary self-reflexiveness. The essay, then, uses literature to deconstruct not simply literature, but as a critical methodology we have come to call the "criticism of consciousness," and by extension, phenomenology. Derrida isolates Mallarmé's figure of the "hymen" as he does Kant's "parergon," and explores the way it deregulates rather than regulates any mimetic play or mimetic discourse, thus disrupting the movement from inside to outside necessary to the economy of representation as well as deflecting any internal mimesis so essential to a self-reflexive

reading of literature.

No wonder, then, that the graff-ologists see this as a threat to the discipline, as a nihilism, as a return of the repressed, or a revolt of the slave who defines and holds in thrall the master. Read it, that is, as if it threatens the very institutions which the new-leftists, comfortable within those same institutions, deride it for not trashing. But one thing is irreducible--they have to "read" it, however blindly, one way or another, even in that graff-ic mannerism which mimicks its own logic. But if the "strict constructionists" mis-read it into an aberrant logic, by way of containing it, they do it with unaccustomed "dis-ease." If they want to purge the "deconstructive element" rather than submit to it, they must remain appalled at the illiberalism such power politics would demand. So their best strategy is probably loving accommodation, to welcome it in as just another neuter in the college of critical knowledge, as just another perverse chapter in the critic's "More Joy of Reading."

## NOTES

1. William K. Wimsatt, "The Concrete Universal," The Verbal Icon (New York: Noonday, 1958), p. 83. First pub. by Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954.
2. Wimsatt, p. 77.
3. Donoghue, "Deconstructing Deconstruction," The New York Review of Books, Vol. 27, no. 10 (June 12, 1980), 37-41.
4. Graff, "Deconstruction as Dogma, or 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Strether Honey!" Georgia Review, XXXIV (Summer 1980), 404-21.
5. Gasché, "Deconstruction as Criticism," Glyph 6 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 177-215.
6. Derrida, "Parergon," La Vérité en peinture (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), pp. 21-168.



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RETRIEVING HEIDEGGER'S DE-STRUCTION:  
A RESPONSE TO BARBARA JOHNSON

"Levelling is not the action of one individual but a reflective-game in the hand of an abstract power."

Søren Kierkegaard, Two Ages

I

In her essay "Nothing Fails Like Success," Barbara Johnson's defense of deconstructive criticism betrays the "blindness of its insight" of virtually all the practitioners of this method deriving from the authority of Jacques Derrida: she overlooks, that is, the fact that deconstruction, as articulated and practiced by Derrida himself, has its source in and constitutes a re-vision (not deconstruction) of Heidegger's de-struction of the metaphysical tradition. This oversight, the result, above all, of archivalizing Derrida's Nietzschean text, making it the original Book of the deconstructed Word, as it were, not only precludes or at least minimizes an adequate defense against the counter-critique of conservative traditional humanist critics like Meyer Abrams, Wayne Booth, Gerald Graff, and Dennis Donaghue, but also, and more important, against the critique of those politically radical critics like Edward Said, John Brenkman, Paul Bové, and Jonathan Arac, who accuse deconstruction "of not living up to its own claims of radicality." That is to say, this oversight succeeds in making deconstruction not simply susceptible to institutionalization, but also, if inadvertently, an instrument legitimating the spirit of the

technological "age of the world picture" and the consumer society that spirit elaborates. In the following all-too-brief remarks, I intend to explore some important aspects of this critical oversight. I want to suggest by such a disclosure that the Heideggerian de-struction is more capable than deconstruction, not simply of a more adequate "defense" against the charge of relativism made in traditional humanistic criticism, but also of a more effective critique of the "binary logic" of mastery -- "culture [or] anarchy." In short, the Heideggerian destruction is more amenable to the literary, cultural, and socio-political adversary purposes of the de-centered postmodern counter-memory.

Since I cannot assume that my readers, both humanists and, especially, deconstructors, are conversant with Heidegger's Destruktion, or, at any rate, with its differential relationship to deconstruction, I will "begin" for the sake of orientation by recalling Heidegger's definition in the introduction of Being and Time which the oversight of the deconstructors forgets:

If the question of Being is to achieve clarity regarding its own history, a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it is necessary. We understand this task as the de-struction of the traditional content of ancient ontology which is to be carried out along the guidelines of the question of Being. This de-struction is based upon the original experience on which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of Being were gained.

This demonstration of the provenance of the fundamental ontological concepts, as the investigation which displays their "birth certificate," has nothing to do with a pernicious relativizing of ontological standpoints. The de-struction has just as little the negative sense of dis-burdening ourselves of the ontological tradition. On the contrary, it should stake out the positive possibilities of the tradition, and that always means to fix its boundaries. These are factually given with the specific formulation of the question and the prescribed demarcation of the possible field of investigation. Negatively, the de-struction is not even related to the past; its criticism concerns "today" and the dominant way we treat the history of ontology, whether it be conceived as the history of opinions, ideas, or problems. However, the de-struction does not wish to bury the past in nullity; it has a positive intent. Its negative function remains tacit and indirect. . . .

In accord with the positive tendency of the de-struction the question must first be asked whether and to what extent in the course of the history of ontology in general the interpretation of Being has been thematically connected with the phenomenon of Time. We must also ask whether the range of problems concerning Temporality which necessarily belongs here was fundamentally worked out or could have been.<sup>1</sup>

What should be marked, above all, in this passage,

is that the "beginning" that Heidegger wants to retrieve is not an absolute origin as it seems to be understood both by his deconstructive critics and his humanist disciples. It is, rather, as the "existential analytic" of Being and Time bears witness, a temporality grounded in Nothing (the absence of presence), that disseminates differences, of which language (words as opposed to the Word) is the bearer.

## II

The primary function of deconstructive criticism is to demystify the privileged binary logic inscribed in the metaphysical rhetoric of the logocentric tradition: to expose the mise-en-abyme between signifier and signified, the groundless ground of mimesis or re-presentation; ie. to show that language is not Adamic, does not "name" (bring to presence) the object it intends, but "doubles" or "supplements" and thus always defers it. More specifically, Derrida and especially others like Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Joseph Riddel, Eugenio Donato, and Barbara Johnson, who practice deconstructive criticism, assume from the beginning that all texts, past and present, no matter what they attempt to signify, deconstruct themselves, that is, are, by the very nature of writing, replete with aporias that transgress and undermine the intended totalization of logocentric discourse. In Derrida's rhetoric, they are subject to the "play of difference," to the "movement of supplementarity" of writing.

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite

glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field -- that is, language -- excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say. . . that the movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of supplementarity. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization.<sup>2</sup>

The writer, no matter who he is or when he writes, can therefore never say what he wishes to say (vouloir dire). Thus the essential function of the interpreter is not, as it is for traditional critics, to interpret the writers intention, but to discover the blindness of his logocentric insight:

The writer writes in a language and in a logic [the binary logic of logocentrism] whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a certain fashion and up to a certain point, be governed by the system. And reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses.<sup>3</sup>

Though the classical or humanistic effort to represent the "conscious, voluntary intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his exchange with the history to which he belongs" is necessary to guard against the possibility of "say[ing] almost anything" about the text,<sup>4</sup> such traditionalist "doubling commentary," devoid of any awareness of the duplicity of writing, closes off rather than opens up a reading -- and only reveals its deferring supplementarity, its "undecidability," to the ironic deconstructive reader of the commentary:

. . .if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text towards something other than it, towards a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychological, etc.) or towards a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. That is why the methodological considerations that we risk applying here to an example [Rousseau] are closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above; as regards the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified. There is nothing outside the text [there is no outside-text; il n'y a pas de hors-texte].<sup>5</sup>

This is, of course, hardly an adequate summary of an immensely complex and brilliantly articulated methodology of reading. But it is enough to suggest what is both valuable and problematic about it from the point of view of the Heideggerian

destruction. To the degree that it reminds us of what the humanistic tradition exists finally to make us forget -- of the unbridgeable abyss between words and between words and their referents, of the groundlessness of the privileged metaphysical discourse, i.e. that language does not "name" the earth, but fictionalizes and defers it and thus that language as (objective) Truth constitutes a violence against the earth -- the Derridean deconstruction is useful to criticism as a theory of reading which is simultaneously a socio-political activity or counter-praxis. That is, it is capable of thematizing the logocentric language of representation, of awakening us to the power inscribed in and hidden by the "structurality" of traditional metaphysical humanistic binary discourse. But, unlike the Heideggerian destruction, its refusal of intentionality or, what is the same theory, its insistence on the autonomy of the text (its "textuality") -- il n'y a pas de hors-texte -- and the consequent interpretive imperative that "our reading must be intrinsic and remain within the text"<sup>6</sup> -- tends both in theory and in practice, especially by Derrida's academic disciples, to dehistoricize both the text and the reading process. Instead, deconstruction pursues the secondary purpose of demystification, the purely negative ironic process of disclosing the unintended (or intended) aporias that "always already" breach all writing -- literary or veridical -- whatever its occasion. Although, as Ms. Johnson says, deconstruction "at its best. . . undoes the very comforts of mastery and consensus that underlie the illusion that objectivity is situated somewhere outside the self," this insistence on the purely writerly nature of writing, this failure to acknowledge that writing, however misunderstood and mystified its essence, has consequences in the world, minimizes, if it does not preclude, precisely what the

Heideggerian destructive (which is also to say, "pro-jective") mode takes to be the first stage of the hermeneutic process. This destructive mode invites an opening out of its horizontal focus on the question of being, in accordance with its disclosive imperative to take into consideration the cultural, economic, and socio-political sites along the continuum of being, those sites, that is, which are the archeological concerns of such critical theorists as Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and other "worldly" critics of Enlightenment logic and its hegemonic institutional elaborations. I mean the study of "affiliation," as Edward Said calls it, the exposure of the usually invisible "network of peculiarly cultural associations. . . between forms, statements, and other aesthetic elaborations on the one hand, and, on the other, institutions, agencies, classes, and fairly amorphous social forces:"

...affiliation [in contrast with homology and filiation, which "so far as humanists are concerned have created the homogeneously utopian domain of texts connected serially, seamlessly, immediately only with other texts"] is what enables a text to maintain itself as a text and thus is covered by a range of circumstances: status of the author, historical moment, conditions of publication, diffusion and reception, values drawn upon, values and ideas assumed, a framework of consensually held tacit assumptions, presumed background, and so on and on. In the second place, to study affiliation is to study and recreate the bonds between text and world, bonds which specialization

and the institutions of literature have all but completely effaced. Every text is an act of will to some extent, but what has not been very much studied [and deconstruction tends to overlook] is the degree to which -- and the specific cultural space by which -- texts are made permissible. To recreate the affiliative network is therefore to make visible, to give materiality back to, the strands holding the text to the society that produced it. In the third place, affiliation releases a text from its isolation, and imposes upon the scholar or critic the presentational problem of historically re-creating or re-constructing the possibilities out of which the text arose. Here is the place for intentional analysis, and for the effort to place a text in homological, dialogical or antithetical relationship with other texts, classes, institutions, etc.<sup>7</sup>

To be more specific, in freeing the signifier from the transcendental signified that, according to Derrida, remains vestigially in Heidegger's understanding of language, the Derridean revision of the destruction minimizes the potential to disclose and analyze not only the hidden violence that informs the logocentric text, but also, and more important, the particular historical, cultural, and socio-political sources, nature, affiliations, and effects of this violence at every site on the continuum of being. I say this despite or, indeed, because of the fact that Derridean deconstruction willfully denies the question of being, the question of the temporality, the historicity of being, as hors texte. Thus it cannot, on the basis

of this methodological emphasis, differentiate between and situate the kinds of cultural/social/political power authorized or legitimated by, say, Plato's Republic, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, or Bentham's Panopticon; Aristotle's Poetics, Samuel Johnson's The Preface to Shakespeare, or Percy Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction. In so far as the Heideggerian destruction acknowledges that texts (language) are "the house of being," i.e. make a difference in the shaping of a world, it can be appropriated to locate historically and to discriminate, acutely and in detail, between, say, the prophesy/fulfillment structure (and rhetoric) of The Aeneid, which discloses its formal and thematic complicity with the divinely sanctioned Augustan imperialism; the well-made narrative plot of Fielding's Tom Jones, which, in sublimating accident, affiliates itself with the formative disciplinary goals of the deistically sanctioned and empirically oriented humanism of the Enlightenment; and the recollective or re-presentational narrative structure of the essentially sane and normal, "disinterested," observer in Joseph Conrad's The Heart of Darkness, which, in rationalizing its excesses, mystifies, normalizes and legitimates the hegemonic purposes of Western (British) capitalistic colonialism. Because of its commitment to the textuality of texts--the absolute absence of presence in the signifier--the deconstructive mode, on the other hand, must of necessity bypass such affiliations between text and world and such historical discriminations between economies of power, in favor of its primary purpose: to disclose the transgressions--the plays of difference that characterize all writing--against the impulse of logocentrism to totalize. This methodological refusal to encounter language as the temporal "house of being," not, as Ms. Johnson says, "an over-simplified understanding of

certain aspects of deconstructive theory," lies behind the current institutionalization of deconstruction, its failure in practice to cross over the boundary line of literary criticism into the economic and socio-political sites its hedges. In other words, this theoretical necessity renders deconstructive criticism, like the New Criticism it ostensibly repudiates, an academic discipline rather than a historical interdisciplinary activity capable of "analyzing its institutional underpinnings, and economic and social relations with the world."

## III

Further, or perhaps, another way of putting this, the deconstructive mode, precisely because of its theoretical commitment to the autonomy of the text and, within this commitment, to the idea of difference as textual difference, tends to be a negative hermeneutic activity. This is not only because it is, despite J. Hillis Miller's easy rhetorical manoeuvre to disarm the objectivist critique,<sup>8</sup> parasitic on canonized host texts, but also, and more importantly, because, in translating its possibilities into the empty, free-floating realm of rhetoric and textuality, it undermines the will to praxis: thinking, that is, gets dissociated from doing. For Heidegger, we recall, the destruction is intended to retrieve (Wiederholen) the question of being (or rather be-ing) from the oblivion to which a sclerotic metaphysical thinking has relegated it, in order to "free" human being--"especially . . . that understanding (and its possible development) which is rooted in the proper Being of Dasein--the ontological understanding"--from the "world in which it is" and the "tradition"--the various but supplementary semiotic systems inscribed in the cultural Memory--in which it is "ensnared." In reifying or spatializing

time, this tradition, which perceives meta-ta-physica, "deprives Dasein of its leadership in questioning and choosing."<sup>9</sup> Though Heidegger himself was reluctant to explore this intention fully, the destruction is intended to activate an opening of the horizon of understanding or, rather, of understanding to horizontality, to include the "worldliness" of the world: a liberating awareness or remembrance that the prison house of logocentrism exists not only at the site of metaphysical thought per se, but, because language is the house of being, all along the continuum of being from culture through economics to socio-politics. The destruction is not a nihilistic activity of thought that neutralizes its active force. Rather, it is, paradoxically, a positive or projective interpretive activity in which thinking (theory) is doing-in-the-world (praxis). The disclosure of the origins of the fundamental ontological concepts, we recall,

has nothing to do with a pernicious relativizing of ontological standpoints. The destruction has just as little the negative sense of disburdening ourselves of the ontological tradition. On the contrary, it should stake out the positive possibilities of the tradition . . . .Negatively, the de-struction is not even related to the past: its criticism concerns "today" and the dominant way we read the history of ontology, whether it is conceived as the history of opinions, ideas, or problems. However, the destruction does not wish to bury the past in nullity; it has a positive intent. Its negative function remains tacit and indirect. [My emphasis, except the single italicized word.]

The Heideggerian destruction, thus understood as a remembering of what a recollective metaphysics forgets, is both a historical and a dialogic project in the sense that, as the etymology itself suggests, it is simultaneously de-structive and pro-jective. Like Foucault's and Said's "archeological" projects, it activates critical consciousness of the varieties of cultural and socio-political power that the supplementary epistèmes of the ontotheological tradition have concealed in their discourses. But in de-destroying (de-structuring) the intended totalized structures and the circular geo-metry of these panoptic discourses, the destruction also dis-closes, activates, and nourishes the will to praxis. That is, in breaching the panoptically inscribed structures of the ontotheological tradition, it opens up and remembers the question of being as it was originally posed: as a question of the be-ing of being. More specifically -- and in order to address, if not to disarm the objection made by Derrida that the retrieval of the Seinsfrage is a recuperation of metaphysics, the destruction retrieves from the traditional understanding of Being as Identity (the One, the Unmoved Mover, Causality, etc.) the temporality of being, a being, that is, "grounded," not in Something but in nothing, in absence, in which presence is infinitely deferred and in which, therefore, temporality disperses Sameness, disseminates or makes (the) difference. The retrieval of the Seinsfrage, in short, is the retrieval of the ec-centricity, the ex-orbitance or, in Heidegger's preferred word, the "care"-provoking err-ancy of being.

As I have said, the destruction of the tradition inscribed in canonical texts retrieves the idea of language as the "house of being."

Understood as I think Heidegger insists that it should be, this means that, in retrieving the being of being from the meta-physical tradition, the destruction also retrieves the idea of language as words from the re-collective tradition of the Word. (Derrida, of course, criticizes Heidegger's phenomenology as a vestigial continuation of the logocentric tradition in the degree to which it continues to privilege speech [parole] as the agent of recuperating or re-presenting presence. If, however, Heidegger's phenomenological retrieval of the logos as speech [legein] is understood as an acknowledgement of dispersal [difference] as its primordial condition, this criticism is defused.) Thus destroyed, this problematic phrase discloses a function of textual interpretation that is quite different from that usually inferred. It not only activates, as in Foucault and Said, the possibility of recognizing and defusing the power and authority of metaphysical discourse and the affiliated semiotic elaborations of a civil society grounded in a logocentric measure. It also opens up, as I shall suggest, the possibility of a discourse capable of rewriting--and rebuilding--the polis on the groundless ground of a differential measure that, emerging from its occasion, allows men and women to "dwell poetically" in the "rift" occasioned by the strife that temporality activates between world and earth.<sup>10</sup>

For Derrida and his followers, deconstructive criticism, on the other hand, is in essence a negative, indeed, a nihilistic critical movement. To put it briefly and all too reductively, in absolutely separating language (writing) from the world outside to which it putatively refers, it precludes, of necessity, admitting the question of language to be simultaneously a question of being, in favor of observing, pointing to and delighting in the

spectacle of the play of difference at the scene of writing. Derrida's appropriation of Heidegger's notion of the ontological difference (that "Being" is not a being [Seiende] as it has been understood throughout the ontotheological tradition, but being [Sein]), translates the difference of being into the levelled-out space of the textual différance.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that deconstructive criticism understands the dismantling process not, as in Heidegger, to be an opening up and releasement of that which metaphysical thinking closes off and forgets, but a disclosure of the false base of canonical logocentric texts. In other words, deconstructive reading remembers the supplementarity, the doubling, of all writing, and thus the duplicity, the absolute undecideability, of all written texts, but not the projective possibilities of being. Although deconstruction, like destruction, calls into question the privileged status of the dominant philosophical discourse, it also "liberates" man from the prison-house of language into an essentially similar nihilistic world. At best, as in Derrida, it activates the

Nietzschean affirmation, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin, which is offered to an active interpretation. This affirmation thus determines the non-center otherwise than as a loss of center. And it plays without security. For there is a sure play: that which is limited to the substitution of given and existing, present, pieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to genetic indetermination, to the seminal adventure of the

trace.<sup>12</sup>

At worst, however, as Ms. Johnson herself admits, it becomes, as in an increasing number of Derrida's belated followers, a purely formal--and comfortable--activity of exegesis, virtually devoid of real awareness of the abyss--the uncertain temporal realm of radical difference or otherness--over which this interpretive activity dances. It is true, of course, that Ms. Johnson criticizes the tendency of recent deconstructive critics to transform this exegetical activity into an assured methodology and recalls them to the Nietzschean/Derridean affirmation of uncertainty:

Much has been made of the fact that "knowledge" cannot be taken for granted. But perhaps rather than simply questioning the nature of knowledge, we should today re-evaluate the static, inert concept we have always had of ignorance. Ignorance, far more than knowledge, is what can never be taken for granted. If I perceive my ignorance as a gap in knowledge, instead of as an imperative that changes the very nature of what I think I know, then I do not truly experience my ignorance. The surprise of otherness [difference] is that moment when a new form is suddenly activated as an imperative. If the deconstructive impulse is to retain its vital, subversive power, we must therefore become ignorant of it again and again.

But this imperative, finally, cannot answer "the critique of deconstruction, which accuses it of not living up to its own claims of radicality, of working with too limited a notion of textuality, of applying its critical energy only within an



institutional structure that it does not question and therefore confirms." For, it seems to me, it is precisely this purely negative stance before the text--this restriction of deconstructive criticism to the exposure of the mastering impulse behind the binary logic of logocentrism, for the sake of affirming ignorance (undecideability)--that not only blinds itself to the "negative capability," the projective possibilities, disclosed by the Heideggerian destruction, but also ends in the metamorphosis of ignorance into empty formalism. Limiting the function of deconstruction to calling into question the "exclusive" either/or of logocentric logic, in other words, all too easily and despite protestations to the contrary, ends, as Kierkegaard reminds us, in the futile hovering "logic" of the neither/nor, in a willed will-lessness that transforms the projective measure disclosed by the destruction--the measure which is the measure of man's occasion--into the certain, regulative, empty, and finally timeless methodology of "unmastered irony."<sup>13</sup>

In thus reducing the signifiers emerging from and addressing different historical/cultural situations to a timeless intertextual (ironic) text, deconstructive criticism ironically betrays its affiliation with the disinterested--and indifferent--"inclusive" formalism of the New Criticism and Structuralism<sup>14</sup> which it is one of its avowed purposes to repudiate. The deconstructive reader, like the New Critic and the Structuralist, becomes a distanced observer of the "scene of textuality"<sup>15</sup> or, in Kierkegaard's term, an aesthete who perceives the text from the infinitely negative distance of the ironic mode. With his levelling gaze, he, too, like his adversaries, refines all writing, in Derrida's own phrase, into "free-floating" texts. All texts thus become the same text. It

all becomes one, as it were. In thus curiously coercing difference into identity, deconstructive criticism paradoxically traps itself in precisely what it would call into question with its deconstruction of the tradition of presence. Despite its intentions, it becomes, in tendency at least, the obverse face of the same coin: a negative violence that mirrors the positive violence of metaphysical speculation. It is not, therefore, as Ms. Johnson asserts, the institutional success of deconstructive criticism that, as an increasing number of examples in standard academic journals testify, has rendered it a self-replicating, predictable, indifferent, and self-defeating professional activity that confirms the institution it would call into question. It is, rather, its methodological failure, inherent, I submit, in Derrida's project, to situate the text in the world. To put it another way, this failure--this successful desituation of language into the "scene of writing"--accounts not only for the academic domestication of deconstruction--the divestment of its original adversary purpose: to interrogate the humanistic impulse to reduce language, history, society, culture, to the Same--but also for its transformation into an indifferent instrument that affiliates itself with, indeed legitimates, the institutions that the humanistic discourse authorizes and elaborates.

Understood from the perspective of the Heideggerian destruction, the deconstructive project that dominates the "advanced criticism" of our time reminds us of Kierkegaard's recognition that the "present [Hegelian] age of reflection" is positively capable of producing the illusion among its intellectuals that, as speculative thinkers, they are active adversaries of the dominant culture and of the power structures that lie behind it:

A passionate, tumultuous age wants to overthrow everything, set aside everything. An age that is revolutionary but also reflecting and devoid of passion changes the expression of power into a dialectical tour de force: it lets everything remain but subtly drains the meaning out of it; rather than culminating in an uprising, it exhausts the inner actuality of relations in a tension of reflection that lets everything remain and yet has transformed the whole of existence into an equivocation that in its facticity is--while entirely privately a dialectical fraud interpolates a secret way of reading--that it is not.<sup>16</sup>

As a form of "reflection," or as Edward Said has aptly characterized it, an intellectual activity "dominated by the spirit of refinement,"<sup>17</sup> the deconstructive "play" of mind becomes, paradoxically, perilously like an exemplary instance of this kind of passionless revolutionary thinking, which transforms the inner impulse to revolt against the old order into an infinitely negative and ineffectual play of dialectics. Further, in emptying out the "inner actuality of relations in a tension of reflection that lets everything [power] remain," it becomes perilously similar, again in Kierkegaard's terms, to the garrulous "chatter" of a wit industry that ultimately, if unwittingly, validates and serves the levelling hegemonic socio-political purpose of the "present age."

## Footnotes

1. Martin Heidegger, "Introduction: The Exposition of the Question of the Meaning of Being," Being and Time, tr. Joan Stambaugh in Basic Writings, ed. Joseph Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 67-8.
2. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Writing and Difference, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 289.
3. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, tr. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 158. For Paul de Man, of course, creative writing, unlike commentary about it, is self-consciously demystified from the start and exists to deconstruct the mystified expectations of the logocentric reader. "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau," Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 102-4.
4. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 158.
5. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, P. 158.
6. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 159.
7. Edward Said, "Reflections on Recent American 'Left' Literary Criticism," The Problems of Reading in Contemporary American Criticism: A Symposium, boundary 2, Vol. VIII (Fall 1979) p. 27.
8. J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida,

Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, Deconstruction and Criticism (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 217-53.

9. Martin Heidegger, "Introduction: The Exposition of the Question of the Meaning of Being," Basic Writings, pp. 65-6.
10. I have conflated several essays of the later Heidegger in this last sentence, above all, "The Origin of the Work of Art," ". . . Poetically Man Dwells. . .," and "Building Dwelling Thinking," in Poetry, Language, Thought, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). The meaning of a measure which is "the measure of its occasion" is implicit in the etymological roots of "occasion" immediately from occasus ("to fall," "to drop," as in the setting of heavenly bodies; and "to fall," "to perish," "to die," as in de casibus virorum illustrium--"of the fall of great men"). An interpretive activity which is the measure of its occasion, then, is not a constraining, masterful and transcendent "geometry" having its ultimate model in the Platonic mousiké of the spheres. It is not, to appropriate Yeats' rhetoric in "Sailing to Byzantium," the "Oriental" measure of a golden bird singing "of what is past, passing, or to come" from the infinitely negative distance of eternity, but rather the measure of "Those dying generations--at their song," a measure that acknowledges man's "mortal dress" as the case. It is, in other words, the measure of "being-in-the-world," of Da-sein (being there) "caught" in that which passes. As Heidegger puts it in an essay on Hölderlin's poetry, it is the de-centered or ec-centric measure of mortality, of dwelling on the context of morality: "In

poetry the taking of measure occurs. To write poetry is measure-taking, understood in the strict sense of the word, by which man first receives the measure for the breadth of his being. Man is a mortal. He is called mortal because he can die. To be able to die means: to be capable of death as death. Only man dies--and indeed, continually, so long as he stays on this earth, so long as he dwells. His dwelling, however, rests on the poetic. Hölderlin sees the nature of the 'poetic' in the taking of the measure by which the measure-taking of human being is accomplished." ". . . Poetically Man Dwells. . .," pp. 221-22. It is, finally a "westering" measure, for another etymological root of "occasion" is, of course, the cognate occidere (which "means" both "to fall," especially "to set," as in the case of the "movement" of the sun; and "to die," "to perish" from the present participle of which (occidens) the English word "Occident" comes). See my essay, "Postmodern Literature and Hermeneutic Crisis," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. XXXIV (Winter 1979), pp. 119-31.

11. A full treatment of the difficult distinction between "ontological difference" and difference would invoke, above all, Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, tr. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), supplemented by the analysis of Temporality in Being and Time; and Jacques Derrida, "Difference," in Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, tr. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press 1973), pp. 129-60, supplemented by the discussion of the "trace" and différance scattered throughout Of Grammatology and the essays in Writing and Difference.

12. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," p. 292.
13. Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony, tr. Lee M. Capel (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1971), pp. 336-42. See also my essay, "Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and the Hermeneutic Circle: Towards a Postmodern Theory of Interpretation as Dis-closure," in Martin Heidegger and The Question of Literature, ed. William V. Spanos (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1979), pp. 115-48.
14. I am referring, of course, to I.A. Richard's (and Cleanth Brooks's) distinction between two general types of poetry, that which leaves out the opposite and discordant differential qualities of an experience, excluding them from the poem (the poetry of the "objective" imagination) and that which includes them (the poetry of the ironic imagination): "The structure of these two kinds of experiences are different and the difference is not one of subject but of the relation inter se of the several impulses active in the experience. A poem of the first group is built out of sets of impulses which run parallel, which have the same direction. In a poem of the second group the most obvious feature is the extraordinary heterogeneity of the distinguishable impulses. But they are more than heterogeneous, they are opposed. They are such that in ordinary, non-poetic non-imaginative experience, one or other set would be supposed to give as it might appear freer development to the others. The difference comes out clearly if we consider how comparatively unstable poems of the first kind are. They will not bear an ironic contemplation. . . . Irony in

- this sense consists in the bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses; that is why poetry which is exposed to it is not of the highest order, and why irony itself is so constantly a characteristic of poetry which is." Quoted in Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and The Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 41.
15. See Edward Said, "Reflections on Recent 'Left' Criticism," pp. 16-18.
16. Søren Kierkegaard, Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 77. I am indebted to my editorial colleague Paul Bové for bringing this passage to my attention.
17. Edward Said, "Reflection on Recent 'Left' Criticism," p. 20.

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THE ART OF BEING TAKEN BY SURPRISE

Deconstructive criticism is a big success, and that, as Barbara Johnson sees it, is the problem: can "deconstructionism" avoid being just another success story, absorbed into the intellectual mainstream and sapped of its innovative force? How can the "deconstructive impulse" avoid being watered down by the very institution which promotes and teaches it? Johnson points out that the critical efficacy of deconstructionism is threatened not only by the sort of intellectual erosion which inevitably accompanies the institutionalization of a thought system, but also by a certain conservatism inherent in the deconstructive methodology itself. Johnson addresses both aspects of the problem faced by deconstructive criticism today, responding first to the accusations leveled against the method from opponents on both ends of the ideological spectrum; and going on to suggest how deconstructive criticism may combat its own tendency to inertia or conservatism. Johnson focuses her remarks on two kinds of "failure" with which deconstructionism is often reproached: the failure, on the one hand, to reaffirm and conform to conventional values in literary criticism; and the failure, on the other hand, to subvert these same values, to act according to the non-traditional or even radical values which deconstructionism seems to espouse.

I would like to consider the ways in which both of these reproaches are bound up in issues of power: the power, in the first instance, to determine an "authoritative" interpretation for a literary text, and thus to dictate literary standards and preference; and the power, in the second case, to make a real

difference in real lives, by subverting the intellectual establishment. Both objections to deconstructionism, however unlike they may appear, share a common ground: traditionalists and radicals alike complain of the incapacity or refusal of the deconstructive critic to take a stand, to endorse or demonstrate a clear meaning, to propose a real solution to a real problem, and to be willing to impose that solution as the correct choice, be it intellectual or ethical. Deconstructionism, its opponents concur, is slippery, unpredictable, too full of surprises to be taken seriously.

Now Barbara Johnson seems to suggest in her paper that the deconstructive critic must indeed be willing to fail in certain ways, since the effort to succeed at being absolutely "logical" or "committed" would imply a willingness to play by all the old rules of the intellectual game. This is too high a price to pay, she suggests; for it is the old rules which seek to minimize the role of surprise in the critical process, valorizing authority in the name of universal standards or intellectual rigor. Above all, Johnson argues, deconstructionism must seek to maintain the continuing "intellectual upheaval of the surprise," by insisting on questioning or problematizing the givens by which the critic operates. To this end, her own paper examines the goals and methods of the deconstructive critic, emphasizing the need to remain open to other perspectives, as well as the need to continue to take risks in reading and interpretation. The deconstructive enterprise, she concludes, must not only continue to offer surprises to its readers, but it must also continue to leave itself open to the unexpected insight from the unexpected quarter. Particularly, she argues, the deconstructionists need to pay attention to the neglected domains of history and biography, in order to radicalize their practice.

In this paper, I would like to suggest some ways in which the deconstructive critic might use the tools of psychoanalysis to do what Johnson has proposed: that is, to ground the "slippery" practice of deconstruction without attenuating the surprising impact of its discovery. While there are undoubtedly other bodies of theory—such as Marxist or linguistic theory—which have served and will continue to serve as moorings for deconstructive criticism, the terminology and method of psychoanalysis do seem particularly compatible with deconstructionism, and might serve to clarify the more hermetic aspects of the approach for the uninitiated reader. I want, then, to discuss two aspects of the relation between psychoanalysis and deconstructionism, using Barbara Johnson's paper as a point of reference. First, I would like to elaborate on how the "logic of otherness" to which Johnson alludes coincides with the "illogical" logic of the unconscious as revealed by psychoanalysis; and I want to suggest, moreover, how this logic may contribute to an esthetic of "surprise" rather than of "mastery." Second, I would like to deal briefly with the issue of the inherent conservatism of deconstructionism, suggesting how psychoanalytic tools might be used to ground the method not only in historicity and biography, as Johnson proposes, but also in our own practice of reading and teaching.

Johnson has done an excellent job of distilling the essence of the traditionalist campaign against the deconstructive heresy, a campaign based on accusations of nihilism, relativism, and inexactitude. After skillfully exposing the "binary logic" behind these assumptions—a logic which grants canonic status to the "principle of non-contradiction"—Johnson asserts that deconstructive logic plays by other rules, based on a radically different logic where "something else is involved."

But just what is this "something else?" If we

want to avoid the slickness or slipperiness to which the deconstructive method seems susceptible, we need to attach our speculations to something concrete. But once we have problematized the notion of an objective exterior "reality", just what can we use to pin down the "unclear" logic of deconstruction? What can the "something else" be shown to consist of?

As I have already suggested, it seems to me that the clearest distinction between traditionalist and deconstructive logic resides in the difference in their attitude toward the exercise of power. As Johnson puts it, the "other logic" of deconstruction "undoes the very comforts of mastery and consensus that underlie the illusion that objectivity is situated somewhere outside the self." The kind of "comfortable mastery" of which Johnson speaks is upheld by the appeal to a localisable authority, and by an identification with the source of that authority as the holder of demonstrable, logical truth. One needs only to look at the language of the passages which Johnson cites in her paper to see that the traditionalists are engaged in a power-play. In the third quotation, for example (Graff), the "validity" of a perspective is based on "coercive reality", a reality which arbitrates, like a sort of referee, among a nondiscriminating "plurality of subjectivities." Or consider the fourth quotation (Shaw) where "certainty" is characterized as the ally of "piety", which deconstruction (sacrilegiously) threatens. The bottom line of all of these accusations seems to be the same: the vehement eschewal of the "logical" consequence of deconstruction, which is the abdication of the power to dictate taste. When Shaw complains, for instance, that "professors relegate judgment of all sorts to the students' subjective preference," he is voicing the fear that the deconstructive method will lead not

only to "skepticism toward all the old ways" (Donoghue), but will actually culminate in an anarchy of taste where (heaven forbid) "judgments of all sorts" become permissible. Presumably these judgments might exceed the text itself, and could, for instance, include personal or political choices. The traditionalists seem bent on denouncing deconstructionism not only as a heresy, but as a subversion.

Johnson counters the traditionalist power-play with her exposition of the logic of deconstruction as a system which "subverts the opposition between subject and object" and "displaces the traditional notion of what a subject is." Significantly, Johnson compares this "other" logic to the puzzling force of the death instinct, described by Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle as that inexplicable impulse toward annihilation which operates inexorably, if not logically, in human experience. But just how does this "other" logic work to subvert the subject-object distinction which functions as the main underpinning of traditional logic? What is the contribution of this "other" logic to the esthetic of surprise? What does this non-binary logic have in common with primary process, the "logic" of the unconscious?

In his paper of 1915 entitled "The Unconscious," Freud spells out the "rules" of a system radically opposed to conscious, binary, "non-contradictory" logic:

Let us sum up: exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process (motility of cathexis), timelessness, and substitution of psychic for external reality —these are the characteristics which we may expect to find in processes belonging to the system Ucs.<sup>1</sup>

Freud goes on to say that evidence of this "other" logic may be found in the dream-work, in certain linguistic phenomena like slips of the tongue or the "double talk" of joking, and in many forms of art. It seems to me that one could add the non-binary logic of deconstruction to this list, at least on several counts. If we take, for instance, the characteristic of "timelessness" —that is, the way in which primary process functions without regard to chronological order— we could draw an (admittedly fanciful) analogy between this characteristic and the way in which Derrida's work, for example, constantly subverts the notion of "priority" or "origin". The argument, for instance, concerning "which came first," speech or writing, is problematized in such a way that the traditional primacy of the spoken word is put into question. In Derrida's work, chronology is no longer a "logical" determinant of authority.

The second characteristic of primary process as defined by Freud —"motility of cathexis"— offers a similar analogy with deconstructive logic. Motility of cathexis can be described as both the inexhaustibility of libido or desire and the capacity of that desire to express itself in a multiplicity of protean forms: in joke, in symbol, in dream-work, in symptom formation. The libido is indiscriminate; it has the tendency to attach itself to any available object and to avail itself of any convenient ruse to find expression. The deconstructive process displays the same sort of inexhaustible energy and the same richness of resource, relying heavily on the same sort of "overdetermined" language (pun, condensation) which so often characterizes processes influenced by the workings of primary process. Moreover, as we have seen, deconstructionism is frequently reproached with its lack of discrimination, its avoidance of value judgments of the "logical" or traditional sort: one text seems as good as another, the traditionalists

complain, as a point of departure for the deconstructive process, an object of the critical "cathexis." In other words, the very "slipperiness" with which deconstructive criticism is often reproached could be compared to the "unfixed" or mobile quality of the logic of primary process.

The two remaining characteristics of this "other" logic — "exemption from mutual contradiction" and "substitution of psychic for external reality"— furnish even more striking parallels with the non-binary logic of deconstruction as described by Barbara Johnson. Johnson devotes several pages to a refutation of "either/or" logic, making an appeal, as we have seen, for a logic where "something else is involved." In Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, Freud describes dream/primary process logic in precisely these terms, as an "illogical" system which is capable of "putting an 'and' where only an 'either/or' is possible."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Freud maintains, in the oneiric mode "there is no such thing as an 'either/or', only a simultaneous juxtaposition is possible."<sup>3</sup> Binary logic, then, the same logic which the deconstructive impulse subverts, is actually alien to the "other" logic of the unconscious.

But deconstructive logic, as Johnson points out, does not simply exclude binary opposition: "deconstruction," she maintains, "both opposes and redefines; it both reverses an opposition and reworks the terms of that opposition so that what was formerly understood by them is no longer tenable." This process, it seems to me, is not unlike Freud's "deconstruction" of the process of negation: the therapist is charged to pay the closest attention to that which the patient denies, since a negative statement conceals its "other" meaning. (The patient's vehement assertion that the person in his dream is not his mother is translated by the therapist into its opposite.) Freud's own method,

then, encourages the "reworking of the terms of an opposition," and contests the "principle of non-contradiction," by demonstrating that the most straightforward assertion is not "identical" to itself: it says what it means and "something else" at the same time. Thus the psychoanalytic method not only reveals the workings of a non-binary logic in the unconscious, but actually reveals the ways in which conscious logic conceals contradiction.

The similarity between the final characteristic of primary process — "substitution of psychic for external reality"— and the "other" logic of deconstructive criticism is suggested by Johnson's discussion of the problematization of the traditional understanding of subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> Johnson's argument demonstrates how the deconstructive logic subverts the dichotomies between external and internal, subjective and objective, by refusing to locate the "moment of meaning-making" either exclusively within or outside of the text. In fact, Johnson suggests, "the reader's 'subjectivity'" itself "is discovered to function something like a text, that is, something whose conscious awareness of meaning and desire is only one aspect of a complex unconscious signifying system which determines consciousness as only one of its effects."

This notion of the textuality of subjectivity is essentially Lacanian; and it is, moreover, a notion which is important for an understanding of the "otherness" of deconstructive logic. Lacan, of course, has problematized the traditional notion of subjectivity — that "illusion of self" to which Johnson refers — by positing the "intersubjective" nature of the self or subject. For Lacan, one's "identity" is plural, determined by an interaction, in the Imaginary and Symbolic registers, with the unconscious processes



of others (as demonstrated in the celebrated "Schema L" of intersubjectivity). Derrida, among others, has argued along analogous lines concerning the "individuality" of any text: one's "personal opinion" is not "owned"; nor can one lay claim to the idea which he "authorizes", for his source is always plural:

If John R. Searle owes a debt to D. Searle concerning this discussion, then the "true" copyright ought to belong . . . to a Searle who is divided, conjugated, shared. What a complicated signature! And one that becomes even more complicated when it includes my old friend, H. Dreyfus, with whom I myself have worked . . . "I" therefore feel obliged to claim my share of the copyright of the Reply.  
But who, me?<sup>5</sup>

Even one's "own" ideas are, in other words, engendered intersubjectively. The boundaries between self and other, subject and object, inner and outer, are blurred: in the deconstructive method there is not only a substitution of "psychic for external reality," as in primary process, but there is actually a mingling of the two domains.

The "other" logic of deconstruction, then, seems to display certain fundamental similarities with the logic of the "other", the unconscious. Nor have the deconstructive critics themselves failed to take note of the areas of convergence between psychoanalysis and deconstruction: the deconstructionists have turned frequently and increasingly to psychoanalytic theory to elucidate the "desiring", "illogical" nature of the literary text.

In Derrida's essay, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," for example, the mnemonic mechanism —that is, the formation of memory-trace in the brain— serves

as a somatic metaphor for the process of writing itself. Derrida's highly imaginative reading of Freud's theory of memory is but one striking example of the intermarriage between deconstructive criticism and psychoanalytic thought. The application of this hybrid approach has also taken shape in the esthetic theory of Blanchot (L'Entretien infini) and Lyotard (Discours, Figure). Lyotard, for instance, concentrates on the process of poetic production, a process which bears the imprint of the "other" logic of the unconscious and thus is structurally analogous to dream in its genesis and expression ("Le Travail du rêve ne pense pas," Discours, Figure). To refer to Derrida's metaphor for writing ("la scène de l'écriture"), one could say that the deconstructive critic sees the unconscious as the producer-director of the textual performance.

While the essays of Lyotard, Blanchot, and Derrida on Freudian theory are indeed provocative, it does seem to me that deconstructive criticism could develop further along these lines, by undertaking a systematic analysis of the role of the unconscious in the "dissemination" of the literary text, rather than contenting itself with mere reference to Freudian/Lacanian thought. The affinities between deconstructive criticism and psychoanalysis are evident in the confluence of terminology of the two thought systems: Freud's "libido" recalls Derrida's concept of "désir"; "motivated forgetting" evokes Blanchot's "oubli"; Lyotard's textual "jeu" refers to Freud's speculations on the genesis of play; Derrida's notion of writing as "trace" corresponds to the Freudian notion of memory-trace, and so forth. A rigorous working out of the ramifications of this "overdetermination" of terminology and subject matter would, it seems to me, provide a concrete point of departure for grasping the sometimes mystifying practice of the deconstructive critic; while rescuing psychoanalytic criticism from

the tendency toward reductive interpretation. An intermarriage of psychoanalytic and deconstructive thought, moreover, could function to provide a sort of middle ground between deconstruction and its "traditionalist" adversaries. By referring to an established "science" like psychoanalysis, deconstruction could elucidate its theory and method without making undue concessions to binary logic. Hopefully this kind of clarification might help to avoid what Johnson calls the entrenchment of "self-definition of some literary critics in their opposition to other literary critics," especially since such an "entrenchment", as Johnson points out, contributes to the institutionalization and subsequent conservatization of the deconstructive process.

I would like to conclude by looking briefly at the issue raised by Johnson in the final section of her paper: which is, precisely, the problem of the conservatization of deconstructionism, and the necessity to orient the method toward a radical practice. If deconstruction is to live up to its own promise of radicality, Johnson argues, it must be careful not to do two things: it must not interpret the edict "there is nothing outside the text" as a justification for ignoring the real world; and it must never get too comfortable with its own success. In the first instance, Johnson seems to be calling for a more material context for deconstructionism; in the second case, she is calling for an interrogation of ways of seeing which have become habitual. This entails, as she suggests, a willingness to change one's field of questions, to identify and expose assumptions, to own up to contradiction, to be taken by surprise. As Johnson puts it, it is a question of "laying bare the ignorance one never knew one had."

As concerns the first issue —the grounding of deconstruction in historicity and biography—the usefulness of psychoanalytic technique and theory

is fairly evident. Freudian theory has been developed out of "real histories"; and it directs its findings back toward real therapeutic practice. While problematizing the notion of final "cure" or absolute "truth", Freudian theory never ceases to address real issues, even if, until recently, it has insufficiently addressed questions of ideology. And as the studies of scholars like John Brenkman and Frederic Jameson have demonstrated recently, psychoanalytic criticism is by no means incompatible with material or even political analyses.

The second issue —that of the maintenance of surprise or the laying bare of ignorance— is no less fecund for the psychoanalytic perspective; it contains, moreover, ideological implications of its own. Althusser has defined ideology in reference to the Lacanian notion of "misrecognition": it is the nature of ideology to be "misrecognized", to appear self-evident, to remain unexamined because it seems to be a given of cultural experience. The study of ideology, then, entails a laying bare of motives, an exposure of what is at stake in the maintenance of attitudes that pass as "obvious" or "correct." Similarly, the Lacanian concept of "misrecognition" —a ruse by which the subject advances an illusory, interested version of "truth"— problematizes the traditional understanding of what it is to be "correct" or "incorrect".

A working out of these issues, then, entails a deconstruction of the clear distinction between "truth" and "error", and of the connection between "truth" and authority or power. In Lacan's system, one "recognizes" one's own "truth" only by owing up to the limits of one's power: the submission to the Symbolic order is the necessary condition of knowledge. Thus knowledge ceases to be allied with mastery or authority; paradoxically, it is only achieved when one allows oneself to be taken by

surprise.

The use of Freudian-Lacanian theory, then, can help to "deconstruct" the assumptions of binary logic, and can provide a theoretical underpinning for the deconstructive enterprise. By elaborating a logic based on a plural (intersubjective) or tertiary (Oedipal) structure, rather than on the binary principle of non-contradiction, psychoanalysis can furnish the theoretical tools necessary for deconstructive criticism to maintain its radical force, its innovative energy, and its potential for self-criticism. And it is perhaps this self-critical faculty which is the most valuable of all, as Derrida seems to suggest when he asserts that "only laughter gets beyond the dialectic,"<sup>6</sup> that is, beyond the constraints of binary logic. And it is laughter, as Freud has demonstrated, which reveals the weakness which resides behind every attempt at "mastery." Psychoanalytic theory will permit the deconstructive critic to take him or herself a little less seriously, which is perhaps finally one of the most "subversive" of projects.

## NOTES

1. Freud, "The Unconscious," from General Psychological Theory, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963, p. 135.
2. Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, Standard Edition, p. 62.
3. Freud, p. 205.
4. Barbara Johnson, p. 4: "In the case of the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, deconstruction seems to locate the moment of meaning-making in the non-objectivity of the act of reading rather than in the inherent givens of a text, but then the text seems already to anticipate the reading it engenders"
5. Derrida, "Limited INC a b c . . .," Glyph 2, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 165.
6. Derrida, "De l'économie générale," L'écriture et la différence, Paris: Seuil, 1977.

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## TAKING AND BEING TAKEN

What does Professor Johnson mean by "the surprise of otherness," that point of departure for deconstruction which she urges us all to keep recovering? If her "meaning" can be taken as what she "refers to" for a moment, then I find her calling up several pre-texts at once (and not surprisingly). First, of course, when she asks a reading to "follow" whatever "puts in question the kind of reading it thought it was going to be," she sounds very much like Paul de Man prefacing Carol Jacobs and arguing against a reader's quest for "singularity of meaning" that censors "marginal" elements in a text to prevent the "occurrence of [a] disruption."<sup>1</sup> At the same time Johnson, like de Man, is generalizing the Jacobs submission to a "necessary incoherence" in order to suggest that any reading should be open to "what has to happen" instead of "what one would want to happen" (de Man's words again). What has to happen, though, pretty clearly includes an understanding of Derrida's "primordial" otherness, the différance inaugurating and inaugurated by the instituted trace that is never there as itself; we should enable ourselves to be surprised as he was in his own reading by the ways "the completely other is announced as such -- without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity -- within what it is not."<sup>2</sup> After all, this differing and deferring constituting any word or transference, this "inside" that is "outside" of itself at its "core", this "always already" self-occluding motion making authority and oppositions possible yet escaping them both, is what Johnson finds "dramatized" in Melville's Billy Budd during one of her best-argued

and most recently published articles. "The 'deadly space' or 'difference' that runs through Billy Budd," she writes, "is not located between knowledge and action [much to our surprise?]: it is that which, within cognition, functions as an act; it is that which, within action, prevents us from ever knowing whether what we hit coincides with what we understand."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, even there the surprise of otherness extends its reference to that "'other' logic" which Rodolphe Gasché has already called the "two steps" of deconstruction: the reversal of the usual hierarchy and the rewriting of what is newly privileged.<sup>4</sup> The effacements of possible meanings by signifiers that seem secondary to signified "passions" in Billy Budd are suddenly seen by the critic as the primary "cause" of all the passions that seem to appear. The effacements are then rewritten out of the standard view of them to become de Manian moments where "language conveys its own empty, mechanical function" prior to any production of potential or constative meaning ("Melville's Fist," p. 583). These three violations shattering common expectations—"what has to happen," différance, and the possibility of an inversion that redefines what seems an appendage—are the main figures that I drift towards as I read the "surprise of otherness" and as I share Johnson's concern about an "anti-method" becoming a predictable and official procedure in criticism.

Given these sedimentations of "surprise" and "otherness," then, I now want to ask the principal question that Johnson's paper raises for me: is the deliberate return to the surprise of otherness she advocates a viable solution to the problem of a "comfortable undecideability"? Some of the ways she makes her case (and how they refer to other statements of it) lead me to doubt that a challenging "ignorance" can ever be opened up again

by deconstruction. Can we so neatly "become ignorant" of the "deconstructive impulse" that has seized a number of us as much as we have seized upon it? Aren't we rather more likely, if we follow Johnson's closing exhortation, to start a project of reading by using "what has fallen into disrepute" as a device permitting us to restate the trace? Johnson herself shows us just how that is done when she "sets [her reader] up to be surprised by otherness" in her opening paragraphs on Billy Budd. She cites several of the tale's interpreters quite early, first to show the surprising diversity of responses to what seems a simple story, and then to maintain that their one point of agreement is the "last testament" status of the tale allowing it to gain "the metalinguistic authority to confer finality or intelligibility upon all that precedes it" ("Melville's Fist," p. 568). Then she moves in for the kill: "Curiously enough [or perhaps "surprisingly"], we find that Billy Budd ends not once, but no less than four times" and thereby shows that "to end is to repeat, and to repeat is to be ungovernably open to revision" or différance (pp. 568-69). I find that view convincing, but mainly because I have read something like it before in a well-known study that Johnson does not cite, Melville's Thematics of Form by Edgar Dryden.<sup>5</sup> Johnson's surprise is indeed "set up," first in her diversion from one issue (disagreement) into another that abruptly defers its predecessor until the author has more evidence, and then in her "ignorance" of an opened-up ending which she proceeds to open by countering an "authority" already countered somewhere else. Apparently "if the deconstructive impulse is to retain [its] subversive power, we must therefore become ignorant" of subversions already performed. Either that, or we must select quotations or positions on the same focus that we know in advance will present the

metaphysics of presence that we want to disrupt, and that is what Professor Johnson does to begin the essay in this collection. To be sure, I am going after her for doing what we all do, what I do, what Derrida does and does unabashedly. It is he who proposes, in one example, to free "Nietzsche from the Heideggerian reading" by first offering the former "up to it completely, underwriting that interpretation without reserve; in a certain way and up to the point where, the content of the Nietzschean discourse being almost lost for the question of being, its form regains its absolute strangeness," its otherness or "what has to happen" in the face of what we have wanted to happen for too long (Of Grammatology, p. 19). Still, two problems remain just because of this quotation that trumpet my principal question once again. On the one hand, Derrida's procedure with Nietzsche, like Johnson's procedure with Melville, is not "forgetting what we know how to do" but doing deconstruction itself, if not rhetorical maneuvers even older. And so, on the other hand, Johnson's closing proposal seems a return to origins (the impossible gesture of metaphysics) that repeats Derrida's "surprise encounter" without much sense of difference at all.

Yet here I must step back a moment and look directly at my own rhetorical set-ups. I have been assuming, perhaps unfairly, that by "one's own usual practices" Johnson is pointing to the practice of deconstruction, naively performed or not, and that by "what has fallen into disrepute" she means what deconstruction has exposed, those assumptions about interpretation that conceal an ignorance which should always command us. How else can I make these statements accord with (or defer to) her later urging that what we must forget is the "deconstructive impulse" demanding the forgetting

itself? Perhaps the accord is different or not there in the way I see it, and perhaps I have raised questions about it within my own selective forgetting of what crosses it. Why have I left out that "judicious time-wasting with what one does not know how to use"? Why should I refuse to examine how "comfortable undecideability" can be "surprised by its own conservatism"? The answer to all these questions, I think, is one that I find in Johnson's reading of Melville, one that she finds in Derrida's reading of Lacan in her essay "The Frame of Reference,"<sup>6</sup> and one that Derrida finds in Foucault's reading of Descartes or his own reading of Rousseau's intertext of supplements: however much a reading responds to and wants to be "affected by nonknowledge as by its future," it also "ventures out deliberately" towards an Apollonian image that seeks to contain, overpower, and repress various diversions that threaten to elude it (Of Grammatology, p. 162). Deconstruction is a willed performance that makes happen "what has to happen" or takes as much as it lets itself be taken whenever it reads (or rereads) a text-within-a-text. Reversal and rewriting may be existing threats in part of a text's drift when a reader takes it on, but they surface only because they form "our intention," something Derrida acknowledges as prior to any cogent reading he presents:

We wish to identify a decisive articulation of the logocentric epoch. For purposes of this identification [in Of Grammatology] Rousseau seems to us the most revealing. That obviously supposes that we have already prepared the exit, determined the repression of writing as the fundamental operation of the epoch, read a certain number of texts but not all of them. This avowal of empiricism can sustain itself only by the strength of the question. The opening

of the question, the departure from the closure of self-evidence, the putting into doubt of a system of oppositions, all these movements necessarily have the form of empiricism and of errancy. [After all, we] must begin wherever we are and the thought of the trace, which cannot not take the scent [or attraction towards something] into account, has already taught us that it was impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely. Wherever we are: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be. (ibid.)

Yes, we must wander only from what we can say and verify already to open up the standard logic of interpretation and statement. But we must do so in a questioning gesture of "strength" (Johnson's "reading" that is "strong") sounding a good deal like Harold Bloom's willing of a hyperbolic origin or new voice from old metaphors that it dethrones and reworks as if it were first. To say anything at all we must want-to-say (vouloir-dire, according to Derrida) and must partially forget, not deconstruction, but our lack of full command over the language we reconfigure. We must try (as I have) to find accords, limited ranges of reference, focusing concepts on non-concepts enabling us to project a "task of reading," and then we must determine that wherever we are (now deconstruction, surely) will take us somewhere that we have proposed as the goal of our will to power.<sup>7</sup>

Hence Johnson's proposal for future subversions may have some viable elements, yet only if they take more account of deconstruction's lust for self-achievement, or what Said calls a "beginning in a characteristic way" that will always find itself as the content of its frame.<sup>8</sup> Surprise may come less from forgetting the strategies of deconstruction

beneath a set-up reading that is itself one of the strategies and more from an initial overindulgence in what deconstruction usually finds: groundless supplementarity, signs as tombs, gaps in knowledge or beginnings-again, ironic encounters between cognitive projections and the sheer march of self-displacing elements. Once that has happened the production of a critical reading (the reading-towards-an-essay that Johnson is actually talking about) can stop and face what it has not mastered in and around its focus and so realize what its Derridean language cannot say, at least not in the state the critic employs it nor perhaps in the present stages of Derrida's own work. Now the critic may confront quite early the "role of truth" (or textual horizon) that reading must establish as its "other" to be read and the plain fact that any reading is finally limited by "its own interests, blindnesses, desires, and fatigue." At that point the deconstructionist can turn towards her own project the surprise that Derrida sees in his focal texts:

We should begin by taking rigorous account of this being held within (prise) or this surprise: the writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command in the patterns of the language that he uses. (Of Grammatology, p. 158)

Surprise now emerges as an oscillation of taking and being taken, being held within or holding. It turns out to be sought by a "rigor" that wants to be captured by "something other than [an analyzed

text] would mean" or assert as defineable (ibid.), and what captures the focal text must therefore capture the critic precisely to insist on her need to command what no writer can command absolutely. This conundrum must arise "wherever we are," at any stage of awaiting "something other" that we achieve with our interpretive assumptions, so deconstruction by its own standards must always work through its own "conservatism," as Johnson says, and only at that juncture, as Johnson does not say, reach out for what it "does not know how to use." The intentional aims of deconstruction, if it is to progress by disrupting itself, must be (1) the finding of textual problems it cannot account for and (2) the quest for some adjustments in discourse that can take these problems on and open others. If those ex-orbitings never occur, if essays such as "Melville's Fist" keep ticking off established Derridean notions in a literary example, however brilliantly, then Johnson is especially right when she sees a future for deconstruction "in which ever more sophisticated subtleties are elaborated within an unchanging field of questions."

As it happens, I can even think of an area other than the one in Johnson's ninth paragraph where deconstruction has led us yet chosen to rest on its current vocabulary without reopening and surging past the conservatism of what it can name.<sup>9</sup> We now accept "meaning" or the predication of a signifier towards an emergent signified (or presence) as the product, even the forgetting, of a sliding difference-from-itself that always defers elsewhere before there is any "sense" to it. Such meaning, as Professor Riddel has said, is in fact "a formal construction" and therefore "a mirage, always already an Image" never at one with itself.<sup>10</sup> Yet what necessitates the transformation from the violent onset-of-the-other-in-what-is-other into

the "sense" of any word's future as a relationship to its past and absent "meaning"? Why can Derrida's vouloir-dire be translated as a "will-to-signification" or perhaps an inevitable "will-to-meaning," as Eugenio Donato intimates?<sup>11</sup> Does the trace's self-occluding by self-displacement demand this sort of forgetting, or is that fairly common explanation too simple? These questions are avoided by Professor Johnson precisely where they might confront her in her reading of Billy Budd. As she approaches the narrator's "Platonic definition of Claggart's evil—'Natural Depravity: a depravity according to nature'," she glides too easily into a lack of "content" in the definition by first accepting F. B. Freeman's view that the phrase is "nothing but a tautology"; "Syntactically," she says, "the definition fulfills its function, but it is empty of any cognitive information" ("Melville's Fist," p. 583). We already know from Derrida and her other examples from Melville that any crossing from term to term points out a space (or "otherness") that is never entirely filled up, even in assertions where terms are presented as identical with one another. There is nothing surprising in that discovery any more than there is in her set-up via Freeman. What is more surprising now is Melville's use of Platonic identity-with-itself when the very syntax of difference (something "according to" something else), not to mention "depravity" as un-natural in most "natures," manifestly denies the self-sameness that makes tautologies so meaningless yet desirable. Something must mean in terms of something else and yet that difference must claim some resemblance too. Why not just displacements that differ and never claim otherwise? Is there simply a human desire for meaning-by-resemblance unrelated to the eruption of displacement? de Man seems to say so whenever he wonders how a meaningless "positional act" connected

"to nothing that comes before or after" can always become "a trope" or a thrust of relation engendering a "sequential narrative" that "means." All he can say is that "we impose, in our turn, on the senseless power of positional language the authority of sense and meaning."<sup>12</sup> Yet how do we impose authority if the mere positioning is not already differing and deferring within itself and so driving towards something else to be pursued by a re-positioning that we may achieve? There must be a way beyond our current evasions to say why différance has to become a will-to-meaning in at least one of its "other" forms.

No one has dealt with this problem, after all, more than Jacques Derrida himself, yet I do not find he has advanced this question much beyond where he left it in "Cogito and the History of Madness."<sup>13</sup> Here, when he finds that Descartes' "I think" is a hyperbolic "attempt-to-say" springing up from a madness of silent non-meaning that remains as the Cogito's "other," he also sees that this sudden "excess in the direction of the non-determined" (p. 57) at once becomes determined by an "economy" of defining exchanges that is the "necessity from which no discourse can escape, for it belongs to the meaning of meaning" (p. 53). "Wanting to say," in other words, as I only started to imply earlier, is "a zero point at which determined meaning and nonmeaning come together in their common origin," yet an origin which is only an excess (p. 56). There can be no discourse without the possibility of a meaning demanded by "an act of force and a prohibition" keeping silent diversion veiled beneath "normality" (pp. 53-54), and that act is a sheer coming forth from non-sense that reaches out for relation and reassurance the moment it steps out from a drift where everything is other than what seems. Why must this be? What is the



necessary turn from non-meaning to meaning that makes even my own discourse possible — and then keeps it from finally meaning beyond all threat of drift? I grant that the taking of the excess as a point of reference for interpretation, something "reflected" as soon as it is "proffered" (p. 58), announces that "meaning" is under way, however much it is always threatened. But why should there be a "proffering" which already assumes a "reflection" upon it? If meaning and non-meaning divide at a common excess, what about the nature of that "origin" has yet to be said? I think that such questions remain because Derrida's later works and those of his followers start with "the meaning of meaning" as presence and work to show that "Everything begins with reproduction" generating presence as a belated object of desire (Writing and Difference, p. 211). The usual strategies of deconstruction simply bypass the question, or rather they beg it, assuming it answered by the metaphysics of presence which they set out to unsettle despite their need to write within it. In doing that, of course, they confess the power of that metaphysics without entirely getting at what makes it necessary (though impossible). Thus I am now taken by surprise, not by différance, but by my taking of everything towards a metaphysical argument which I "want to say" but which I deny. Deconstruction must disrupt itself most, must take itself towards being taken, by better explaining, of all things, the rational discourse which it always is.

True, this suggestion is risky, and in a very basic way that Johnson's final call-to-ignorance does not really force on writers of criticism. I ask, not just for essays admitting what we cannot say (as I have), but for essays that we do not send out because they are too predictably deconstructionist (and I've sent out my share). We must write,

for awhile at least," "pre-papers," discussions that are the readings we thought they were going to be. Then we must return to the textual horizon to which our work seems to respond and find movements occurring that still escape our reading, even though we will never find all of them. The resulting essay must be the struggle of extending an ever-inadequate vocabulary to face questions that beckon only at the edges of our understandings. Of course, as Jonathan Culler said in this very forum last year, our current system of promotion and tenure (and rewards thereafter) militates against all such "projects" that could "take years to complete."<sup>14</sup> The more copious the vitae, given good quality, the better the chances for many scholars to chase after inflation (though there are exceptions). Why not latch on to some helpful, astonishing notions that can be used in several readings and can make some works seem truly different from what they seemed before? I did. The answer is that there comes a point when you can always tell what you are going to say as much as your readers can tell exactly what they will read under your name, and on the fact of that problem Professor Johnson and I are in something close to total agreement. We differ, as most do, in our ways of proposing solutions. I claim that her case for re-emergent ignorance could encourage some critics to repeat the very strategies they should question and expand. Her "judicious time-wasting," unless modified from what I find in that sentence, could simply be the first stages of an essay that knows its own surprise but pretends to let it happen. I prefer a reading and writing towards an ignorance that is really imperative because it cannot be spoken or even thought without a good deal more work. I believe that most of us have more time than we acknowledge, or at least enough to articulate what we do "not know how to use" on the way to a mastery that is its own best critic in its ability to see

what its readings evade. The alternative is to accept ourselves as worthy of praise or blame from a deconstructionist "insider" who tells us what is "proper to the form" if we wish to "do it." Deconstruction at its best takes its aim at what is improper "wherever we are," so I look for the time when I will not "be taken" (or taken in) by my own pattern of "proper" and fabricated surprises.<sup>15</sup>

## NOTES

1. Foreword to Jacobs' The Dissimulating Harmony (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), pp. ix, xi, and xii.
2. Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 47.
3. "Melville's Fist: The Execution of Billy Budd," Studies in Romanticism, 18 (1979), 599.
4. See Gasché's "Deconstruction as Criticism" in Glyph 6: Textual Studies (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), esp. pp. 183-94.
5. See Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), pp. 209-15.
6. "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," Yale French Studies, 55/56 (1977), 457-505.
7. See Michel Foucault on what the author-function necessitates (even for the deconstructor) in "What Is an Author?," Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism, ed. Josué Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 141-60.
8. See Said's Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), pp. 4-26.
9. Even Johnson's laudable urging in that ninth paragraph that we "use history and biography de-constructively" sounds less like the hope for the "new questions and new ways" that it claims to foster and more like the refiguring of excluded material within an established programme. Isn't

the emphasis placed once again on following Derrida and de Man, the leaders of the movement?

10. "Decentering the Image: The 'Project' of 'American' Poetics?" in Textual Strategies, p. 347.

11. See Donato in "'Here, Now'/'Always Already': Incidental Remarks on Some Recent Characterizations of the Text," Diacritics, 6, No. 3 (Fall 1976), esp. 26-27.

12. "Shelley Disfigured" in Harold Bloom, et al., Deconstruction and Criticism (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 64.

13. Revue de metaphysique et de morale, 3 and 4 (1964), trans. and rpt. in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 31-63. I quote from the latter version.

14. "The Critical Assumption," SCE Reports, 6 (Fall 1979), 83.

15. My thanks to Debra Kurtz for typing the final version of this essay.

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OF POLITICS AND LIMITS:  
DERRIDA RE-MARX

"Modern art, etc."  
--Marx, *Grundrisse*

The following might best be considered simply as an extended footnote to Professor Johnson's comments concerning one of the types of "accusations" commonly directed against deconstruction--that of "the politically radical, which accuses deconstruction of not going far enough." For the question raised by these particular "accusers" regarding "the politics of deconstruction" may itself be viewed as a displacement of perhaps a more basic question--the question of Derrida's encounter with Marx, an encounter (to transpose Derrida's own quotation from John Searle) which "never quite takes place."<sup>1</sup> It has long been acknowledged that Marx is conspicuously absent from the list of Derrida's so-called "precursors," and that Marxist texts are mentioned only in passing (if at all) without themselves ever forming the putative objects of any extended reading.<sup>2</sup>

Such neglect, however, has been (and remains) "a serious ground for dissatisfaction among younger French and American intellectuals"<sup>3</sup> who continually implore Derrida to take an unambivalent position (is he *pro* or *contra*?) in regards to the Marxist tradition. The nature of this "dissatisfaction" is clearly discernible, for instance, in the bizarre *pas de deux* performed by Derrida and his interviewers both in "Positions" and in "Ja, ou le faux-bond": each of these "dialogues" concludes with a sequence of increasingly insistent

attempts on the part of his interviewers to have Derrida definitively describe his relationship to Marx; each of these attempts in turn elicits a lengthy response by Derrida which, however, only seems to have the effect of reinforcing his interviewers' frustration (thereby prompting them once again to repeat their question to him in a slightly different form . . . ).<sup>4</sup> Why this reticence on Derrida's part to "satisfy" his Marxist critics, and why do they feel that he "never goes far enough"? Why (if not for "political" reasons) has Marx not drawn the same attention which Derrida does devote to the other "modern masters"? What (in the words of one of his interviewers) precisely is Derrida's "rapport au le matérialisme historique et au le matérialisme dialectique"<sup>5</sup> (and can this question be asked as such)? These are the issues to be rehearsed below.

One of the more extraordinary features of the "dialogues" referred to above is that--despite his interviewers' nearly continual protestations to the contrary<sup>6</sup>--Derrida does in fact manage to specify many of the ways that he finds his own work to accord with the history of the Marxist tradition. In the first place, he defuses the Marxists' most pressing concern by explaining that the absence of Marx from his texts represents not an objection to Marxism *per se* but a *lacuna* explicitly calculated "to mark the loci of a theoretical elaboration which, from my standpoint in any case, is *yet to come*."<sup>7</sup> Having said this, however, Derrida is quick to insist that it makes little sense to fix his relationship to Marx in any determinative way (as if this were a question of his personal *opinion*): any such relationship is not a simple matter of subjects and

and objects. Neither Derrida (as "reader") nor Marx (as "text") are in any manner homogeneous entities: both are rather elements in a system of unsymmetrical relationships which exceed the boundaries of their "proper" names.<sup>8</sup> This disseminated plurality of reader(s) and text(s) undermines both the possibility of "an unambivalent attitude" to Marx as well as of a discrete, stable canon of Marxist "principles" that would exist *hors-texte*. Marx, in other words, is not to be memorized but read.

While Derrida and his interviewers are all agreed that the process of reading is itself inscribed in heterogeneous ways, it is, however, precisely concerning the nature of this heterogeneity that Derrida and his interviewers seem to diverge radically. For Jean-Louis Houdebine, "heterogeneity" is that which names the outside of any idealist philosophy, what such philosophies cannot synthesize, transcend or "digest"; in its absolute resistance to any metaphysical reappropriation, heterogeneity (in Houdebine's words) forms "the motif of a (of the?) fundamental dialectical materialist contradiction" and, as such, serves "as a reversal and at the same time a displacement outside the domain of classical philosophy."<sup>9</sup> The major thrust of Houdebine's point here is to challenge the priority of Derrida's *différance* by claiming that this term is encompassed within the notion of heterogeneity conceived in its "proper" materialist sense--and thus, by implication, that deconstruction is merely one moment within the larger dialectic of Marxist-Leninism.<sup>10</sup>

For Derrida, however, such a formulation is constantly fraught with the danger that, in privileging such notions as "heterogeneity" or even "matter," one may simply be participating in the

logic of that to which one is opposed. As he has noted elsewhere:

The "contents" (of action or of discourse) that are apparently the most revolutionary or the most subversive are, from the moment when certain rules of formal decency are respected, perfectly recuperable, neutralized, and assimilated by the systems to which one pretends to oppose them.<sup>11</sup>

Phrases such as "the irreducible heterogeneity of matter" therefore continually run the risk of simply installing a new transcendental signified that "can always turn up to reassure a metaphysical materialism."<sup>12</sup> If an "outside" to metaphysics may "always become an 'object' again in the subject/object polarity or the reassuring 'reality' of an *hors-texte*," then we must remain on our guard since "the 'dialectic' of the same and the other, of the inside and the outside, of the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, is," as Derrida stresses, "extremely *devious*."<sup>13</sup> In short, Houdebine's master-concept cannot claim for itself a victory over (and beyond) metaphysics simply as the product of its (re)iteration: such concepts can succeed in calling idealism into question not through any predetermined insistence but only as a result of the textual work which they occasion.<sup>14</sup>

Replying in this way to Houdebine's question (which, nonetheless, is repeated over and over again), Derrida also comments on the nature of Marxist systematicity. In another context, he has noted that "deconstruction does not oppose, but works, without working (if work is determined oppositionally), otherwise"<sup>15</sup>--and such a formulation is pertinent here. For if Derrida's ubiquitous strategy of uncovering "a structure of

alteration without opposition (more, or less, than oppositional) is a tactic employed to resist the temptation of "both simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing*, while upholding it, in the closed sphere of these oppositions," we will find that deconstruction will remain at variance with materialism in so far as the latter tends to content itself with its own self-definition as the specular outside or other of a (simply) opposed idealism.<sup>16</sup> In failing to recognize this implication in the discursive structure of its "enemy," dialectical materialism will remain caught within the systematic logic of its metaphysical "opponent":

To the extent that it includes a system named dialectical materialism, doesn't Marxism present itself as a philosophy (whether elaborated or to be elaborated), as a *founded* philosophical practice, as a "construction" (to respond in a word to your question)? I haven't known any Marxist discourse--considered as such or said to be such--which would respond negatively to that question. Nor even, I might add, which poses or recognizes this as a question.<sup>17</sup>

The Marxist concept of "ideology," for example, in avoiding "questions of the Nietzschean and/or the Heideggerian variety," represents merely one domain in which the residual operation of a traditional metaphysics can be detected--one which is marked "by a certain logic of representation, of consciousness, of the subject, of the imaginary, of mimesis, as well as by a pre-critical notion of illusion or of error . . ." <sup>18</sup> Thus even the work of such an avowedly "anti-humanist" as Althusser remains inscribed within the borders of "a very old-fashioned psycho-philosophy."<sup>19</sup>

While such remarks seem to indicate a generally negative attitude towards Marxism (at least as presently formulized), Derrida nevertheless emphasizes the point that "deconstruction is not [. . .] an anti-philosophy or a critique of philosophy. Of Marxism less than any other."<sup>20</sup> Unlike Marxism, deconstruction "is not a critical operation, rather criticism is its object. [It] aims, at one moment or another, at the confidence expressed in the critical instance (one which is *decidedly* critical/theoretical) concerning the ultimate possibility of decidability itself."<sup>21</sup> Yet in so far as Marxist criticism remains ever willing to be *decidable*--to construe itself as rending the "veil" behind which the *true* relations lie--to this extent we must conclude that Marxism and deconstruction do not (simply) *overlap*.<sup>22</sup>

Having outlined Derrida's brief (though suggestive) remarks expressed in his interviews concerning the nature of his *rapport* with Marx (a *rapport*, we have learned, that cannot be [simply] articulated), we now will turn to some statements made by various of his Marxist critics--for whom, of course, the "positions" taken by Derrida "do not go far enough." Whether as a direct response to the questions raised in the interviews or as a generalized estimation of the implications of deconstruction, the "objections" posed to deconstruction by Marxism fall into two categories: those for whom Marxism and deconstruction are mutually *exclusive* disciplines (in that deconstruction does not know its *place*, its own limits relative to Marxism), as well as those for whom deconstruction is not sufficiently *inclusive* (in that deconstruction is charged with knowing only too

well the [ideological] place it has circumscribed for itself).<sup>23</sup> Both of these objections, however, can be considered as variations on a single question of *boundaries*: of Who comprehends Whom, of which theory--in its own comprehensiveness--can comprehend a wider range of phenomena (including the other).

This question of limits is aptly phrased by Terry Eagleton, for whom deconstructive criticism represents a problem "for a critic whose commitment to materialism *extends beyond semantic boundaries*" [my italics].<sup>24</sup> John Brenkman's reservations are also paradigmatic of this concern:

Deconstructive literary criticism has held off the problems posed by history and society by *limiting* the construct to be deconstructed to the series of fundamental concepts, oppositions, and value schemes that Derrida has found to organize idealist philosophy since Plato. The deconstructed system remains a purely speculative one. This indefinite *broadening* of history into the area of metaphysics, accompanied by the *narrowing* of the general text, hides the evasion of all historical specificity; such a strategy has a special appeal precisely because it allows the act of radical critique to *withdraw* from its actual historical, political, and institutional context.<sup>25</sup> [my italics]

Similarly, Christine Buci-Glucksmann finds it insufficient "to situate the internal contradiction within Hegelian philosophy only at the *level* of the relationship of writing and method (cf. "Hors livre" [in *La Dissémination*]). What closes Hegelian philosophy in on itself (the cutting edge of its relationship to science and to the history of

class struggle), or what simply does not offer itself as an intra-textual opening [. . .], is there-  
by *included* in Marxism" [my italics].<sup>26</sup>

Some Marxists emphasize, however, that such *limits* to deconstruction are not completely without *remedy*.<sup>27</sup> Implying that deconstruction is not "wholly irreconcilable with Marxism," Fredric Jameson finds that Derrida's practice of textuality "may be said to have left a place open for Marxism."<sup>28</sup> Proceeding from such a perspective, Michael Ryan itemizes just what deconstruction has been most lacking--an absence which only an alliance with Marxism can (ful)fill:

Deconstruction can derive from Marxism the *broad* political and socio-historical *outlines* which it now lacks. Like bourgeois feminism which dictates its own *limits--limits* which Marxist-feminists are beginning to *overcome--* deconstruction as it exists projects *limits* which can only be *overcome* by placing its at once more local and more general undertaking (because the critique of logocentrism is *limited* in comparison to social theory, but it nevertheless deals with a phenomenon which characterizes all western, not only bourgeois, rationality) *within* the *framework* of a *broader* revolutionary theory. If it is not to remain an academic *sub-discipline*, a philosophical critique of philosophy and of its institutions or an elitist literary critical method, it must be *joined* to a Marxist critique of race, class, and sex exploitation.<sup>29</sup> [my italics]

While, for Ryan, Marxism also can "benefit" from its encounter with deconstruction (he finds the latter "a means of detecting and correcting residual idealism in Marxist theory itself"), neverthe-

less this discussion of the possibility of *rap-prochement* is posed once again as a question of hierarchies, of borders, of boundaries (even though the asymmetry of "at once more local and more general" offers a troubling pause). Can the *limits* to this version of territorial warfare be *overcome*? This is the question we will now consider below.

Professor Johnson's comments in "Nothing Fails Like Success" do much to settle the claim made by Marxists that "deconstructive theory sometimes seems to block all access to the possibility of reading explicitly 'referential' documents in conjunction with literary or speculative texts." The task for "deconstructionists," as she argues convincingly, is not to "reject" the demands of history in any simplistic way but rather to find "new ways in which the literary and the non-literary texts alike can be made to read and rework each other." Yet we must still ask ourselves why her discussion (as well as mine) is necessitated in the first place. For if Derrida *had* only written both openly and at length on the texts of Marx and of Marxism, then surely our discussions would lose their pertinence: we then wouldn't have to ask about his *rappport* with Marx (even if we reject the facile ways this question has been posed). Why *is* Marx absent from Derrida's texts? How can we account for his reticence without *deciding* prematurely what this absence *means*?

Perhaps in a purely *speculative* way.

While various theories have been offered to account for Derrida's "detachment" from this

subject (and while--on their own terms--they are more or less persuasive), such theories are perhaps less successful in indicating the nearly pathological nature of this situation itself.<sup>29a</sup> The psychotropic structures of the interviews discussed above might provide a clue to what may be at stake in Derrida's "omission" of Marx. In the first place, the questions put to Derrida by Houdebine and Scarpetta resemble in their blind insistency nothing so much as a compulsion to repeat [*Wiederholungsang*], a compulsion "which cannot ultimately be reduced to a conflictual dynamic entirely circumscribed by the interplay between the reality principle [they do, after all, receive answers fitted to their questions] and the pleasure principle [yet they remain "unsatisfied"]."<sup>30</sup> Nor can this compulsion to repeat be understood simply as a desire to *master* deconstruction, to subject Derrida to *their* own mastery:

What then is this function of traumatic repetition if nothing--quite the reverse--seems to justify it from the point of view of the pleasure principle? To master the painful event, someone might say--but who masters, where is the master here, to be mastered? Why speak so hastily when we do not know where to situate the agency that would undertake this operation of mastery.<sup>31</sup>

Neither, however, can Derrida assume this position of mastery, for his is literally a "defensive" position--a position characterized by a certain rhetoric of defense [*Abwehr*]:

The *lacuna* to which you alluded [concerning Marx], and do me the honor of believing this, are explicitly calculated . . .

There is what you call this "encounter" [with Marx] which has seemed to me indeed, for a long time, absolutely necessary. *You may well imagine that I was not completely unconscious of it.*

And yet, *I am charged with the fault that I denounce*, as if people [actually, C. Buci-Glucksmann] were less in a hurry to criticize me or to debate me than first to adopt my position in order to do so.<sup>32</sup>

This "defensive" tone marks as well a discussion in *La Carte Postale* in which Derrida objects to the translation of the phrase *aufgelöst werden können* (in a recent French edition of *The German Ideology*) as *peuvent être déconstruites* ["can be deconstructed"]. Derrida comments:

Once the amalgam is accomplished, the appropriation incorporated [*incorporée*], we hear that "deconstruction" is to be abandoned, *since Marx had already said it.*<sup>33</sup>

Who hears that "'deconstruction' is to be abandoned"? Is *this* the translator's (surreptitious) motive? Can it be construed (without remainder) *solely* as the product of malicious intent? If Derrida is "over-reacting," is it coincidental that this behavior occurs in the proximity of Marx's name?

In noting this conjuncture of a compulsion to repeat with the operation of a certain rhetoric of defense, we seem to find ourselves reading not an interview between Derrida and his Marxist critics but--*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, whose fourth chapter begins with Freud's "confession" that "what follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his predilection."<sup>34</sup>



Freud begins this chapter by noting that "the system *Pept.-Cs.* [occupies] a position in space" that poses specific problems of *limits*:

It must lie on the borderline between outside and inside; it must be turned toward the external world and must envelop the other psychical symptoms.<sup>35</sup>

The ego is similarly described as a "boundary creature" [*Grenzwesen*] eluding classification according to a simple logical topography (as Margaret Ferguson explains):

Because Freud describes [the perceptual] apparatus in terms of a "protective" function, and because he specifically relates the notion of protection against external threats to the ego's task of defending itself against internal threats, the chapter provides a useful way of thinking about textual defenses--including Freud's own--as "productions of the ego." [. . .] The distinction between "internal" and "external" in the realm of textual defense is, however, no less complex than Freud suggests it is to be in the realm of psychic survival.<sup>36</sup>

If the interviews in question qualify as such "textual defenses," it is because part of their complexity resides in their similar problematization of the limits between "inside" and "outside." Not only are the questions addressed to Derrida asked in terms of which discourse is more *comprehensive* than the other (which, in "understanding" the other, can situate the other in itself) but even the very form of the interview poses and reposes this same problematic of limits: when does "Positions" end? with the termination of the dialogue section or with the "final" exchange of letters? where are its borders between writing and

speech, between the spontaneity of conversation and a supplementary process of editorial revision? If, in addition to a compulsion to repeat, a mechanism of defense indeed inheres to the structure of the interviews, these then are tropes whose topographies "do not yield to the norms of formal logic: they relate to no object or collection of objects nor in any strict sense do they have either extension or *inclusiveness* [*compréhension*]."37

This topographical indeterminacy is manifest, moreover, in our inability to identify simply *whose* is the ego producing these "textual defenses," *whose* is the ego that is both "the stake and the agent" of such defensive maneuverings.<sup>38</sup> Rather than attributing this ego-function either to Derrida or to any/all of his interviewers (since the phenomena under observation cannot be reduced to the interplay of individual psyches), perhaps we can suggest that what is at stake is *the ego of deconstruction* (in the same way that Derrida authorizes us to think about the ego of psychoanalysis as it is [de]constructed in Freud's text). By doing so, we might discover that the "connection" between this general effacement of limits and Derrida's defensiveness on the question of Marx is something that (in Derrida's own words) "belongs to a different labyrinth and a different crypt."<sup>39</sup>

"What is a crypt?" As Derrida's essay "Fors" explains, a crypt is a defense mechanism taken to extremes (or, if such a word existed, to *intremes*). As Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok developed the notion, a crypt is an uncanny ruse of the ego employed to mimic the operations of the Unconscious.<sup>40</sup> While space does not permit a detailed elaboration of this figure,<sup>41</sup> what will be stressed is that a crypt "literally" incorporates a foreign body with-

in the self, an action that ultimately exceeds the possibility of distinguishing between the literal and non-literal:

The cryptic enclave, between "the dynamic unconscious" and the "Self of introjection," forms, inside the general space of the self, a kind of pocket of resistance, the hard cyst of an "artificial unconscious." The interior is partitioned off from the interior. [. . .] The inner safe (the Self) has placed itself outside the crypt, or, if one prefers, has constituted "within itself" the crypt as an outer safe. One might go on indefinitely switching the place names around in this dizzying topology (the inside as the outside of the outside, or of the inside; the outside as the inside of the inside, or of the outside, etc.), but total confusion is not possible [!].<sup>42</sup>

"How do crypts find articulation?" Through *cryptonyms* which both "protect against a mortal repetition of an excruciating pleasure and provide a displaced expression of a desire which would otherwise have to remain irrevocably silent."<sup>43</sup> Cryptonyms work *anasemically*, establishing correspondences between words not on any semantic basis but through "lexical contiguity" or "formal consonance"; the cryptonym is then treated as a synonym of the initial (interdicted) word of which it is a translation.<sup>44</sup> (Derrida's play on the homonymity between the way *Hegel* is pronounced in French and the word *aigle* ["eagle"] might be understood as an illustration of these cryptonymic rules.<sup>45</sup>) Since such a procedure can occur both within languages as well as between languages, the potential for cryptonymic substitution remains *unlimited*.

With this pocket sketch of the workings of the

crypt, we can take up once more the question of Marx's absence from Derrida's texts, and conclude that we have simply been looking in *the wrong place*. For when Derrida writes that "there is no paradigmatic text: only relations of a cryptic haunting from *mark* to *mark*," or that all translation is a matter of "economy" (of the *oikos*, the household) in its "relationship with time, space, counting words, signs, *marks*," we have found indeed "a certain foreign body working over our household words."<sup>46</sup> Just as Derrida finds a proper name in the sounds of the Freudian text,<sup>47</sup> so we, too, can acknowledge such an (improper) presence in the texts of deconstruction: for the cryptonym in question is, of course, that of *mark(s)/marque(s)/Marx*. It is only fitting that it is Marx who is encrypted in the ego of deconstruction: he is anasemically invoked in every re-marking of the mark (as *telos* or target; as trace or residue; as minting or inscribing; as error or illusion [a *stray* mark, off the *mark*]--the general topoi about which Marx has much to say). As the inside of the inside of deconstruction's outside, or as the outside of the outside of deconstruction's inside, Marx inhabits within the *limits* of deconstructive rhetoric a very precarious bounded/boundless place: it is no wonder that the interviews bear this same (abyssal) structure, for when the name of Marx is the subject in question, the deconstructive ego is apt to be highly defensive. Hence Marx is not absent from Derrida's texts as claimed: encrypted in the crypt of its Self, deconstruction has Marx in protective custody.

While the discussion above has been somewhat less (or more) than serious, it was undertaken

if only to insist that there is something decidedly "wrong" about recent Marxist attacks on deconstruction, or about deconstructive attacks on Marxism,<sup>48</sup> or even about some of the positive attempts to articulate the relationship between the two. I find myself, for example, in complete agreement with Michael Ryan's lucid critique of P. Lejeune's *Le pacte autobiographique*<sup>49</sup> (a work of "bovine complacency," to be sure) and yet dissent entirely from the way that Ryan tries to make Marxism and deconstruction *overlap* on the question of "self-evidence." This is not to say that both discourses do not attack this nefarious concept, but that the *object* being attacked (even though it may bear the same name) may not be the same in each instance. Ryan's use of phrases such as "Put the two critiques together and you get . . ." or "This is the lesson of Marxism and deconstruction combined" invoke an arithmetical model ("only like with like"--only objects belonging to the same discursive order--"can be added together")--an assumption which our discussion of crypts (where 1 + 1 may equal 430) was meant to put in question.

Marxism and deconstruction pose themselves in dissimilar ways, each answering to a different object: Marxism criticizes *its* objects (race, class, and sex oppression), deconstruction criticizes *criticism*.<sup>50</sup> If they are to be related (as I hope they will) this should occur on the basis of their supplementarity (and not simple complementarity), of their "folding" and not mere "overlapping" into one another; in the same way that desire impinges upon need, so are Marxism and deconstruction connected: *anaesthetically*. As a contribution directed towards a fuller mapping of this borderland between the two, this paper thus makes a *pli* for additional re-marx.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc," *Glyph*, 2 (1977): 169. As Derrida remarks concerning this formulation, it is above all with the structure of this "never quite" that this paper, too, will be concerned (171).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Gayatri Spivak's "Translator's Introduction" to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1976): xxi and 318 n.19, as well as J.-L. Houdebine's question to Derrida in "Positions," an interview to be discussed at some length below [*Positions* (Paris, 1972): 83-4].

<sup>3</sup> Spivak, *op. cit.*, p. 318 n.19.

<sup>4</sup> "Positions" is the last of three interviews published under the title *Positions* (Paris, 1972); "Ja, ou le faux-bond" appeared in the journal *Diagraphe*, #11 (1977): 84-121 and is a "continuation" of the interview begun as "Entre Crochets" in the same journal, #8 (1976): 97-114. Derrida's interviewers in the former are Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta (both of whom are associated with the Tel Quel collective); the interviewers in the latter remain anonymous (the editors of the journal?).

<sup>5</sup> "Ja, ou le faux-bond," p. 116. In this connection it should be pointed out that the "unity" I am attributing to a Marxist critique of Derrida is in itself a strategic fiction. I am calling "Marxist" those for whom Derrida's omission of Marx--as well as his reticence to discuss openly those issues historically connected to Marx's "name"--is a matter for concern (and I include myself among them).

<sup>6</sup> That such protestations are, in fact, nearly continual is evidenced even in the structure of the "Positions" interview (a topic to which we will return).

<sup>7</sup> Positions, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> See "Signature Event Context," Glyph, 1 (1977): 172-97, as well as "Limited Inc" concerning the ways in which the written undermines the seeming plenitude of personal "identity." It is, of course, a frequent topos of Derrida's writing that a heterogeneous collection of texts both is and is not (completely) designated by the "uniqueness" of their author's "proper" name.

<sup>9</sup> Positions, pp. 126, 127.

<sup>10</sup> As Richard Klein aptly explains, the point here is simply that "Houdebine comprehends Derrida." See his "Prolegomenon to Derrida," Diacritics, 2:4 (Winter 1972): 31, which poses many of the same questions that will be considered here. As we will notice, "comprehension" (as "inclusion" as well as "understanding") may, "in the last instance," be what the question of Marx is all about.

<sup>11</sup> "Ja, ou le faux-bond," p. 105. For example, would there be something that we can call "idealist" philosophy if it weren't for the fact that there was always already some version of materialism to put it into question?

<sup>12</sup> Positions, p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, La Carte Postale (Paris, 1980): 286.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 305; and Positions, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> "Ja, ou le faux-bond," pp. 118-19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 120. Having said this, however, Derrida still insists "in the necessity of the problematic domain designated by the Marxist concept of ideology, even if I judge that, in its historical/theoretical situation, the state of the concept in the Marxist texts that I know cannot measure up to the structure and the complexity of the domain and the objects so designated" (Ibid., p. 119).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> We will return to this problematic of overlaps in our conclusion.

<sup>23</sup> Such a distinction between "inclusive" and "exclusive"--as are all distinctions between "outsides" and "insides"--is merely an arbitrary heuristic. What is being stressed here is not some attempt to differentiate the two but rather the common structure of "-clusivity" they share.

<sup>24</sup> Terry Eagleton, "Text, Ideology, Realism," in Literature and Society [Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1978], ed. Edward W. Said (Baltimore, 1980): 149.

<sup>25</sup> John Brenkman, "Deconstruction and the

Social Text," Social Text, #1 (1979): 188.

<sup>26</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann, "Déconstruction et critique marxiste de la philosophie," L'Arc, #53 (1973): 32.

<sup>27</sup> Any resemblance to the Platonic pharmakon here is not necessarily unintentional.

<sup>28</sup> Fredric Jameson, The Prison-House of Language (Princeton, 1972), 177, 183-4.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Ryan, "Self-Evidence," Diacritics, 10:2 (June 1980): 2.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the discussions by Spivak, op. cit., p. 318 n.19, and by Klein, op. cit., p. 31: the former considers temporal matters, the latter questions of political survival.

<sup>30</sup> J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, 1973): 78.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1978): 51.

<sup>32</sup> Positions, pp. 84, 85, 72. My italics.

<sup>33</sup> La Carte Postale, p. 285.

<sup>34</sup> Beyond the Pleasure Principle [Norton Ed.] (New York, 1961): 18. Is it accidental that the "subject" of much of La Carte Postale is--Beyond the Pleasure Principle?

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Margaret W. Ferguson, "Border Territories of Defense: Freud and Defenses of Poetry," in The Literary Freud: Mechanisms of Defense and the Poetic Will [Psychiatry and the Humanities, Volume Four], ed. Joseph H. Smith, M.D. (New Haven, 1980): 150, 155.

<sup>37</sup> Nicolas Abraham, "The Shell and the Kernel," Diacritics, 9:1 (Spring 1979): 28 [my italics].

<sup>38</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 104.

<sup>39</sup> La Carte Postale, p. 349.

<sup>40</sup> "Fors," Georgia Review, 31:1 (Spring, 1977): 64-116 [translated by Barbara Johnson].

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed summary of this work, see Peggy Kamuf, "Abraham's Wake," Diacritics, 9:1 (Spring 1979): 35. I also wish to thank Lorna Gladstone, whose dissertation [The University of Chicago, 1980] on "The Telling of the Wolf-Man's Story" first introduced me to Abraham and Torok's work.

<sup>42</sup> "Fors," pp. 74-5.

<sup>43</sup> Kamuf, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> "Fors," pp. 106-7.

<sup>45</sup> See Glas (Paris, 1974), p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> These are from Derrida's "Borderlines" in Deconstruction and Criticism, Harold Bloom et al. (New York, 1979), pp. 137, 169-70, as well as from "Fors," p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> La Carte Postale, p. 333.

<sup>48</sup> See J. Hillis Miller's "Response to Vincent Leitch" in Critical Inquiry, 6:4 (Summer 1980), which says a few discouraging words about Marxism.

<sup>49</sup> Ryan, op. cit., passim.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Melville's dissertation [The University of Chicago, 1980] is very helpful in posing this issue of what objects mean to disciplines; I thank him for sharing his work with me.

Wherever possible, existing translations of Derrida's writing were employed. These include:

"Positions," Diacritics, 2:4 (Winter, 1972): 35-43.

"Positions [cont.]," Diacritics, 3:1 (Spring 1973): 33-46.

"Response," Diacritics, 3:2 (Summer 1973): 57-9.

"Speculations-On Freud," Oxford Literary Review, 3:2 (1978): 78-97 [trans. Ian MacLeod].

## NEWS AND NOTICES

## SCE Sessions at MLA

## 1. Annual Business Meeting:

Monday, December 29, 1980  
Mirror Room, Sheraton, 5:15 PM

## 2. 302: Designing Courses in Criticism

Monday, December 29, 1980  
10:15-11:30 AM, Cedar, Hyatt

Panel: Leroy Searle, Univ. of Washington  
Jeffrey Peck, Univ. of Washington  
Jeffrey Plank, Georgia Inst. of  
Technology

## 3. 356: Deconstructive Criticism: Directions

Monday, December 29, 1980  
1:45-3:00 PM, Arbor 4, Hyatt

Panel: Vincent B. Leitch, Mercer Univ.  
Barbara Johnson, Yale Univ.  
William Spanos, SUNY-Binghamton  
Joseph Riddel, UCLA

(Papers printed in this issue of SCE Reports)

Note: the following sessions include papers and presentations by SCE members:

17, 31, 43, 57, 81, 88, 103, 129, 135,  
153, 174, 175, 187, 243, 288, 293A, 302, 315,  
321, 333, 356, 392, 446, 486, 494, 510.

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SCE Session at SAMLA  
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November, 1981

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Toward a New Transdiscipline"

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