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INTRODUCTION

JAMES CREECH

In April of 1984 The Society for Critical Exchange sponsored a colloquium with Jacques Derrida at Miami University. During Professor Derrida's visit he was interviewed in French by James Creech, Peggy Kamuf and Jane Todd of the Miami University French Department. A translation of that interview is contained in the present volume.

It is followed by the remarks of Andrew Parker and Andrzej Warminski, two of the respondents participating in a panel discussion after Professor Derrida's address the following day. Although that address is not printed here—it is entitled "Mnemosyne" and can be read in a forthcoming issue of *Critical Inquiry*—these responses make a significant statement that can be read by themselves. They have the added virtue of describing very well the discursive field in which Derrida's remarks on Paul de Man, memory and mourning can be situated.

As for the interview, it was agreed in advance that it would focus on the question of "Deconstruction in America," and Professor Derrida received a list of written questions on the afternoon before the interview the following morning. A significant portion of the questions were spontaneous, however, as will be obvious to the reader.

In transcribing and translating this discussion I have attempted to reproduce its conversational tone, with all the interruptions, ellipses, suspensions and laughter that marked a very cordial and freeform discussion. Essentially nothing has been edited out, and the reader can follow the sub-text of associations which lead from one moment of the discussion to another. Although the interview was in French, some words and phrases were inevitably spoken in English because the discussion was often about things American. To preserve the differential quality of those words I have printed them in bold face type.

I would like to thank my colleagues Peggy Kamuf and Jane Todd for generously suggesting ways of improving this translation, and Jacques Derrida for his kindness in reviewing the French transcription.

SUMMARY

Here is a topical summary of the major issues that were discussed:

Deconstruction's "place" in America as distinct from Europe or France. The importance of the campus. The American tradition as a context in which deconstruction has had such a remarkable impact.

The importance of religious traditions for understanding deconstruction in America. The relatively new field of deconstructive theology. American criticisms of deconstruction, with specific reference to Edward Said concerning deconstruction's "anti-referentiality."

Derrida's notion of translation and its possible importance in understanding both the provenance and the effect of deconstruction in America.

The relation of deconstruction and feminism, and the possible role of the feminine in writing.

James Creech
Miami University

DECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA:

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACQUES DERRIDA

JAMES CREECH, PEGGY KAMUF AND JANE TODD

PEGGY KAMUF: In accepting our invitation to come here to Miami, you suggested the topos "Deconstruction in America" as a frame for our discussions. In the lecture we are going to hear tomorrow, you make it a point not to "define these words," since as you say the gesture of wanting to define "is by definition exactly what defines the enemy of deconstruction, someone who, at least out of ambivalence, would like to exhaust it [la fatiguer], use it up, turn the page." I would contrast this simple gesture of wanting to define deconstruction with the necessity you have pointed to since your earliest writings for deconstruction's "double gesture." More specifically, I'm thinking of the double gesture you outline in "The Principle of Reason." There, you first explain how and why the university can easily adapt to apparently revolutionary discourse which leaves intact the fundamental principles of all academic or scientific discourse—even the most conservative. You then go on to situate the terrain of the double gesture which you say "insures professional competence and the most serious tradition of the university even while going as far as possible theoretically and practically in the most directly underground thinking that appears unsituable, and thus unbearable, to certain university professionals in every country who join ranks to foreclose or to censure it by all available means." Although the effects of this censure can be found in all countries, aren't there effects which are quite specific to the United States where the university institution very often presents itself—as it does here [at Miami University] for example—as set apart, well defined in its proper place, its campus, whose limits are often clearly marked? What relation do you see between this topographical representation and the fact that deconstruction provokes such strong reactions of censure and exclusion? What in your opinion is being denied in this representation of the university in its proper place?

JACQUES DERRIDA: Thank you. There are a large number of fundamental questions here and it would be too ambitious for me to

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try and answer them all. I'm going to try to follow a thread that I perceive on first reading, basically the thread indicated by the word "topos." Your question begins with the topos "deconstruction in America," and goes on to talk about the topographical representation of the American campus and its proper place. If I were to try and summarize your question without simplifying too much or doing too much violence to it, I would say fundamentally that it is asking what takes place with deconstruction. **What takes place and where does it take place?** So, it begins with the question of its American place.

P. KAMUF: Yes.

J. DERRIDA: It's true that I suggested we situate our discussion around the question **"deconstruction in America,"** but as you know, in the lecture I'm going to give tomorrow, I explain at the same time why I must avoid that question—in a manner that is altogether as deliberate, as thought-out, as analytical as possible. Although I can't take up all the arguments that justify that avoidance, I want to say a few words about it all the same. Partly because I believe it's necessary to clarify a large number of preconditions or protocols, in order to speak about deconstruction in America.

I believe that a rigorous analysis of what is happening in the United States around this word, this gesture and this movement cannot be explained without mobilizing an analysis that also focuses on the history of this country, its religious and moral tradition. We can't understand the reception that deconstruction has had in the United States without background—historical, political, religious, and so forth. I would say religious above all. (And such an analysis can't be attempted impromptu like this.) So we can't understand what is going on regarding this issue without studying not only very long sequences of American history, but also a shorter sequence which is the history of the American university institution—I would say the history of the profession. I think that things happened between, let's say, 1960 and 1980 in the profession of literary and philosophical study, things that aren't without connection to the evolution of the market, to the economic and political sphere—the number of jobs, etc.

I'm persuaded that an analysis could show that all this comes into play in both the positive and negative reception given deconstruction, in the defense against it as well as in the acceptance which—it should be emphasized after all—has indeed been stronger in the United States than anywhere else. The reaction is ambiguous and equally strong in both directions. So I can only repeat what I said in

the lecture when I decided to go very slowly, much more cautiously than can be done when improvising either in a lecture or an interview, in trying to approach this phenomenon which is so enormous. Enormous not in itself, because let's not forget that in spite of everything what we are talking about is a small thing going on among a minority and in the very closed milieux of certain American universities. Therefore, without exaggerating the importance of the phenomenon in itself, let's say that it's the symptom—the small symptom—of something whose proportions I believe are considerable. And to gauge its dimensions I would have to undertake analyses that I can't undertake here.

There is another moment in the argumentation of the lecture which I develop in order to excuse myself, in sum, for not keeping my promise and for not responding to the demand placed on me: one finally realizes that there is no **deconstruction in America** quite simply because once one takes into account that the United States is today the place where deconstruction, or the reaction against deconstruction, has spread more markedly than anywhere else in the world, then at that point one can't give a meaning to the name **"America"** unless one takes into account that very symptom. And consequently, I would say that **the United States** today is a place where something like this can take place. (And moreover, it is remarkable that at least in a timid and scattered fashion, the word "deconstruction" has appeared in certain political contexts, as well as in certain newspapers like The Wall Street Journal...) So the place itself is defined in this context on the basis of the symptom which is produced there.

So for me, the United States today is a place where something like deconstruction—in its academic and its political dimensions—reverberates in an altogether surprising way. And when I try to ask myself where all this is taking place, I then perceive the United States as a place where it is occurring much more, in a more lively and sensitive way than anywhere else—that I know of. Morerso than in Europe. In other words, I think Umberto Eco was to a large extent right when, in an interview with the French newspaper Libération, he said that deconstruction is first of all an American phenomenon and that it is perceived in Europe as an American product. I myself find in Europe that with the exception of France (although even in France to a small degree)—but especially in Germany and in Italy—deconstruction is known as an American import.

P. KAMUF: I see.

J. DERRIDA: Even my own work within the field of deconstruction is received very often on the basis of the American reception. So something has happened in the United States which is not a simple translation or importation of something European. I believe it has an absolutely new and original dimension in the United States, and therefore all the more difficult to put together. I don't think that there is something like one deconstruction. There are very diverse, heterogeneous phenomena which resemble each other, which in a way come together under that name, but only to a certain point. So we also have to take this great diversity into account. Yes, interrupt me...

P. KAMUF: I think that, in this question, I underscored the words "topos" and "place" as you noticed, because, as I said, in the American institution there is this tradition of the university apart, and of the university community apart. And obviously, I was also thinking of your analysis in "The Principle of Reason" which sets out from James Siegel's topographical parable. I agree that there is no one deconstruction. But I suppose I was trying to get at the limit of this closed space—or this space which aspires to being, sees itself, represents itself as being in its proper place. I was asking whether it is not precisely here, at the borderline, in this encounter, that deconstruction defines itself, necessarily somehow, for and by the American institution. That was my point.

J. DERRIDA: Yes, I'll come to that aspect of the question. But just a parenthesis before we get there.

What strikes me when the question you raise is centered around the question of place is a certain type of deconstructive thinking, at least the kind that has interested me personally more and more for some time now: that is, precisely, the question and the enigma of event as that which takes place [qui a lieu],the question of the enigma of place. And here we have to proceed very, very slowly and very, very cautiously when we ask ourselves what we really mean by place. Thinking about the question of place is a very difficult thing—as is thinking about event as something which takes place. It's finally a question of the topikos in the rhetorical sense, as a localizing of what comes to pass in the sense of event, of Ereignis. My reference to Heidegger is often a reference to those places in Heidegger's thought where the question of place is very alive and very mysterious too. All this means that the question of

place is absolutely essential, but all the more difficult to circumscribe and to isolate.

So, getting back to the question of the university place. Let's skip over the intermediary question. We'll come back to it later. My feeling is that, in effect, what distinguishes the United States for me from a European place, from this particular point of view, is that all intellectual and cultural life is concentrated—in any case to a large degree—in the university.

P. KAMUF: Yes.

J. DERRIDA: It's very different from my experience in France where, paradoxically, my move was to address myself over and above the university to an intellectual or cultural or literary milieu which was not defined by its links to the academy. From this point of view, deconstruction was a kind of departure from the university, with all the consequences that may have had for me. In the United States on the other hand, everything is concentrated within the academic institution, such that the intensity of the resonance provoked by deconstruction is all the greater because such a situation concentrates both positive and negative resonance together in the same space.

This academic concentration explains why deconstruction reverberated much more strongly here than in France. In France it had an impact very quickly, but right away it dispersed and there were moves to interpret, to censure, to misread, to disassociate, but also to combine. Moves proportional to the diversity of intellectual milieux, of interests, schools, cliques—which weren't university cliques. They all had to do with the university, but they weren't composed purely of academics. So deconstruction found itself dispersed right away, channeled into a highly diversified place.

While in the United States, since everything goes on in the university (and I would even say in several departments of the university which, despite the size of the country, are very close to each other, with information circulating very, very fast inside a relatively homogeneous milieu), there was right away a greater intensity of reception in the positive sense of the term, and also, just as great an intensity of reaction, of rejection. Consequently, I have the paradoxical feeling that everything being done here under the heading deconstruction has a much greater chance of being heard and received than in Europe, precisely at the moment when it is encountering the most violent resistance. Many indications today

give us cause to think that in its violence, the reaction has reached a point and a style—above all a style (we could talk about that)—which I think constitute an event in the tradition of the American academic ethic in particular. All of a sudden people are beginning to transgress the rule of their own declared deontology.

P. KAMUF: Yes, that's really striking.

J. DERRIDA: It's a sign that some nerve has been touched. Of course there are analogous things in Europe. I could cite examples. But just now I have the impression that here in America quite violent things are going on in this regard.

Now, to get back to the campus limits, I believe that they do explain the potential for impact [retentissement] because, as we're realizing more and more clearly, deconstruction gets at the foundation and the axiomatics of the institution. This could be demonstrated. But also because, here and there, it establishes connections between the interiority of the institution and the outer social sphere. Deconstruction makes such a connection not only by calling into question the interdepartmental limits and so forth (which isn't very novel), but above all by raising the question of the relations between the university and the social sphere. And even if it's not absolutely new as a thesis, as a proposition, or in terms of the content of the proposition (we'll return to that question in a moment), I think it is new enough as a praxis [manière de faire], as a way of proceeding, or writing, etc., for the forces with an interest in protecting themselves inside of the university to feel very threatened and to react with the violence we were just talking about.

I wanted to return to the question that you ask in the middle about the definition of the double gesture. It is true that it's difficult to define the one deconstruction [la déconstruction], and not only because it is finally, I believe, a rather heterogeneous movement. Personally I would even say that its best interests are served by keeping that heterogeneity—although I don't know whose interests or what interests these are. But if deconstruction has an interest then this heterogeneity has to persist, otherwise it would be precisely the end of deconstruction.

Deconstruction is also difficult to define because it is neither a system nor a unified discourse. It's as you say a multiplicity of gestures, of movements, of operations. And what's more, multiplicity is essential for each of these gestures, that is, simultaneously carrying out several gestures which can seem either contradictory

or in tension with one another. If this tension is not maintained then, in my opinion, the very force of deconstruction is extenuated every time.

Now, twice in your question you talk about double gesture, but I would say that the double doesn't designate the same thing each time. There's the double gesture which has become—and this I regret—a kind of procedural or methodological schema which consists in saying basically what I once ventured very hastily in Positions, namely that there are two gestures, one which consists in overturning, the other which consists in displacing. It's become...

P. KAMUF: It's formula.

J. DERRIDA: It's a kind of formula. I'm not disavowing the formula, but still, as soon as it becomes a technique in the instrumental sense, it can't work. Nevertheless, I believe that what was indicated in this double gesture is necessary. So on the one hand there is what appears to be this technique. But there is no deconstruction without questioning of technique, without returning to the question of technique (which you'll see I try to do in tomorrow's lecture), without recalling that deconstructions can't be reduced, can't let themselves be instrumentalized and become a method of literary criticism, for example, or a method for reading philosophical texts. At that point, it is already "false" or "wrong" to transform the double gesture into a device, a technical procedure. It's already insufficient.

Now the other double gesture you allude to is really, more than a strategy, a kind of affirmation that is very important to me personally. (Here I wouldn't want to appear to be speaking in the name of the one deconstruction. I'm just saying how I experience, how I see these things.) Personally I believe—I believe—that we have to run the risk of raising even the questions that are most threatening for the university, for the institution, for the solidity of the academic institution, for the respiration of the university.

And then at the same time, I feel very "traditionalist" in a certain way because I am for memory, history, and in sum, everything of which the university is the guardian. That's it. The mission of the university is, in a word, to assure the memory of culture, of thought, of philosophy. And I am for the protection of this mission. What's more, I'd even go so far as to say that the university's mission will be all the better protected if we don't place limits on questioning, even if it may seem destructive or tiresome or subversive. There again, this double gesture is very difficult to sustain because it can

lead to untenable situations of contradiction and "double bind." Personally, I live this double gesture as a sort of rapid alternation, doing both as fast as possible. [LAUGHTER] But I suppose that at the same time it's this duplicity, if one can call it that, which makes deconstructive gestures unbearable to...

P. KAMUF: ...to the traditionalists...

J. DERRIDA: ...to the traditionalists, because they would like to be able to say that everything called deconstruction is simply destructive and incompetent, and that basically people who do it forget the memory of the university, destroy the criteria of reading, destroy competency and seriousness. And when they realize that it's not quite so simple, and that they have to deal with people who know, who also have a certain competency, well, then things become absolutely catastrophic and they fly off the handle.

Personally, that's one of the things that interests me a lot in the United States because, to get back to what we were saying a moment ago, in France that particular dilemma couldn't be felt with such intensity since there are always avant-garde milieux involved in experimental research into literature, philosophy and so forth, which claim to be anti-university but always in a rather frivolous manner. That's because they don't see in what way, in spite of everything, they depend on the university. They need the university to assure their own archives, and thus their own history. They need for people to write theses on them.

In France, as soon as academics can associate, let's say, deconstruction with these avant-garde movements outside the university—I remember very well this moment in my own little history—they say, "That's Tel Quel. That's Derrida outside the university, so those people are incompetents... " While here, where everything takes place on the inside, it becomes something very critical and painful within the body of the university to see people who ask these questions and sustain such discourse as members of the profession. Which means that paradoxically, in the great body of the United States the questions of deconstruction become concentrated, attain a kind of intensity, that they don't attain elsewhere.

JAMES CREECH: Perhaps we could take up yet another question that is linked to to the one you have just dealt with. In the United States deconstruction has been accepted up to now primarily in literature departments, and not in philosophy departments. As you know, we

lack a philosophical tradition here, in any case of a tradition such as there exists in France. And yet—perhaps because there is this lack of tradition—the United States was receptive to this movement that emerges in a certain fashion from the European philosophical tradition. Why is that? How did this come to be? Why has it happened in literature departments where the philosophical tradition is especially weak? And secondarily, could you respond to the critics who say, as you no doubt know, that deconstruction is precisely a movement made up of people who don't have a sufficient background in the the tradition to appreciate and to know what they are doing. And that, because it is cut off from the roots of a certain philosophical tradition, deconstruction becomes superficial and "formulaic," to go back to what we were saying before.

J. DERRIDA: Yes. There again, it's a very, multiple multiform question. There are several points of entry...

J. CREECH: This would be a question not of place, of the campus, but a question of tradition, of the reception within a tradition. And thus it becomes a question of translation which is also something which we might want to discuss.

J. DERRIDA: Yes. I think that to get at this question which is altogether vital, altogether central, it is necessary to increase the points of entry. And one of the possible entrances is first of all the fact that the first texts making use of deconstruction in Europe, for example, were texts which took very seriously the question of literature, texts which had to give an account of themselves in the face of literature [qui s'expliquaient avec la litt#rature] and which considered certain operations, certain literary events as decisive for posing questions of a deconstructive sort to philosophy. That you know. No need to insist on it. So for that reason it was normal that literature departments be sensitive to deconstruction—which is a coming-to-terms with literature.

Another entrance into the question—I'm not going to say much about it, but I think it could be done—another entrance might have to do with what has happened in the relatively recent history of literary studies in America. (But here I'm even more incompetent to talk about it.) I think New Criticism, for example—a certain type of attention, "close reading," tending a bit towards formalistic, anti-historicist issues, etc.—was one of the premises preparing the way for deconstruction. Even if the period of New Criticism was over by

and large, it prepared people, readers and students, for certain reading practices associated with deconstruction. That's one thread that could be followed. I'm unable to do it myself, but I'm convinced it could be done. On the other hand it is true that, in principle, people in literature departments aren't as prepared to receive philosophical discourses, discourses very rich in philosophy. But at the same time, literature departments in the United States--certain of them in any case—are at the outset more free of traditional prejudices associated with philosophy, more free of resistances regarding continental philosophy. Moreover, the way into continental philosophy can pass under the heading "English Romanticism," for example, which inside and outside the United States is, after all, associated with readings of Hegel and the German philosophers. So here, a whole sensitivity was already prepared and waiting.

But then one has to consider the fact that in the literature departments there has been rejection as well as acceptance. The impact of deconstruction also stems from a moment of rejection. And the rejection has been very classically the rejection by literary scholars of things theoretical and philosophical. (I say "very classically" because it resembles what went on in France and in Europe in general.) "That stuff is philosophy, we don't want any part of it." In France, in the literature departments, that's always the way it happens. So, resistance to theory. Resistance to things European. Not only to individuals from Europe, but even to Americans who are more "European" than others. I am thinking of the role played by Paul de Man, who was both European, very open to continental philosophy, to the European literary tradition, and who played a decisive role in the American formation of deconstruction.

Thus we find ourselves faced with a paradoxical situation where in certain literature departments deconstruction is rejected as a theoretical and philosophical thing, while symmetrically, reciprocally, philosophers who are American by tradition—or at least non-continental, non-European—reject deconstruction as a thing good only for literature people. The poor literature types, in other words, have become victims of a kind of philosophical mystification, an import product, contraband that they were not solidly enough prepared to criticize. And that's the situation we're in today.

Here is one possible reading of these symptoms. At the present moment, big-name professors [e.g. Bate and Wellek] representing the grand tradition of literary studies are allying themselves with other big-name professors [e.g. Danto and Searle] representing the dominant tradition in philosophy, and both are saying

the same thing: "it's going on somewhere else." (That's what Bate has in common with Wellek. Without reading a page of what they're talking about, they have the same diagnosis: It's philosophy, and it's bad philosophy.) They form what in France we call a "cordon sanitaire," that is, they want to surround the locus of the infection, the epidemic, in order to avoid the contagion. The key to deciphering this symptom is that when the philosophers say that "it's going on somewhere else," that the problem lies in the literature departments, you can be sure, you can establish undeniably, that it's beginning to occur in the philosophy departments. What makes them so nervous is that, indeed, it is beginning not only in the philosophy departments, but even in the centers within these departments that were traditionally linked to analytical philosophy. Even there a certain interest in deconstruction is developing. And that's what is making people very nervous. I don't know if I've answered your questions...

J. CREECH: A moment ago you said that the reception of deconstruction in the United States had something to do with religion. Although you added that you didn't want to take up that question now, it piqued my curiosity and I wonder if you could even vaguely situate the issue, if that would interest you. If not we could go on to some other questions.

J. DERRIDA: I'll try to do it in what will naturally be a very inadequate and summary manner.

J. CREECH: Fine.

J. DERRIDA: We must look in two directions. On the one hand, as you know, the teaching of religion, and above all its institution, is something very strong in the universities of this country. It exists in Europe too, but to a lesser degree and it isn't as integrated into the academic tradition. Now, when faced with deconstruction, to the extent that it is an integral part of the most rooted, the most solid, the most fundamental academic culture, the instruction of theology and of religion naturally finds itself called to task—not necessarily threatened however; it's complicated—but at least sees itself provoked by questions concerning all of metaphysics, morality and so on. There is doubtless the impression that the socio-ethico-political ground is actually threatened by something which it would like to condemn as being both atheistic and immoral. And as you know, the criticisms or the critical insinuations regarding deconstruction have

always had a moral or a moralizing aspect to them. Deconstruction is accused of corrupting academic morals, and **sous-entendu**, of corrupting morals period, in the most sexual sense of the term.

Now, because of this the protestant, theological ethic which marks the American academic world acted all the more "responsibly," basically taking deconstruction more seriously than was possible in Europe. Or rather in Europe, paradoxically, the dismantling of the religious element was already further along. In a word, the European cultural milieu was basically less protected than the American milieu, and that might explain the negative sensitivity.

But there is a positive sensitivity which I believe can also be explained by religion, by theology. Currently, in publications, etc., there are emerging many indices of a deconstructive theology movement.[1] To talk about it seriously we would have to analyze a whole history of exegesis, of modern hermeneutics in German and European protestant thought, centering around Heidegger, Karl Barth, etc. But in general, to summarize very succinctly, the point would seem to be to liberate theology from what has been grafted on to it, to free it from its metaphysico-philosophical super ego, so as to uncover an authenticity of the "**gospel,**" of the evangelical message. And thus, from the perspective of faith, deconstruction can at least be a very useful technique when Aristotelianism or Thomism are to be criticized or, even from an institutional perspective, when what needs to be criticized is a whole theological institution which supposedly has covered over, dissimulated an authentic Christian message. And [the point would also seem to be] a real possibility for faith both at the margins and very close to Scripture, a faith lived in a venturous, dangerous, free way. I know theologians who are doing this, and who applaud deconstruction, who need deconstruction, not against their faith but in service of their faith, against a certain theology, even against a certain academic, theological institution. There are conflicts within the sphere of American theology. They're not very visible or very developed, but they are certainly taking place and in my opinion they're taking place at the points where the most work is being done within the theological field.

I've just come from Williams College, where I was invited by a department of religion. That department was the locus within the university, or so it seemed to me, where the most work was going on in new areas—courses on psychoanalysis, on Lacan, on deconstruction, on anthropology, on Lévi-Strauss, on literature too. In a word, it was the place where the most risks were being taken relative to the traditional focus of the academy, relative to the

cloistering of departments. This religion department is perceived by other departments—English, philosophy—as a little unsettling. So from the institutional point of view as well, I believe the study of the religious, theological dimension in the American university can go a long way towards explaining what is going on with deconstruction.

J. CREECH: Edward Said [The World, the Text, and the Critic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 188-190.] raises a question that is perhaps of some interest as an intelligent formulation of an issue often raised by American academics not receptive to your work. What is "the mediating agency between base and superstructure" that, Said assumes, is presupposed by your critique of Western metaphysics? How is logocentrism in or a governing instance of, both the writer and the Western metaphysics that would control the writer, enclosing him? By what "agency" is logocentrism translated and transmitted from tradition to writing subjects in different times and different places?

And by extension, how can a writer, such as yourself, be outside logocentricism to that marginal extent required to point to it? And here, let me say that I chose this criticism because it does echo a number of other people with whom you're certainly familiar. The question of agency however is certainly a crucial one.

J. DERRIDA: You know, I wonder whether Said's question, formulated like that, is really more intelligent than the criticisms of "academics not receptive to my work," whether it shows more receptivity. Judging from the difficulty that I am having in entering into the formulation of these questions, I would say that there is not much receptivity. But once again, too hastily and too summarily, I'll try to respond—so to speak.

First, to formulate the question in these terms— "mediation," "base," "superstructure,"—is already to disregard everything I've tried to put forth on this subject, if I may say so. I do not believe that today one can, simply, analyze anything whatever while calmly trusting the difference between an infrastructure and a superstructure. It's not that I think this distinction is simply without pertinence; it does have its pertinence. It can even be useful up to a certain point. But at the point where a deconstructive analysis enters, this opposition cannot be considered as guaranteed, or as as a thing in which one can have confidence. For that matter, I don't even think that a marxist can have... I don't even consider this question a marxist question. It's "marxoid," but it's not marxist.

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

[I don't believe] that a marxist can talk about "mediation" between infrastructure and superstructure. **"Agency,"** what does that mean, literally? How would you translate it [into French], because I don't really understand...

J. CREECH: I don't think that it's the Aristotelean term exactly. I think that it simply suggests something which would assure conveyance [le transport], for example conveyance of a text into the world, of a philosophical or textual tradition into an individual. So it also raises the whole question of the referentiality of the text, of the possibility of historical action, and thus the possibility for a politics of deconstruction. I think that all that lies behind the question.

J. DERRIDA: Yes. That's why this question, in sum, relays your other question on what is **"outside"** [cf. below, p. 18].

J. CREECH: Yes.

J. DERRIDA: Well, to answer of course in a very abstract and hyper-formalized manner, because we don't have time to go through the labor of "mediation" which would be necessary, I would say that from my point of view, everything is, precisely, in the "mediation." That is to say that everything is in the conveyance [le transport]. Conveyance is <u>all</u> there is between what he is calling infrastructure and superstructure; [there is only] translation in the most open sense of the word, metaphorization in a sense that can't be simply reduced to the narrow rhetorical meaning. So I would begin with mediation, and I would say that that's all there is, with an extreme differentiation in the processes of **"mediating agency."** There is no pure infrastructure. There is no pure superstructure. There is only text. Now, if I say such a thing in that way...

J. CREECH: there will be Walter Jackson Bate who is going to...

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

J. DERRIDA: Right... and we're goint to try to answer since the ground rule of our discussion here is that we can respond very quickly and very directly concerning things which are really very complicated, which would require time.

Once I say that there is <u>only</u> conveyance and mediation, and therefore that there is only text, I can no longer respond to **"what is the mediating agency?"** Said, if he were **"receptive to my work,"** ought to take an interest in what I say about the question **"what is?"**, because the implications would take him well beyond the point where he could placidly ask, "where do you situate the mediation between infrastructure and superstructure?" So, I can't respond to the question **"what is?"**. This kind of structure which I call "text," or "trace"—or here, to adopt to Said's language, **"agency," "mediation"**—goes far enough to call into question the very form of the ontological question, the authority of the question "what is?", far enough so that we can't in all tranquility ask "qu'est-ce que c'est?"

To come next to the question of the text—to what I mean when I say, "it's only text"... I've read Said by the way—well, not all, I've read a little of him. And when I reread the questions, the objections that you quote here, or when it is said about the deconstructive perspective that there is nothing outside the text, then I say to myself: If deconstruction <u>really</u> consisted in saying that everything happens in books, it wouldn't deserve <u>five</u> minutes of anybody's attention. When these people pretend—and they all do (Foucault does, Said does)—to believe that <u>that</u>'s what deconstruction means, then I say that if the academy were still governed by ethics, such a thing ought to be... severely punished!

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

Really... The argument that Said sets out to criticize—at least the manner in which the argument is carried out—can certainly be criticized. One can criticize the proposition that text is all there is, or that the text can't be limited to writing inside books. One could criticize the proposition that we should reconstruct the concept of text and writing in order to be able to say that the economic infrastructure is text, for example. Now, you may be unhappy about these propositions, but if you are going to criticize them, at least you have to recognize that that is what is being said. It is incumbent on you to try to see <u>why</u> it seemed strategically useful at a given moment to say, for example, "a body is text, the table is text, the market—Wall Street, etc.—is text." Or else, "nuclear arms are text." That seemed strategically useful at a given moment. And I believe that it has in fact been useful. So, it's everything <u>but</u> a textualization in the sense that Foucault and Said want to represent it.

And even less is it a "discursivization," if one can say that.

Because one must not forget this huge fact that the beginnings of deconstruction were a critique of logocentrism. That is, exactly the opposite of a reduction to phenomena of language. Nonetheless, all these people we are talking about here, all these criticisms, have in common that they present deconstruction as an enclosure **"in the prison house of language,"** which is—I don't know how to qualify it—blindness, bad faith, a stubborn refusal to read, which is an enormous symptom.

Perhaps we can try to approach these formulations and to answer and respond after all in a little more pointed fashion to what is said by Said in these texts. I go back to the formulation, "How is logocentrism in or a governing instance of both the writer and the Western metaphysics that would control the writer... ?" Now, in this sentence he transforms logocentrism into a kind of behest [instance], that is to say into a program which supposedly comes along to give orders to a writing subject...

J. CREECH: I should point out that in this part of my question I was summarizing Said...

J. DERRIDA: Ah, you're summarizing. Yes that's true. There aren't any quotation marks there...

J. CREECH: There aren't any quotation marks there, right. I believe I'm summarizing faithfully, but all the same...

J. DERRIDA: But I think that he also speaks of **"writing subject"**... I would still say that logocentrism does not act from the outside in order to constrain both a subject and the ensemble of Western metaphysics. For example, the notion of **"writer,"** and the notion of subject, is a logocentric product. So, one can't say that logocentrism commands the subject. The subject is a logocentric concept. That doesn't mean that we can get rid of it just like that. It's not a question of getting rid of it, moreover. But we're not dealing with a machine giving orders from the outside, to a free individual who all of a sudden is supposed to find him or herself captive of logocentrism. In any case that's not how I am trying to describe things.

And that leads to the question which is supposed to concern me: "...How can a writer, such as yourself, be outside logocentricism to that marginal extent required to point to it?" Yes, well, I've tried to suggest repeatedly that there is no simple exteriority possible as regards logocentrism, no more for me than for anyone else.

Therefore, what is said about logocentrism is said from a certain inside of logocentrism. But it is an inside that is divided enough and tormented enough and obsessed enough by the other, by contradictions, by heterogeneity, for us to be able to say things about it without being simply "outside of it." And we say them within the grammar, within the language of logocentrism while allowing the alterity or the difference which obsesses this inside to show through. The proof that it's possible is that it is done, it happens, and it happens often enough to provoke gestures of impatience which make it plain that something is going on. This signifies something about the structure of logocentrism itself. Logocentrism is not a homogeneous milieu in relation to which one is either inside or outside. Logocentrism is an impulse [un mouvement]—let's call it that—an impulse towards self-centering or recentering things on the basis of a demand [une instance] named, among other names, Logos. And by definition that impulse fails—at least it doesn't reach the point it would like to reach. And thus, from the outset, at the same time as this impulse inscribes its efficacity, it inscribes the signs of its failures, and leaves traces of its interior limits. And it's in the traces of these limits that a deconstruction of logocentrism labors.

And if today it takes a certain form—it had to take other forms not long ago—if today it is taking the form of a quasi-systematic deconstruction of logocentrism, it's not because a "writer" or a "writing subject" or an individual can **"step out of it"** and then recount what happens. It's because in all these structures (and they are not only philosophical structures, they are cultural, economic, military, scientific, technical, etc.) in all these structures the logocentrist or logocentric impulse is rocked by historical events, rocked by things that happen. That happen not just in the university. That happen in the world, in dimensions that are political, social, military, techno-scientific, etc. And it is because of this jolt that there are here and there individuals, institutional sites, through which this jolt is taking a discursive form, that is to say terms, texts, discourses, courses.

J. CREECH: But in your statement just then, isn't there at least the suggestion of a difference between logocentrism on the one hand and on the other hand, the historical forces which are supposedly making it possible for deconstruction to take the form it is taking? And which are making it possible for these limits that are marked in texts to take the form that they are taking now, to be published (so to speak) in the way they are currently?

J. DERRIDA: Yes, but these historical forces you're alluding to can't be defined as "historical forces" except within logocentrism. To name them "historical forces" is to name them in the grammar and in the syntax of logocentrism. There are things that happen before they can be named, before we can choose names for them, because all names are marked by logocentrism. Before choosing these names one must take cognizance that things are happening. Grave things are happening. For example—I don't know--the de-limitation of Western authority relative to the third world, the premises of nuclear war, etc. Other events which are general indices like that... So, things happen and because of them logocentrism no longer enjoys the placid self-assurance that it used to have, and it is in this anxiety that deconstruction inscribes itself.

But deconstruction is also a symptom. It's a symptom that takes a philosophical form most often. Philosophical and literary. Which is to say, it occupies little corners in the world historical supermarket [petits lieux de la grande surface historique—justement—mondiale]. What we call deconstruction is... How shall I say? Imagine a great earthquake throughout California. And then in a university somebody sees a crack appear. Well, deconstruction—deconstruction under that name, and in the form of the discourses we've been referring to in the last few minutes—is the Western, literary, philosophical academic form for the essential part of this great human earthquake which is rocking all the structures of humanity. The logical, economic, social structures, etc.

That brings us around to your question of reference. I don't know if we have time to...

J. CREECH: I would certainly like to get to it. Edward Said's critique repeats the now-standard lament that "deconstruction" as practiced by you neglects the historical and the political "hors texte." Whereas for Foucault, "a signifier occupying a place, signifying in a place, is—rather than represents—an act of will with ascertainable political and intellectual consequences . . ." (p. 220). You, according to Said, want to disconnect the signifier from a determinable obligation to a signified such as "will" and "political consequences." For Said, however, texts have a racinating function relative to the social and political "hors texte" which Foucault tries to force into legibility. He "makes a text assume" its relation to power (p. 212), whereas Said finds in your work an insistence on suspending such links. He uses terms like "dedefinition" and "anti-referentiality" to characterize the thrust of your texts. It is thereby implied that a

deconstructionist politics is not really possible. If texts are always open, then "the differences between one class interest and another, between oppressor and oppressed . . .one ideology and another, are virtual—but never crucial. . .—in the finally reconciling element of textuality" (p. 214). How do you respond to this and to the other criticisms of your work which situate themselves in the historico-political sphere in order to accuse the absence of such concerns in most of your published writings?

J. DERRIDA: Very rapidly. This is a question of the same type as the one about ["agency" and] the outside of the text. [Cf. p. 14, above.]

J. CREECH: Exactly.

J. DERRIDA: To say for example, "deconstruction suspends reference," that deconstruction is a way of enclosing oneself in the sign, in the **"signifier,"** is an enormous naiveté stated in that form. You see, from the very beginning my deconstructive propositions began by calling signification, the pair signifier/signified, into question. So, to say that deconstruction consists in giving the signifier such a predominant place that the referent gets tossed out is already an unacceptable formulation. So to start with, let's say that that's not the way things should be described.

Not only is there reference for a text, but never was it proposed that we erase effects of reference or of referents. Merely that we re-think these effects of reference. I would indeed say that the referent is textual. The referent is in the text. Yet that does not exempt us from having to describe very rigorously the necessity of those referents. And personally speaking, never have I said that there is no referent. I realize that people often claim that, that it's frequently been understood in that way. But never have I said that there is no referent.

J. CREECH: But I know that there will be people who will read these lines, and who will read "the referent is textual," and who will then read that "we have to think the necessity of the referent," but will think that everything still remains in the signifier, in the text.

J. DERRIDA: Of course! Because first, they translate "text" by "signifier," which is illegitimate. It's really very important to point that out. And next, they translate "text" by "book." So of course!

But if we begin saying the text is not signifier [le texte n'est pas signifiant], the text is not a tissue of signs (signifiers/signifieds); and secondly, the text can't be reduced to discourse found in books, but rather everything is text, and therefore an atomic bomb is a text, then making such claims at least is not the same thing as suspending the referent. This question of reference—which you're right is indeed crucial—at least to my mind should lead us to reelaborate a transformation of the concept of writing, of trace, of text. I have the feeling—again speaking hastily in straightforward terms of immediate feelings—I have the feeling that what I am doing is more referential than most discourses that I call into question. The impossibility of reducing reference, that's what I am trying to say—and of reducing the other. What I'm doing is thinking about difference along with thinking about the other. And the other is the hard core of reference. It's exactly what we can't reinsert into interiority, into the homogeneity of some protected place. So thinking about difference is thinking about "ference." And the irreducibility of "ference" is the other. It's what is other, which is different.

J. CREECH: The irreducibility of what, did you call it?

J. DERRIDA: "Ference." Reference. Of "that which carries."

J. CREECH: Ah, I see.

J. DERRIDA: Yes, a referent is what "carries back to." Referent, means "referring to the other." And I think that the ultimate referent is the other. And the other is precisely what can never allow itself to be closed in again within any closure whatsoever. So that's what I'm trying to say. It is just as paradoxical for me to see this thought translated as a thought without reference, as it is to see textual thought translated as thought about language. Language games. It's just as topsy-turvy in the one case as in the other.

P. KAMUF: It seems to me, then, that you are forced to adopt another strategy. A moment ago you said that at a certain moment it seemed "strategically useful" to say something like, "text is all there is." But that phrase, as you just pointed out, was twisted by the reception which mistook it.

J. DERRIDA: The logocentric reception, because...

P. KAMUF: Yes. So now another strategy is required, right?

J. DERRIDA: Yes.

P. KAMUF: Because you did use the past tense: "It was useful to say that."

J. DERRIDA: Yes.

P. KAMUF: And now, it's no longer useful to say it?

J. DERRIDA: Yes it is. I think that it's going to be useful for a rather long time.

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

In all strategy you try to choose the best, the best strategy, the technique or the levers which can be the most economical, in other words, that can serve the best and the longest time possible. I think that this text business—at least I believe so, I may be wrong, but this is the way it appears to me—is of a nature to remain useful and necessary for a very long time. But that doesn't mean that it's the only one. I also began, in a manner of speaking, by saying that there were no master words, no master gestures, that there was only a chain where concepts should relay each other. I am persuaded that at one moment or another there will be better words, better names than "text," "writing," "difference" or "deconstruction." It can depend on the situation. That doesn't mean that these words immediately fall out of usage, but only that along the way, to the degree they aren't "true," other words will take their place.

I believe in spite of everything that the strategy for the last ten, fifteen years—my small strategy—has in fact shifted. That's not to say that now I'm going to put deconstruction in the drawer and take up something else. It means that there are gestures, movements, procedures, words which become less urgent, less useful—or less overwhelmingly useful—than others, and then at that moment there is a pass off in the relay.

There is no single strategy. Since a strategy is dictated by places really, and therefore by forces and individuals who are inscribed in these places, what may be strategically opportune here at one moment, is no longer opportune there at another moment. For

myself, I write from the place—several places—in which I find myself. I think that my strategy, if you can call it that, at least in the sixties and seventies, was largely determined by the French scene, by what was happening on the French theoretical scene, what with structuralism, Lacanianism and certain other elements. The reference to the linguistic model, the Saussurian model, was dominant at that time. So it was because of that particular program that I was led to insist on writing, on text. But once that situation is no longer dominant, other gestures are possible. And in the United States it's different. And different in other ways for other people. There is no single strategy.

JANE TODD: In some recent texts, notably "Des Tours de Babel," [in Difference in Translation, ed. Joseph Graham, Cornell University Press, 1984] you have written that translation is a necessary supplement to the original and even in the original, a demand that is already part of the original, but in the manner of work that remains to be done, a task of the translator. It's what survives, continues to live, but also what grants an augmented life. You have suggested too that deconstruction is not "made in France," but that it is an American invention. I think there's a certain relation between these two concepts. In both cases the original finds the supplement necessary for its originality in a mode of linguistic or cultural alterity. Now, you suggest that in America we are the most receptive to and most reactionary against deconstruction. To what extent does the conservative reaction to your work have a necessary and essential relation to the original? In other words, do such critics as Denis Donoghue, Jackson Bate, René Wellek, John Searle, and even the article in Newsweek assure the "survival" of your work?

J. DERRIDA: Thank you. In the first part of your question, although the notion of translation and supplement are invoked to complicate everything, nevertheless you are supposing that the original of deconstruction is not to be found in America. I don't know how true that is. I don't know if there is an original of deconstruction. Naturally, to answer your question seriously we would have to take up that whole schema of Benjamin's, and everything I was trying to interpret from it too.

But nevertheless, let's suppose as a hypothesis that something of deconstruction originally took place in Europe. The fact is that it began to be named in Europe. That's incontestable. The word

"deconstruction" itself has a whole genealogy. It's an old French word which had fallen out of use, that I used for the first time, so to speak, in this particular sense. But I did so with the sense that I was translating and deforming a word of Freud's and a word of Heidegger's. In Heidegger the word is "Abbau," as well as "Destruktion". But deconstruction is neither Heidegger's Abbau nor Destruktion, although it is related, naturally. So already the "first use" of the word deconstruction was a sort of deforming translation in which the schema of an original requiring a supplement and so forth, was made to point back towards Abbau and Destruktion. All this is in fact very complicated. But let's assume the hypothesis, at least for convenience sake, that the original formulation of deconstruction comes from Europe.

In that case, I think that in fact you're right—in any case that's my experience. What happens in the United States becomes absolutely vital. It is a translation supplement that is absolutely called for by something which must have been lacking in the original. With the effect of strangeness, of displacement—sometimes recognizable, sometimes unrecognizable—which that produces. And personally speaking, when I'm in the United States I frequently have the sense of recognizing things and of not recognizing things. There's the issue of language in the strict sense. That is, when I read deconstruction in English, it's something else. It's altogether something else, it's true. And at the same time, I feel that I'm incapable of explaining the American transformations of deconstruction through and through. That's in part because I lack familiarity with all the traditions we were speaking about a moment ago. I know "New Criticism" not at all—or very poorly, very indirectly. Anglo-Saxon literature, which is after all the vehicle for deconstructive movements in English departments, I know poorly. (And it's in English departments that things are happening more than in departments of French or philosophy.) So when I see texts appearing which deal with Wordsworth or Wallace Stevens, etc., these are absolutely new things for me, things I'm sure not to understand well. In this empirical and phenomenal sense then, I indeed have the feeling you describe there when you speak of a "mode of linguistic or cultural alterity."

And yet, I wouldn't translate it into terms of "survival." We really have to specify the word "survival" very carefully. As you know, in Benjamin's text ["The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's Tableaux Parisiens" in Illuminations, Ed. with introduction by Hannah Arendt (Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 69-82], in what I say about it, it's not a question of a

name surviving into posterity—although that's not without its importance. Rather, it's a question of a very strange structure whereby the dimension of la survivance—the fact of surviving, that which survives—constructs the very present of the text and makes it into something which neither happens nor fails to happen. It constructs the present of the text as something belonging to a language that calls for a translation which it renders impossible.

In other words, it is a poetic or sacred event. In Benjamin's text, it is obvious that the moment when a text no longer allows translation in the conventional sense of the term—that is, the separation between the meaning and the letter somehow—that moment is a poetic moment, both the poetic and the sacred moment of the text. It's the religious moment that one finds in all texts, even if they aren't religious texts. And in our relation to literature, that moment exists. Our relation to literature is a sacred, sacralizing moment, at least by virtue of the fact that a literary text is a text in which the distinction between the signifier and the signified, let's say to be brief, or between form and content, is impossible. The event consists in that. This impossibility longs for translation, cries after translation, demanding a translation which is for that reason impossible. Our relation to this body where the letter and meaning are not distinguished—that is, our relation to literature—is a relation to a sacralized text. Benjamin describes the very movement of sacralization. When the relation to the text is a relation to an event that cannot be translated, and in which the meaning is no longer separated from the letter, then we have a relation to the religious, or let's say we have a sacralizing relation.

The survivance of such a moment is then the appeal that goes out, which is heard in this original text in relation to a translation—in relation to another event in another language—which will augment language. It will not be content merely to transport a content into another language, nor just to communicate or to transmit something, but will produce between the two languages this experience that Benjamin calls "reine Sprache," pure language. At that moment we experience what language is, what language really is. And this augmentation, that's what survival is. La survivance is, so to speak, at work in this augmentation—and there is a whole series of metaphors for it in Benjamin.

Now, you bluntly ask me the question [LAUGHTER] of the survival of my work in relation to... I mean, when in the same sentence you have Donoghue, Jackson Bate, Wellek, John Searle (to which several others should be added)...

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

...the thought that my work has to survive all that gives me very mixed feelings, I must say.

J. TODD: But that's why I added the part about work remaining to be done. That is, translation is after all a task.

J. DERRIDA: Of course. So I would say that if there is a "noble" task of translation, I wouldn't entrust it to the people you named.

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

But the idea that, even so, they might be working for "the survival of my work" is a thought that doesn't displease me.

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

But since I believe neither in the translating power nor the survival of my work the question doesn't arise.

What goes on in the translations of texts in which I myself have been engaged, now that's something that does interest me, that's what I do care about, what goes to the very quick of my desire. And when these translations produce this augmentation, these new textual bodies, then I think that nothing better could happen to me. At that point it's not a matter of survival in the sense of posterity, but of another type of survival, of "more living." You know, in the text you refer to, and also in "Living On," I talk a lot about survival. Survival isn't simply life after death, but a strange dimension of "plus de vie"—both "more life" and "no more life." Or "plus que vie," that's it, "more than life." Plus de vie and plus que vie. And, yes, sometimes I think that it happens that way in certain texts, in certain translations. Not "translation" in the strict linguistic sense of the term, where you take a text and then you publish a translation of it, but rather when through all sorts of other texts—not referring at all to my own—such a translation is produced. There is more. There is more; there is something else. But in this "something else" there is all the same a kind of history. Really, I think that that's the best thing that happens to me in America, when it happens. Or that's what I've been coming here to look for, but... So. Have I begun to answer your questions?

J. TODD: The question is also, when you say that we are the most receptive and the most reactionary [réactifs], can that reaction have an affirmative force?

J. DERRIDA: Yes, absolutely. Well, "affirmative"... I don't know. "Positive," in any case. I am persuaded—and I say this without cynicism, because I think that's the way it happens all the time—I am really persuaded that the people you named are doing very good work for deconstruction. I could say a lot against them, and I think it would be justified. But I believe that the damage they produce is ambiguous, and that they are helpless to prevent this ambiguity. It is in nobody's power to change that. I mean, we have enough history behind us to know how things happen in culture. At a given moment, when some motif is in the process of becoming dominant, all the attacks against it only manage to feed the opposing force. That's the way it goes until the moment it all turns back around. But there is always a phase during which dedicated hostility has an inverse effect, in an absolutely mechanical way. That's the way it has to be. I think, I hope that it's happening that way, and that reactionism [la réactivité] is part of the establishing of deconstruction.

Obviously the threat is more in the establishing than in the hostility. It's clear that if it worked too well it wouldn't work at all. Let's just say that's a question for the future.

But there comes a moment when people rush in. Obviously there are always individuals at such a moment, in such a social scene, who have an infallible flair for playing that role—how to call it?—the role of paradoxical **"scapegoats."** They try to designate the scapegoat, but all the while they are doing the work of buffoons who come along and say a certain truth that they aren't aware of saying. I believe that a lot of truth is speaking through the discourses of Danto, Searle, Bate, Wellek and several others. It's not the truth that they say it is, but I think that one can read a lot of truth about deconstruction in their discourses.

J. TODD: Jonathan Arac writes that the "Yale Critics" "are attacked both by those who wish to preserve the institutions of literary study unchanged and by those who want change but deny that the Yale Critics are producing any," and therefore that deconstruction occupies "the middle ground between the 'literarily conservative' and the 'politically radical'" [The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America, eds. Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, Wallace Martin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 178]. Would you like to respond to this view of deconstruction's institutional role in America, especially as it concerns a certain practice or non-practice of politics?

J. DERRIDA: Well, as far as Jonathan Arac's statement is concerned, let's say that I don't believe just because—and it's true—**"the Yale critics are attacked both by those who wish to preserve..."** etc., that it follows that deconstruction occupies **"the middle ground."** Being attacked by both sides doesn't signify that one is in the middle. That's all I would say. Perhaps it's because one is beyond. But not in the middle. If one were in the middle one would be loved by both sides.

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

P. KAMUF: Recently you began an inquiry into the notion of invention in a series of lectures which is called "Psyche: The Invention of the Other" [forthcoming]. This series begins in effect with a question that you seem to be asking yourself, and I'm quoting you only from memory. (What's more, I heard you in English, so...) "What am I going to be able to invent this time?" you asked. Although this question seems to take the form of a self-interrogation, it is pronounced vis-a-vis a listening place [une écoute] which, one can be sure, is itself asking more or less the same thing, "what is is Derrida going to invent for us—in front of us—this time?" Is this other question also the question of the other? And here I'm asking several questions at once: Is the American listening place—to use shorthand—differentiated enough to reinvent another deconstruction with you? And since this last question can't be addressed to you, precisely, without getting tangled up in effects of mirroring, shouldn't the question be displaced towards a questioning of the mirror in all its effects?

You then led us through Francis Ponge's poem "Fable," to these final lines, an allegory of the fable's moral: "APRES sept ans de malheur/ Elle brisa son miroir [AFTER seven years of misfortune/ She broke her mirror]." Assuming that it's not a matter of indifference that Ponge days "she" here, what relation could one see between your reading of this invention of Ponge, which is a breaking of the mirror, and what I would call "the deconstruction of feminism in America," putting this phrase too in quotation marks? I'm sure you're aware that several of the most categorical gestures of

exclusion towards deconstruction are now taking shape around the word "feminism" in this country. In particular, it's getting to be a watchword that in your writings the feminine can only be read as a metaphor, and that you still don't deal with Woman [la femme]. But does one really hear what you say when one reads in that way? Doesn't breaking the mirror also break the word "de" in a phrase such as "parler, écrire de la femme [speak, write of/from woman]?" And finally, to what extent must the invention of the other give up talking about woman in order to hold on to the chance of speaking from the place of woman [depuis la femme]?

J. DERRIDA: Thank you. There's a lot there. I'm going to try to reread things in order.

The first sentence of the lecture you mentioned isn't said just ironically, rather it is offered as an example of rhetoric which is immediately afterward analyzed in terms of the history of rhetoric—Cicero, etc. This first sentence is a game which implicitly and potentially contains not only the discourse that follows on the subject of rhetoric, [but also] everything that follows on the subject of invention. So this first question didn't propose that I was going to invent something. It was a sort of matrix for everything that I was going to try and say later about invention.

One of the themes of this lecture was that a deconstruction of the concept of invention suggests that invention (if there is such a thing) is invention of the impossible, of the other—beyond everything that's been said about it in the history of philosophy which I try to analyze in the lecture. An invention of what is possible is not an invention. Invention of the impossible as invention of the other—a syntagmatic element [syntagme] in which "of the other" is a double genitive, leaving invention at the disposition of the other. It's the other who invents. And basically it's the other who invents me. It's the other who invents us. To the degree that we invent the impossible, we invent the other.

I don't know if we can get to the question of America again. We were saying a while back, if you like, that basically since deconstruction in America wasn't simply a displacement, a transmission, a translation of a European deconstruction, what goes on in America with deconstruction is not only diverse but other. It is something in relation to which I am not simply an outsider—since now my ties with America are numerous enough that I'm somewhat implicated in all that goes on here—nor simply totally **"at home,"** because what happens in America remains very foreign to me all the same. And, at least for me, there can be no re-invention of deconstruction unless it remains very foreign to me, or at least something I could neither anticipate nor recognize. This does happen. Speaking anecdotally, it frequently happens that I see under the heading "deconstruction," in the guise of deconstruction, things that are absolutely new and foreign to me and that I never imagined it possible to associate with deconstruction.

And now finally, since we unfortunately have to go too fast, I get to Ponge's "Fable" and what you have quoted from it here. Specifically, that in the "fable's moral," the responsibility or the initiative for breaking the mirror is entrusted to a feminine pronoun.

In the lecture that you refer to I multiplied the approaches to this feminine. We would have to reconstitute the reading of the whole poem to do that. I can't do it here. But among all the possible hypotheses there is this one: that "she" refers to the fable itself, to the event of the fable, to the fabulous. That "she" refers to truth. And we know that indeed very often truth has been presented as a woman. Saying that "she" is truth which breaks the mirror isn't necessarily any different from saying in traditional rhetorical terms that woman breaks the mirror.

In another direction, one could also demonstrate that the poem distributed all the personal pronouns. There is "je," "tu," "vous," "nous," and then "elle" at the end. One could also show that this moral appears to invert the French proverb (an English proverb, too, I believe) according to which breaking a mirror brings seven years' bad luck, and that the mirror is broken at the end of the poem's seven lines. So the misfortune is in the mirror and not in the breaking of the mirror. "She" puts an end to the misfortune of specularity in some way.

"She" is a feminine pronoun. I do not say that it's woman. The difficulty of your questions, of what follows from them, is in the words "feminism" and "woman." There is no doubt that "she" refers to what is called the feminine. But what have we said in saying that? I said in the lecture that the "she" could be Ponge as well, that developments occur in his poems (there are other examples) in which the signer of the poem ends up being on the feminine side. Or it can be a man. "She" can be a man. It can be the feminine of a man [le féminin d'un homme]. As you know, these things are possible. That complicates a great deal the questions of woman and feminism.

Under the heading of this unmasterable complication, I come to what you call "the deconstruction of feminism in America." Continuing to proceed by summary and crude statements, I would say

that for me deconstruction is certainly not feminist. At least as I have tried to practice it, I believe it naturally supposes a radical deconstruction of phallogocentrism, and certainly an absolutely other and new interest in women's questions. But if there is one thing that it must not come to, it's feminism. So I would say that deconstruction is a deconstruction of feminism, from the start, insofar as feminism is a form—no doubt a necessary form at a certain moment—but a form of phallogocentrism among many others.

So, I think that for example Spurs, which is often mentioned in this kind of discussion, is a text which, following a certain Nietzsche, a certain moment in Nietzschean discourse, is an anti-feminist as well as anti-phallogocentric text—since precisely the symmetry of those two things is its central motif. (When I say "anti-feminist," naturally I'm simplifying a lot, I'm speaking very crudely...) So for me deconstruction is a certain thinking of women [pensée des femmes] which does not however want to immobilize itself in feminism.

I believe feminism is necessary. Feminism has been necessary and is still necessary in certain situations. But at a given moment, to close oneself in feminism is to reproduce the very thing one is struggling against. And here too there are gestures that are necessary, staggered, that have to be practiced at the same time or successively... I don't know.

So I think that because of the complexity of this question, of this strategy, certain feminists—certain women struggling in the name of feminism—may see in deconstruction only what will not allow itself to be feminist. That's why they try to constitute a sort of target, a silhouette, a shooting gallery almost, where they spot phallocentrism and beat up on it [tappe dessus]. Just as Said and others constitute an enemy in the image [LAUGHTER] of that against which they have ready arms, in the same way, I think certain feminists, as they begin to read certain texts, focus on particular themes out of haste and say, "Well, there you have it..." (I don't know exactly who one could think of in this regard, but I know that it goes on.) In France I recall a very violent reaction from a feminist who upon reading Spurs and seeing the multiplication of phallic images—spurs, umbrellas, etc.—said, "So, it's a phallocentric text," and started kicking up a violent fuss, charging about like a bull perhaps...

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

So I think that it's a matter of patience, of reading. I think

that if one reads a bit attentively one should realize that what I was attempting certainly was not feminism, and certainly not phallocentric. I'm not saying that everything I write, or everything I am, or everything I do is exempt from all phallocentrism. I wouldn't go that far because I believe that it's impossible, for men as well as for women. So let's just say that the most insistent and the most organized motif in my texts is neither feminist nor phallocentric. And that at a certain point I try to show that the two are tantamount to the same thing.

Now, when you say that "it's getting to be a watch word that in your writings the feminine can only be read as a metaphor," then I would say "no"—again to go very quickly. It's not a metaphor. It's not a metaphor first off because in order for the feminine to be a metaphor one would have to be assured of knowing what the essence propre of woman is. And what I try to say particularly in Spurs is that woman has no essence of her very own, and that that's the phallocentric gesture. It's the gesture of considering that there is "la femme" and that she has her very own essence. So if there's not an essence proper to woman, neither is there a metaphor. The word "woman," designates neither the essence proper to woman nor the essence of metaphor. It's another order. And moreover, I never speak about woman—I mean, assuming that discourse as my own. When I say "la femme," I'm quoting someone else.

In the last part of your question, you say, "to what extent should the invention of the other give up talking about woman in order to hold on to the chance of speaking from the place of woman [depuis la femme]?" Yes of course, that alternative is inscribed in a position between a discourse which would make woman an object and a discourse of which woman would be the subject, the initiating subject. "...From the place of woman."

P. KAMUF: Not necessarily. I was thinking also of the notion of "listening place [écoute]." It would be, it seems to me, more differentiated than that. Not only the position of the subject, but the subject would be understood as an effect of the listening to the other, would be created by a kind of listening. There would no longer be any master.

J. DERRIDA: Right. Talking from the listening place of the woman.

P. KAMUF: That's it. It's one of the alternatives.

J. DERRIDA: Yes. In other words if we consider for example what is called a writing man—for example me, to the extent that I'm supposed to be a man—then writing on woman should be less writing on woman than writing from or on the basis of [depuis] what comes to me from a feminine place. Yes, I agree...

P. KAMUF: Well, that's what I've learned from reading you.

[GENERAL LAUGHTER]

J. DERRIDA: And what I too have learned from the écoute of women, from listening to the degree I can to a certain feminine voice.

Only, that's the reason I always take the rather heavy-handed precaution of saying "so-called..." Because it's not such a simple thing when we say that whoever bears a masculine proper name, is anatomically male, etc., is a man. This feminine voice can pass through trajectories that are extremely multiple and altogether interior. Well, "interior"... Not really "interior." And it's reciprocal, since the same thing is going on on both sides of what can be thought of as a mirror. In other words, on the women's side, and even in the most feminist women, the masculine voice is not silent. [LAUGHTER] Both outside and inside. One is dealing here with a most complicated specular machine where the mirror is in some ways never broken and yet always broken. Where the breaking of the mirror in fact is a moment in the reconstitution of another mirror. What I tried to establish in this little poem by Ponge—where in a certain way it happens—is this complication of the mirror structure, with all its grammatical, poetic, sexual dimensions.

J. CREECH, P. KAMUF, J. TODD: Thank you very much.

J. DERRIDA: Thank you for all the questions.

Translated by James Creech
Miami University

NOTE

[1]For example, Thomas J.J. Altizer, et al., Deconstruction and Theology (New York, 1982); Mark Taylor, ed., Deconstructing Theology, special issue of Semeia (1983).

MNEMOSYNE
Zweite Fassung

Friedrich Hölderlin

Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos
Schmerzlos sind wir und haben fast
Die Sprache in der Fremde verloren.
Wenn nämlich über Menschen
Ein Streit ist an dem Himmel und gewaltig
Die Monde gehn, so redet
Das Meer auch und Ströme müssen
Den Pfad sich suchen. Zweifellos
Ist aber Einer. Der
Kann täglich es ändern. Kaum bedarf er
Gesetz. Und es tönet das Blatt und Eichbäume wehn dann neben
Den Firnen. Denn nicht vermögen
Die Himmlischen alles. Nämlich es reichen
Die Sterblichen eh'an den Abgrund. Also wendet es sich, das Echo
Mit diesen. Lang ist
Die Zeit, es ereignet sich aber
Das Wahre.

Wie aber Liebes? Sonnenschein
Am Boden sehen wir und trockenen Staub
Und tief mit Schatten die Wälder und es blühet
An Dächern der Rauch, bei alter Krone
Der Türme, friedsam; und es girren
Verloren in der Luft die Lerchen und unter dem Tage weiden
Wohlangeführt die Schafe des Himmels.
Und Schnee, wie Maienblumen
Das Edelmütige, wo
Es seie, bedeutend, glänzet mit
Der grünen Wiese
Der Alpen, hälftig, da ging
Vom Kreuze redend, das
Gesetzt ist unterwegs einmal
Gestorbenen, auf der schroffen Strass
Ein Wandersmann mit
Dem andern, aber was ist dies?

Am Feigenbaum ist mein
Achilles mir gestorben,
Und Ajax liegt
An den Grotten, nahe der See,
An Bächen, benachbart dem Skamandros.
Vom Genius kühn ist bei Windessausen, nach
Der heimatlichen Salamis süsser
Gewohnheit, in der Fremd'
Ajax gestorben
Patroklos aber in des Königes Harnisch. Und es starben
Noch andere viel. Mit eigener Hand
Viel traurige, wilden Muts, doch göttlich
Gezwungen, zuletzt, die anderen aber
Im Geschicke stehend, im Feld. Unwillig nämlich
Sind Himmlische, wenn einer nicht die Seele schonend sich
Zusammengenommen, aber er muss doch; dem
Gleich fehlet die Trauer.

Friedrich Hölderlin

RESPONSE TO JACQUES DERRIDA'S "MNEMOSYNE: A LECTURE FOR PAUL DE MAN"

ANDREW PARKER

> "I remember him (I have no right to utter this sacred verb, only one man on earth had that right and he is dead) with a dark passion flower in his hand, seeing it as no one has ever seen it. . . "
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes el memorioso"

I'd like to begin my comments on "Mnemosyne" by addressing briefly the relationship between Derrida's lecture and the poem by Hölderlin he cited in part. This relationship, I'd argue, is certainly not a simple one, for it forcibly raises questions concerning our ability to differentiate between "texts that cite" and "texts that are cited"—to delimit, in other words, the borders between container and contained. This kind of clear-cut distinction cannot be sustained in the case at hand, for the container and the contained are both called by the very same name: "Mnemosyne." Whereas Frege's familiar distinction between sense and reference [**Sinn und Bedeutung**] was designed to explain why it is possible that a single object can be called by different names, what we are confronted with is a problem of an altogether different order, one that resists solution in Fregean terms. For "Mnemosyne" apparently presents us with a single word designating two different objects, a proper name unproperly denoting two different referents. I stress **apparently**, however, since it is not at all clear that the two objects in question are, in fact, rigorously distinguishable as discrete entities. The problem here is not solely that two seemingly separate things are called by the same name, but that one of these things is situated **inside** the other as well. In citing "Mnemosyne" within a text called "Mnemosyne," Derrida's lecture undermines a traditional understanding of the relationship between part and whole: if, by virtue of the identity between the two titles, the one can always substitute for the other, then the part ("Mnemosyne") can be seen as equivalent to the whole ("Mnemosyne"), thereby hollowing out the wholeness of the whole, its identity with itself. At the same moment, however, the whole can take **its** place as the part for which it substitutes, the container now erupting inside the contained, the envelope itself enveloped by what it formerly

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seemed to hold. This structure of double invagination (I use here a term developed by Derrida in a reading of Blanchot's **La folie du jour**[1]) makes it impossible finally to tell "Mnemosyne" from "Mnemosyne," to draw stable boundaries between Derrida's text and Hölderlin's. We cannot, in fact, determine any longer where the one leaves off and the other begins: Simultaneously part and whole and neither part nor whole, "Mnemosyne" remains irreducibly different from itself, a proper name which literally is beside itself.

"Mnemosyne," in other words, might be said to echo itself within itself—but this mention of the word "echo" is already a citation from the Hölderlin poem (from line 14, to be precise). If time allowed, I'd offer here a detailed reading of the poem to reinforce this interpretation of its non-self-identity.[2] Since my time is short, however, I'll skip very rapidly over most of the poem, pausing only long enough to call attention to the thematics of language in the opening three lines as it leads three lines later, to the figure of the path; to the relationship between the abyss, the ground, and the sunshine in lines 14 and 18-19; and to the rhetoric of flowers links lines 20 and 25 to the title of the poem.* In a less cursory analysis I'd also dwell on the appearance of law in the poem—on the phrases (roughly) "he scarcely needs law" (l. 9) and "the law is underway" (l. 30). It remains for a future reading to show how all of these features prevent the poem from achieving an integral identity, from cohering as a delimited object. From the present however, I'd simply like to concentrate on the last line of the poem, for it presents us with a highly unstable border, a kind of closure-without-closure: "**dem Gleich fehlet die Trauer.**" This phrase is exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible, to translate (let alone make sense of). In the first place, the grammatical subject of mourning is not identified explicitly but requires specification by an act of interpretation. The second problem—one which is far more difficult in its indifference to the very possibility of critical choice—is the syntactical uncertainty centering on the very **fehlen**, an uncertainty which permits several alternative readings that are not necessarily compatible with one another. One such reading was suggested by Paul de Man in an essay dating from 1966 called "Wordsworth und Hölderlin": "The mourning (of the poet) is in error,"[3] a rendering which stresses that the act of

*A bookseller friend from Amherst recalls seeing a photograph (in some Field Guide to Flora) of a wildflower called mnemosyne that blooms only in April. This connection between flowers and memory also awaits further exploration.

mourning can be attributed either to the poet or to the reader—that what is erroneous is either the poet's act of mourning or **our** act of mourning **the poet.** Either way, however, de Man reads the verb "**fehlen**" unequivocally as "to be in error," yet an alternative translation of this verb might be that mourning is lacking, is missing, is absent. The "lack of mourning" is itself syntactically problematic, for the genitive construction can mean **both** that mourning is not present, is elsewhere at the moment, **and** that mourning is incomplete, is less-than-whole. "**Dem Gleich fehlet die Trauer**" is thus at least trebly divided, the poem's ultimate line refusing to specify whether mourning is an error, a gap, or a fragment—refusing, that is, to provide the syntactic closure one might expect at the moment when a poem signs off. I'll return in a few moments to these last words of the poem, but first I'd like to explore a bit just what it is in the nature of mourning that could lend itself to such an impasse. In traditional psychoanalytic terms, mourning normally is a process in which a subject gradually recovers from the death of a beloved object; this object is interiorized within the subject until the latter's libido can invest once again in another living object. The work of mourning, in this conception, is inherently economic in character, a kind of cost-accounting designed to guard against the threat of an absolute expenditure of libido with no return on investment. In the words of the psychoanalyst Daniel Lagache, mourning therefore works to "kill death"—to foreclose this possibility of irreversible loss by transforming death's otherness into an economy of sameness.[4]

How, then, might we mourn the dead if to mourn them is ultimately to appropriate them, to violate their difference from us, to reduce the interval of their alterity? This is the dilemma of **L'Amitié** when Maurice Blanchot is faced with the death of his friend Georges Bataille. (I thank Jane Gallop for recalling to me both this work by Blanchot and her own superb analysis of it.) If, according to Blanchot, "death has the false virtue of appearing to bring back to intimacy those who were divided by grave differences," then one can be faithful to the dead only by speaking **to** them and not **of** them; by refusing to make of them simply "the theme of conversations (or articles);"[5] by respecting "that exteriority which is the very heart, the innermost, of any intimacy;"[6] by challenging, in other words, the apparent self-identity of mourning's economy. Perhaps another name for such an acknowledgment of exteriority within the interior is what Derrida has termed **demi-deuil** or **deuil impossible:**

To do one's mourning . . . is an experience of fidelity, but it is

> also the opposite. Thus the impossibility of doing one's mourning, and even the freedom of not doing one's mourning, is also a form of fidelity. If to do one's mourning and not to do one's mourning are two forms of fidelity and two forms of infidelity, the only thing that remains—and it is this that I call "half-mourning" [**demi-deuil**]—is an experience between the two.[7]

Mourning as an experience between the two—which Derrida—also calls "mourning's double constraint"—might describe as well the invaginated structures of the two texts named "Mnemosyne," might account for the ways in which their parts and wholes, exteriors and interiors, intermingle themselves without limit or reserve. The irreducible betweenness of this experience of mourning might also explain why Hölderlin's poem cannot end on a decisive note, why its alternative renderings of **fehlet** remain syntactically suspended, why its bottom border never quite reaches bottom. Finally, and somewhat less speculatively, we can suggest that this determination of mourning as a structure of betweenness informs Derrida's strategy in his remarks on Paul de Man. For Derrida hasn't recounted to us a history that would reduce the betweenness of memory to a most unfriendly self-sameness; he has rather affirmed the possibility of absolute loss, redefining friendship in the process as a kind of writing marked by the untotalizable traces of the other within the self. Derrida, in other words, writes both of and from the betweenness of mourning (the **demi-deuil**) in order to speak not **of** Paul de Man but **to** him, to his memory. In risking thereby a paradoxical infidelity as a measure of fidelity—in unsettling, as a result, the economism, the mimeticism, of "true mourning"—Derrida **apostrophizes** to de Man, leaving their differences alone. These differences between Derrida and de Man thus remain free to circulate within the text of "Mnemosyne." One place in which to follow the track of such differences is the ending of the poem by Hölderlin with which we've been concerned. I'd like to argue here that the different possible renderings of **fehlet**—error on the one hand; absence and/or incompleteness, on the other—can be taken to indicate certain characteristic differences between de Man and Derrida in their respective understandings of the nature and function of the literary. Error, of course, has long served as a key term in de Man's writings, nearly attaining the status of a stylistic trait.[8] And while Derrida, to my knowledge, has never offered a thorough analysis of the phrase "**dem Gleich fehlet die Trauer,**" I think it's legitimate to recognize in its double genitive construction a

characteristic Derridean interest in syntactical undecidability.[9]

If I seem to be pushing matters into a realm of untenable conjecture, I nevertheless think that my argument is licensed by the poem in question. Drawing on the whole of Hölderlin's corpus in a scrupulous reading of the poem's penultimate lines, Paul de Man concluded that the unidentified subject of line 49—**einer**, "the one"—"can be none other than Rousseau."[10] If I find the appearance of Rousseau here to be highly significant—if I take his unexpected presence as support for my contention that the differences within **fehlet** might be read as the differences between de Man and Derrida. De Man, of course, criticized Derrida's reading of Rousseau in **Of Grammatology**, insisting that Derrida's analysis was "blinded," that "Rousseau escapes from the logocentric fallacy precisely to the extent that his language **is literary.**"[11] De Man, accordingly, considered himself entitled to confer "exemplary value" upon Rousseau, to call "literary, in the full sense of the word, any text [like Rousseau's] that implicitly or explicitly signifies its own rhetorical mode . . ."[12] For de Man, then, Rousseau remains exemplary insofar as his writing can be deemed "literary"—and it is around this question of the literariness of Rousseau that the debate mentioned this morning by Derrida between Rodolphe Gasché and Suzanne Gearhart has pivoted.

I agree fully with Derrida that the issues raised in this exchange between Gasché and Gearhart are far too rich and complex to permit any summary response. If we were to turn, though, to Wlad Godzich's recent defense of de Man vis-à-vis Derrida, this question of reductiveness might be somewhat mitigated, for Godzich's argument hinges to a considerable degree on the effects of a single word: production.[13]

Godzich focuses in his essay on the section of **Of Grammatology** called "The Exorbitant. Question of Method," where Derrida describes the work of reading as the production of a "signifying structure."[14] This section concludes with the following remarks which Godzich cites in his analysis:

> [W]hat we call production is necessarily a text, the system of a writing and of a reading which we know is ordered around its own blind spot. We know this a priori, but only now and with a knowledge that is not a knowledge at all.

Godzich identifies in this passage specific reasons for de Man's indifference to Derrida's emphasis on production—an indifference all

he more pronounced, in Godzich's view, by de Man's critical silence on this issue. Godzich argues that Derrida's characterization of production as "a bringing forth of the other, of the transcendental" can lead all too rapidly to "the possibility of a return to the phenomenal" (32-33). If, however, reading were to be redefined strictly along de Manian lines as an "explicit focusing on the question of knowledge" (33), then any such recourse to the category of production, with its attendant risk of phenomenalism, would be rendered entirely "unnecessary" (39). In the absence of this purely epistemological approach, the act of reading will slip inevitably into a narrative form which, Godzich concludes, "permits the contamination of deconstruction by logocentrism" (34). De Man, in Godzich's view, refrains from making this criticism explicitly for to do so would be to offer a "counter-story" itself susceptible to dialectical sublation.

Godzich's essay is argued, of course, with far greater rigor and subtlety than I can muster here; as Derrida writes in a note to "Mnemosyne," I send you to it as an incomparable work of criticism. I find its analysis, however, open to question in a number of respects. In the first place, I wonder about the advisability of removing "production" from the critical vocabulary, for such a deletion would militate against the possibility of reinscribing the **effects** of this word. When Derrida employs terms such as production he is borrowing "an old word from philosophy in order to demarcate it"—to work the word against the accumulated weight of its historical usage rather than to safeguard it against the possibility of "contamination."[15] If, then, "concepts such as **production**, constitution, and history remain in complicity" with logocentrism, this can be interpreted less as a shortcoming—as a potential for abuse—than as an essential element of deconstructive strategy, as an opportunity to be welcomed and set to work.[16] Secondly, I am dubious about Godzich's strictures against the "return of the phenomenal" which Derrida's recourse to production is said to permit—not that I wish to recover a naive textual phenomenology but that I understand the logic of deconstruction to work against the pertinence of such strictures. Godzich, I'd argue, is required to hold the phenomenal at a distance insofar as he commits himself to de Man's pervasive tendency to distinguish text from world: in "the Rhetoric of Temporality," to cite a characteristic essay, de Man maintains that "all true irony [states] the continued impossibility of reconciling the world of fiction and the actual world," that irony underwrites "the radical difference that separates fiction from the world of empirical reality."[17] Derrida, to be sure, is not attempting to reconcile these or any other polarities;

he would argue, though, that the textual and the "actual world" are not strictly separable since it is by way of the former's re-marking that the latter comes into play as such. If a text, for Derrida, "overruns all the limits assigned to it so far—all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not . . .),"[18] we might conclude from this that we cannot **return** to the phenomenal world since it never, in fact, has simply been "away." My final quibble is with Godzich's treatment of reading as properly an epistemological issue—a treatment which, again, follows de Man in his usual way of framing literature in terms of a certain negative epistemology, e.g.: "Whenever this autonomous potential of language can be revealed by analysis, we are dealing with literariness and, in fact, with literature as the place where this negative knowledge about the reliability of linguistic utterance is made available."[19] Derrida's work, I believe, refrains precisely from his kind of epistemological speculation, choosing instead to explore the conditions of "a knowledge which is not a knowledge at all"—a knowledge, in my reading of this phrase, which is defined relationally as non-self-identical (a "knowledge-without-knowledge," as Blanchot might say) rather than epistemologically as fully unreliable.[20] Whereas de Man's typical emphasis on "the truth and the falsehood of the knowledge literature conveys about itself"[21] enables him, finally, to equate "the rhetorical, figural potentiality of language with literature itself,"[22] Derrida maintains his distance from any such conflation of the rhetorical or the textual with the literary:

> The textual process cannot be dominated by any instance as such, especially not by the theoretical instance in its scientific or philosophical varieties: nor shall I be in too much of a hurry to call it "fictional" or "literary."[23]

Derrida's restraint seems to be founded on the recognition that literature owes its categorical existence to a system of philosophemes which has already determined the literary as a "place" in which language, for once, can safely be as playful as it likes. Skeptical, in the light of such determinations, of any attempt to isolate "a formal specificity of the literary that would have its own proper essence and truth,"[24] Derrida takes exception to phrases such as "literature itself," transforming the onto-epistemological question of "what is literature?" into the relational question of "what's **between** literature?"—a question that highlights not the

(negative) knowledge that literature might impart but its disciplinary self-division:

> What takes place between philosophy and literature, science and literature, politics and literature, theology and literature, psychoanalysis and literature? It was here . . .that lay the most pressing question.[25]

This relational conception implies as well an understanding of narrative and its limitations that is different from the one proposed by Godzich when he contends that deconstruction courts logocentrism in telling the latter's deceptive "story." For narrative, once more, is less an epistemological problem for Derrida than a relational one: in telling, for example, "strange narratives without events,"[26] Derrida is neither opposing nor rejecting narrative but construing its powers otherwise, deploying narrative **against itself** rather than refusing it altogether as an epistemologically-compromised mode. Like production, narrative simply cannot be rejected as a theological remainder, as a metaphysical residue, for "no concept is by itself, and consequently in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed."[27] Acknowledging **both** the ineluctability of narrative **and** its capacity for self-difference, Derrida's writing instantiates such "textual work" by reinscribing narrative not in its putative falseness but in all of its structural betweenness.

In underscoring the betweenness of literature and of narrative, we have returned once more to the very questions with which we began—questions of invagination, of mourning, of syntactical undecidability. How are we, then, to settle accounts **between** Derrida and de Man, to comprehend the differences that divide them? Can we simply label the one the champion of deconstruction, the other its most significant resister? If, as Gearhart has argued convincingly, philosophy and literature equally fail to subject deconstruction to their respective masteries, then what does this failure say about the nature of deconstruction "itself"? Is there such a thing called deconstruction to which one can be true or from which one can deviate—a thing which is not already divided from itself? **Does** deconstruction possess a proper name—and, if not, in the name of what can one seek to defend it, be "faithful" to it? **How different**, finally, **are** errors, gaps, and fragments? Can a rigorous distinction among such terms be sustained, or are they related to one another in ways that exceed antithesis? Each of these questions I'll leave here

suspended in the supplementarity of the verb **fehlen**—"lulling and rocking," as Hölderlin wrote in another version of his poem, "on a swinging skiff of the sea."[28]

Andrew Parker
Amherst College

NOTES

[1]Jacques Derrida, "La Loi du genre/The Law of Genre," **Glyph**, 7 (1980), pp. 176-232.

[2]I should take a moment to explain why I haven't reproduced an English translation of the poem. In the first place, the only published translation available (by Michael Hamburger) is of the third version of that poem, whereas it is from the significantly-different second version that Derrida quotes. Secondly, I've omitted a translation for a strategic reason, in that the poem's putative translatability is precisely what my analysis will question.

[3]A translated version of this essay (by Timothy Bahti) will appear in de Man's forthcoming **The Rhetoric of Romanticism** (Columbia University Press).

[4]Daniel Lagache,"Le travail du deuil," cited in J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, **The Language of Psychoanalysis**, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 486.

[5]Maurice Blanchot, **L'Amitié** (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 328-29.

[6]Jane Gallop, **Intersections** (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), p. 40.

[7]Anne Berger, "Une conversation avec Jacques Derrida," **Fruits**, no. 1 (December, 1983), 88-89.

[8]See, for example, Stanley Corngold, "Error in Paul de Man," **Critical Inquiry**, 8, no. 3 (Spring 1982), 489-507, and de Man's epistolary reply in the same issue (pp. 509-13.

[9]See, for example, Derrida's analysis of the double genitive in "Title (to be specified)," **Sub-Stance**, no. 31 (1981), 5-22.

[10]Paul de Man, "L'Image de Rousseau dans la poésie de Hölderlin" (forthcoming in a translation by Andrzej Warminski in **The Rhetoric of Romanticism**).

[11]Paul de Man, **Blindness and Insight**, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 138.

[12]Ibid., p. 136.

[13]Wlad Godzich, "The Domestication of Derrida," in **The Yale Critics**, eds. Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, and Wallace Martin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 20-40. All subsequent references to this essay will be cited directly in the text above.

[14]Jacques Derrida, **Of Grammatology**, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 158.

[15]Jacques Derrida, **Positions**, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 59.

[16]Jacques Derrida, **Margins of Philosophy**, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 12.

[17]**Blindness and Insight**, pp. 218, 217.

[18]Jacques Derrida, "Living On/Border Lines," in Harold Bloom et al., **Deconstruction and Criticism** (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 84.

[19]Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," **Yale French Studies**, no. 63 (1982), 10.

[20]See Stephen Melville, **Deconstruction, Criticism, Modernism** (forthcoming from University of Minnesota Press). This notion of "relationality" accords well, I think, with Suzanne Gerhart's understanding of the irreducible historicity of deconstruction; see her "philosophy **Before** Literature: Deconstruction, Historicity, and the Work of Paul de Man," **Diacritics**, 13, no. 4 (Winter 1983), 63-81.

[21]**Blindness and Insight**, p. 164.

[22]Paul de Man, **Allegories of Reading** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 10.

[23]Jacques Derrida, **La carte postale** (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1980), p. 279.

[24]**Positions**, p. 70.

[25]Jacques Derrida, "The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations," in **Philosophy in France Today**, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 38.

[26]See Jacques Derrida, **Signéponge/Signsponge**,, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 101-02.

[27]**Positions**, p. 57.

[28]My thanks to James Creech, Jacques Derrida, Neil Hertz, Peggy Kamuf, and Andrzej Warminski for their generous criticisms and comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

DECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA / HEIDEGGER READING HÖLDERLIN

ANDRZEJ WARMINSKI

I. Deconstruction in America

In order **not** to talk about deconstruction in America—in order to learn **how** not to talk about deconstruction in America—one could do worse than to look at an article published in **Newsweek** (June 22, 1981) under the rubric "Ideas" and entitled "A New Look at Lit Crit." Because it gathers together and presents in starkly journalistic form the academic gossip that passes for a "discussion" or a "debate" of deconstruction and then serves as the primary source for what distinguished academics think, say, and write about "deconstruction," this article has come to play a pivotal role in the drama of "Deconstruction in America," a kind of counter or currency in the self-generating, balanced, closed economy of exchange that constitutes talk about deconstruction in America: an economy in which academics tell reporters what deconstruction is and then quote these reporters to tell other academics (and themselves) what it is, in which academics report to and report reporters, in which reporters report themselves—a self-contained informational relay system of self-reporting and self-quotation that nowhere has to encounter a thought—never mind a reading of texts. A contentless, meaningless, formalistic, nihilistic system if there ever was one—but, like all systems, terroristically coercive in policing its territory and enforcing its law, whether it be in the form of letters of denunciation to foreign governments, university presidents, or department chairmen, etc. or in the form of good-natured book-length popularizations of deconstruction. What does this system have to contain? A good way to break its circle would be to read the "ideas" contained in "A New Look at Lit Crit."

At first sight, it would seem that the **Newsweek** reporters do anything but minimize the terms and the stakes of a struggle they characterize as an "all-out war." Although teachers and critics of literature "have always fought like intellectual infantry over the interpretation of literary texts . . . in recent years the literary scene in the United States has dissolved into a state of all-out war. At

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issue, claim spokesmen for contending forces, is the very nature of writing and the future of criticism itself." What are the sides in this war—their weapons, arsenals, and strategies? "On one side of the fray are partisans of the humanistic tradition, who believe that the purpose of criticism—the interpretation, evaluation and enjoyment of serious literature—remains unchanged. These critics assume, as William Wordsworth did, that a writer is 'a man speaking to men'—that literature is a form of communication, held in common by an author and his readers, about something of significance to the human community. Thus, in the hands of broad-gauged scholars such as Alfred Kazin and the late Lionel Trilling, the response to literature becomes a moral as well as esthetic concern. In Matthew Arnold's words, criticism should 'propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.' On the other side are the avatars of a radical approach to writing—called deconstruction—that undermines all the humanists' assumptions about the relationships between author and reader, literature and life. Deconstructionists draw heavily on modern European theories of language and have developed a decidedly nihilistic philosophy of life. They argue that all writing is reducible to an arbitrary sequence of linguistic signs or words whose meanings have no relationship to the author's intention or to the world outside the text. In this view, Hamlet is not a play about patricide nor does it dramatize the tragedy of the human condition as understood by a man named Shakespeare. Instead, it is an impersonal skein of linguistic codes and conventions whose interpretation is open to anyone who cares to 'deconstruct' the text and 'complete' it by creating something totally different—a piece of criticism that is in itself a new work of art." Humanism versus nihilism, humanism and anti-humanism, these are the sides in the war. Decoding the heavily coded characterization of the two sides would take one far. On the level of the individual word, we have an opposition between, on the one side, words like "human, "humanistic," "man," "tradition," "communication," "common," "community," "significance," "moral," "concern," etc., coupled to the somehow reassuring names of Matthew Arnold, Lionel Trilling, and Alfred Kazin; and, on the other side, words like "avatars," "radical," "undermines," "theories," "language," "nihilistic," "arbitrary," etc., coupled to unnamed Europeans (in the phrase "European theories of language") as impersonal as the skeins of linguistic codes and conventions that they would "deconstruct" texts into. A whole Anglo-American history (and philosophy) of xenophobia, nativism, and know-nothingism lurks not too far beneath these words and their war. Even more symptomatic is the system that supports

the humanists' conception of "the purpose of criticism—the interpretation, evaluation and enjoyment of serious literature." It is a system based on a certain reading of Kant in which "interpretation" and "evaluation," knowledge and action, epistemology and ethics, pure reason and practical reason, the first and the second **Critiques**, can be articulated together thanks to the possibility of knowledge's phenomenalization in art, the aesthetic, aesthetic judgment, the third **Critique**—thanks to the enjoyment that links the interpretation and evaluation of serious literature—serious because as art it is a source and a repository of edifying knowledge and value. So, a certain humanized and humanistic Kant—a Kant conceived in terms of what Paul de Man in his last work would have called "aesthetic ideology"—provides not only the values worth defending in this war but also the heavy (ideological) artillery or heavy bombers. And, as is the case in all wars, there are casualties: "At Johns Hopkins, the debate over deconstruction wrenched apart the French department, which has since lost many of its tenured members." "Wrenched apart," "lost," "tenured members"—the war is depicted as quite conventional with casualties confined to professional soldiers or mercenaries (tenured members) with losses, we are led to assume, on both sides. No civilian targets, no women and children—no untenured members or graduate students—it would seem, have yet been hit. Even if "all out," then, it remains a containable, clean little war (like that of the Falkland Islands, say where you can try out all kinds of new weapons under real battle conditions) in which there is no question of escalating to nuclear weapons. As such, it is also a short war which can be brought to successful conclusion by the last paragraph of the article, meaningfully sub-headed "Meaning": "Meaning: Philosophically, the debate over deconstruction turns out to be just another round in an old battle between two kinds of humanism—one that finds human experience rich in meaning and another that concludes it has none. Great literature has long dramatized both outlooks, but deconstruction is a strategy which aims at settling the issue beforehand by robbing language of its unique ability to capture truth. Fortunately, deconstructed literature cannot match the wonder of a single well-told story, or a poem's power to make us see the world afresh." The war turns out not to have been so serious or so new after all—just another conventional round of shot in an old battle or just another round in an old humanistic (man to man) boxing match. It was, after all, not a case of humanism versus something other than itself but (one) humanism versus another humanism, humanism against itself. One may believe human experience rich in

meaning, the **other** may conclude it has none, but neither would question the fundamental humanity of that experience and its easily dialectizable oppositions. Both the believers in meaning and the believers in non-meaning—humanists and nihilist, humanist and anti-humanist—can be classified under meaning, for, after all, if I can say that experience has no meaning, I have already mastered that lack of meaning like a Socrates who knows that he does not know (and hence is voted the wisest man by the oracle of Delphi whose motto is "Know thyself"). It is no wonder, then, that what started out as an all-out war turns out to be only another round in an old battle or, better yet, a local police action against (masked?) robbers who would rob language of "its unique ability to capture truth." Like in a television sitcom or a cops and robbers show, all the tensions are relaxed and the oppositions are resolved in the end. "The day after" deconstruction and all-out, nuclear war turns out not to be so different from the preceding day. Like nuclear war, deconstruction can be staged, dramatized, filmed in terms of the clichés of a disaster movie and using the same set and the same lighting as its predecessors: "Skyscraper," "Airport," "Airplane," "The Day After," and now "Deconstruction" (with "Deconstruction II" and "Deconstruction III" shortly to follow). Definitely a low-budget operation. What else would one want from "Deconstruction in America"—but "Gidget goes to Paris"?

What else? Nothing else. This American movie version of deconstruction would re-inscribe it into a balanced, symmetrical economy of binary opposition, loss and gain without excess or lack. In the metaphor of the boxing match—"another round in an old battle . . ."—it presupposes two (symmetrical) fighters in one, self-identical ring with lights, rules, a referee, and judges that never change—when it is precisely **these** presuppositions that deconstruction would question. In the metaphor of the robber—"robbing language of its unique ability to capture truth"—it presupposes that language is a victorious soldier who has managed to capture truth (or has just been paid) whom deconstruction waylays in an alley—when deconstruction, rather than taking from language what it already has, demonstrates what has always already been taken from it, better, what it has always already **robbed itself of.** Rather than our robbing language, we are robbed by language: "We wuz robbed" or "We wuz (always already) robbed." These characterizations of deconstruction are wrong not only in their conceptual content—they are not **true,** this is not deconstruction—but in their metaphors. Indeed, these concepts—and the whole chain of concepts that goes along with them:

"experience," "human," "truth" as a property that can be captured and transferred from person to person (providing he is the right, proper, entitled person and not a robber), that can enter into an economy of exchange (in which it can be exchanged for other commodities or for money)—these concepts are clearly inextricable from the metaphors that stage them, express them, translate them, etc. Do these metaphors of deconstruction "express" the idea of deconstruction or are the ideas wholly dependent on the metaphors? In not being able to state the relation between concept and metaphor **only** conceptually (i.e., without employing metaphors) or **only** meta-metaphorically (for there is no metaphor that could dominate the entire field of metaphor), we already begin to enter a different economy—one whose principle Derrida's "White Mythology" calls the "law of supplementarity." In the section "Plus de métaphore"—"More and no more metaphor"—the supplement is the one metaphor too few that is at the same time the one metaphor too many: that is, in any meta-metaphorical discourse that would attempt to dominate the entire field of metaphors, there would always be one metaphor too few within the field of metaphors and one metaphor too many outside the field—precisely the one metaphor that the meta-metaphorical discourse still has to employ to construct itself. If it enters the field of metaphor, the meta-metaphor is no longer master; if it does not enter the field of metaphor, it does not master the **entire** field of metaphors (because it itself is missing from it). This would be one preliminary statement of the law of supplementarity and its strange economy—an economy not easily recoverable for the plus and minus, more and less, systems of binary opposition that would characterize deconstruction in terms of an economy in which truth and language (concept and metaphor) in relation to themselves or to one another leave nothing over—nothing that cannot be recovered either by cheap dialectics or police action. If there is a single reason for the obscurantism of reactions to and characterizations of deconstruction, it is the refusal or inability to understand the law of supplementarity, for example, its economy of less and more, and the negative peculiar to it.[1] Illustrating this law by examples could take us far into the reading of texts by Derrida (for instance, "White Mythology" which stages itself as the statement of this law and its illustration by examples, or the much unread ending of "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," or the text we have just heard and its tentative "Definition" of deconstruction as **plus d'une langue:** no more one language, more than one language, "plus" of a language, etc.—supplement of language) and de Man (for

instance the essay on Proust in **Allegories of Reading**). To economize, we will stick to one exemplary reading which gathers the themes and problematics of "Deconstruction in America" around one question: that of undecidability.

II. Heidegger Reading Hölderlin

An oblique route may take us to the question faster. The reading is that of Hölderlin by Heidegger: the Hölderlin who, according to Paul de Man's 1955 essay, says exactly the opposite of what Heidegger makes him say but who nevertheless talks of the same thing (though in an opposite sense). In the end,[2] what Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin comes down to is the question of the "Not" (**Nicht**): that is, whether Hölderlin's double lack and "double Not"—"the no longer (**Nichtmehr**) of the gods who have fled and the not yet (**Nochnicht**) of the coming god"[3]—are to be understood in terms of Heidegger's fundamental ontological Not (based on the "Nothing" [**Nichts**]). (Or, in other words, is the presence and absence of the (Greek) gods in Hölderlin's poetry the same thing as—**das Selbe** and not **das Gleiche**—as the concealment and dis-concealment of Being, i.e., is it to be thought in terms of the ontological difference between Being and beings, **Sein** and **Seiendes**?) Is there an "other Not" in Hölderlin's poetry? Perhaps the best place to begin reading the "other Not"—of Hölderlin and of Heidegger—is the late hymn "Germanien," to which Heidegger devotes one hundred and fifty pages in the lectures from the **Wintersemester** 1934-35. Appropriately enough, this poem that, according to Heidegger, is the perfect beginning (because it leads into the origin) begins with a **Not**—an apparent negation whose "object" is the Greek gods:

Nicht sie, die Seeligen, die erschienen sind,
Die Götterbilder in dem alten Lande,
Sie darf ich ja nicht rufen mehr, wenn aber
Ihr heimatlichen Wasser! jetzt mit euch
Des Herzens Liebe klagt, was will es anders
Das Heiligtrauernde?

Not them, the blessed, who once appeared,
Those images of gods in the ancient land,
Them I may no longer call, but if,
You waters of the homeland, now with you
The love of my heart laments, what else does it want,

The holily mourning (one)?

Heidegger's entire project pivots on a re-interpretation of the poem's stark, abrupt, opening "Not." Indeed, says Heidegger, "This 'Not them . . .' with which our poem begins, is a decision of time (**Zeitentscheidung**) in the sense of the **original time** of the peoples" (**HH**, 51).[4] One could say, then, that the question of the poem comes down to whether Heidegger can—whether we can, since the time decided by the poem is **our** time—get past the first word of the poem. His complicated attempt to do so, his re-interpretation of the Not, of the refusal of the old, dead, Greek gods, is worth re-tracing.

The re-interpretation begins with a determination of the "grounding mood" (**Grundstimmung**) of the poem on the he basis of the "holily mourning" (**das Heiligtrauernde**) heart of the opening lines: the mood is holy mourning (**heilige Trauer**). What does it mean? "Holy mourning" is not some sentimental, subjective sadness or like physical pain—as we know from **Sein und Zeit**, this is not what Heidegger means by mood—but rather something essentially other (**HH**, 82). This otherness is specifically determined by a three-fold "not": the "holy mourning" is not 1) a despairing giving up of the old gods, indeed, as the first strophe says, these gods remain loved too much by the "I" of the poem—that is, the mourning does not exhaust itself in a sterile independence of the **subject**; nor 2) is it a rootless giving oneself up to the gods who have fled—that is, the mourning is not a losing of the subject in the **object**; nor 3) is it a refusal of both 1) and 2)—that is, the mourning is not an empty hovering between subject and object but rather "founds a new relation to the gods" (**HH**, 87). This three-fold "not" is what makes the mourning **holy**: it is not contingent and not poetic decoration, but "rather in it something groundingly essential is poetically said about Being pure and simple (**über das Seyn schlechthin**)" (**HH**, 90). In short, if the essential otherness of the holy mourning is that of Being, then this grounding mood of the poem is an ontological category like the mood of dread (**Angst**) in **Being and Time** and "What is Metaphysics?" And like the mood of **Angst**, which because it is fear of **nothing** rather than of something, discloses the Nothing, the **Nichts**, the mood of holy mourning, because it is a mourning over the present absence of the old Greek gods rather than over their (past) presence, discloses the Not, the **Nicht**. Hence the opening words, rather than any kind of refusal of the old gods or a nostalgic hanging onto them, are a recovering of the old gods in their absence, or, better, "the preservation of the divinity of the old gods in the mourning

renunciation of them" (**HH**, 93).

Heidegger's ontologization of Hölderlin's "Not" (Nicht) and "other" (**anders**) can be traced to its (textual) source in the pages he devotes to an extensive interpretation of the poem's opening. After the determination of the poem's grounding mood as holy mourning (the "holily mourning" heart), we can say the first strophe again with a now clearer knowledge, says Heidegger (**HH**, 96), who then quotes the entire first strophe (again), and comments: "Now we read nothing more of a refusal. We also gather that it is not at all a question of an external historical comparison of a previous state of the old world and the attitude to it with a later and contemporary world, not a question of humanism, but rather what holds sway here is the time of the peoples, and in question is the global destiny of the native earth" (**HH**, 96). The effacement of the opening "Not" could not be more explicit—now we read nothing more of a Not, we could paraphrase—but Heidegger makes it so: "But not only does nothing of a refusal happen in the first strophe. The 'Not' with which it begins is basically not at all an isolated negation, also not a renunciation, but rather [...]" (**HH**, 96). A peculiar torturing of language takes place here: not only does not a not happen in the first strophe, we could rewrite (**Nicht nur nichts von einem Nicht geschieht in der ersten Strophe . . .?**). If not only not a Not, what then? Heidegger's response is worth following to the end: "The 'Not' [...] rather finds its authentic [or proper] full meaning (**seine eigentliche volle Bedeutung**) in the 'what else does it want' (verse 5), the holily mourning heart. We have already pointed to the beginning of the second strophe and stated that, yes, the gods have themselves fled and hence a refusal of them is not necessary. With that, however, we do not broach the true import of the second strophe and its inner relation to the first. Rather we have to hold together in one both verse 5 and verse 19, 'what else does it want' with 'Nothing do I want to deny here and nothing do I want to plead for.' This line is the highest decisiveness (**höchste Entschiedenheit**), namely the taking over of the abandonment by the old gods. The grounding mood of holy mourning intensifies itself here to its innermost dominance. The mourning becomes a knowledge that the true taking earnestly of the gods who have fled as those who have fled is in itself precisely an awaiting of the gods, namely of their godliness as no longer fulfilled. The wanting-nothing-more and pleading-for-nothing is not the fall into a crude godlessness and an empty despair, no idle and clever coming to terms with death, rather this wanting is the wanting of verse 5—'what else does it want'—: turning into and pure self-maintaining in the space of a

possible new meeting with the gods" (**HH**, 96-97). Rather than a despairing or facile refusal of the old gods, the poem's opening—read in the context of verses 5 and 19—would be the highest decisiveness, a mourning that is a knowledge of the gods who have fled as fled, and hereby a will to a possible new meeting of, with, the gods. ("All No [**Alles Nein**]," says the "Letter on Humanism," "is only the affirmation of the Not [**ist nur die Bejahung des Nicht**].") Perhaps here Heidegger could be more easily accused of "nostalgia" than in "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (for which the "Germanien" lectures are clearly a **Vorstudium**), for it would seem that the meeting we are awaiting is with the same old gods (whereas in "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" there is an asymmetry between gods past and god to come). Nevertheless, we have to remember that 1) it is a new meeting (**Neubegegnung**) with the gods, and, more important, that 2) it is not a presence that is mourned here but rather a **present absence** whose negativity is interpreted ontologically. Small wonder, then, that the "highest decisiveness [or decidedness] (**höchste Entschiedenheit**) of this holy mourning—what we come up against under the name "Hölderlin"—puts us into the decision (**Deshalb stellt er in die Entscheidung**).

But such an understanding of the "Not of the Not" of Heidegger's "poet of the poet" is nevertheless not yet a reading: how does Heidegger efface, erase, re-write the poem's opening Not? If the Not finds "its proper, full meaning" (**seine eigentliche volle Bedeutung**) in line five—"what else does it want?"—then what does this verse want? What does Heidegger want in reading the Not into it? In fact, Heidegger reads into it not only the Not but also the entire poem (indeed all of Hölderlin's poetry and all of poetry if we keep in mind Hölderlin's decisive exemplary position as the founder of "an other history"): "Only when we measure the entire self-secured breadth of this holy mourning, which pushes away everything forced, do we meet and understand the deciding word (**das entscheidende Wort**) of the entire first strophe and thereby of the entire poem" (**HH**, 94). This "deciding word" (**das entscheidende Wort**), this "essential word" (**das wesentliche Wort**) (**HH**, 96), the word that turns "Not" to "Not" (of Being), "other" to "other" (of Being), beginning into origin, what does it say? As it turns out, this "word" does not say anything but asks (or does not ask?) a question: "The word has the linguistic form of the question and runs (verse 5): . . . what else does it want—it, the holily mourning heart. According to the usual characterization of forms of speech one can find here a so-called rhetorical question, a saying which despite having the form of a question is no

question but rather an answering and assuring, the statement of a certainty and decidedness (**Das Wort hat die sprachliche Form der Frage und lautet (V.5): . . . was will es anders—es, das heilig trauernde Herz. Nach der üblichen Kennzeichnung der Redeform kann man hier eine sogenannte rhetorische Frage finden, ein Sagen, das trotz der Frageform keine Frage, sondern ein Antworten und Versichern, der Spruch einer Sicherheit und Entschiedenheit ist)" (HH, 94-95).** Although Heidegger seems to dismiss the "linguistic form"—a question, and, at that, a "so-called rhetorical question"—of his "deciding word" (as though because it were a question of **merely** linguistic **form** it could be effaced and re-written [like a question mark, say] again and again), it is clear that he exploits this form and "the usual characterization of forms of speech" to the full: that is, he reads the question figuratively, as a rhetorical question (**une question de pure forme**, as one might say in French). Rather than asking "What else?" the question is really saying "Nothing else": "The no longer being able to call the old gods, this self-submission to renunciation, what else is it—it is nothing else (**was ist es anderes—es ist nichts anderes**)—but the only possible resolved readiness for the awaiting of the godly [...]" (**HH, 95**). It is this decision to read figuratively that allows Heidegger to re-write the "Not" into "Not Not," as it were, and to take it (along with verse 19) as the "highest decidedness." And it is no use saying that Heidegger's **Nichts** comes before, is ontologically prior to, the question of literal and figurative, for here the decision of the question (literal/figurative?) comes before—i.e., in terms of a temporality of reading and not a temporality of the destiny of the forgetting of Being—indeed, founds (and confounds) the question of the "Nothing" (**Nichts**).

Now the (first) problem with such a reading of the Not is that the question "what else does it want?," "what **other** does it want?," can, of course, also be taken literally as "what else is there?" That is, as asking what else beside **calling** (**rufen**) the mere **images** of the gods who **appeared**—gods who precisely **because** they appeared cannot be our gods because our culture is a response to a different, other nature from that of the Greeks. (Again, in the terms of Hölderlin's famous letter to Böhlendorff, our **nature** is Greek culture ["clarity of representation," "Junonian sobriety"]; and Greek nature is Oriental culture ["the fire from heaven," "holy pathos"].) This would be one possible reason why the "I" of the poem's opening fears that it is fatal, deathly, to see the beautiful countenance of the gods as though they were unchanged (as if **now** were **then: als wärs, wie sonst**): "To look upon your beautiful brows, as though / They were

unchanged, I am afraid, for deadly / And scarcely permitted it is to awaken the dead (**Denn euer schönes Angesicht zu sehn, als wärs, wie sonst, ich fürcht' es, tödtlich ists, / Und kaum erlaubt, Gestorbene zu weken**)." In other words, the gods who appeared then are now, for us, dead not because they no longer appear but because for us, now, they **cannot** appear: that is, in the mode of Greek, mimetic representation, in the mode of appearance (**erscheinen**), images (**Bilder**), etc. In short, perhaps the question is indeed asking for "other gods," whom it would be more appropriate to call (**rufen**): that is, gods who can be called by a calling that is not a calling of images of seen (literally or figuratively) gods but a calling of, as it were, heard gods, a calling of calling. What other gods these could be and how they could be other is the question of the poem. Trying to "answer" this question—as though one could answer and as though we had not already answered (here and elsewhere)—would lead us too far away from (and too far into) the poem, but the implications (for Hölderlin and for Heidegger) can be indicated. The problem is not just that a literal reading of the question triggers another, opposed, reading of the poem—i.e., it is not just that the poem is, as one says, "ambiguous"—but rather that 1) the two readings, figurative and literal, are mutually exclusive (better mutually parasitical)—the one reading is precisely the error denounced by the other and has to be undone by it"[5] (as Paul de Man puts it): "**Nothing but** them . . . " versus "**Not them** . . . "—and are not reconcilable, not mediatable (either by dialectics or by ontology), because 2) the difference between them is radically undecidable. There is no way to decide whether the poem is really asking or not asking for something else because the poem "itself" is not itself, it is divided against itself and does not know whether it is asking for something else or for more of the same. And the appeal to "tone" (or "context") is of no help here because as Heidegger has so eloquently demonstrated, it is precisely this question that decides the tone, the mood (**Stimmung**), of the poem in the first place; and if the question is itself undecidable so is the tone or context by means of which we had hoped to decide the question. In short, precisely the word, the phrase, that Heidegger calls the "deciding word" of the poem is itself undecidable, and thus reproduces an other (de-ontologized) Not that cannot be effaced, that reproduces itself mechanically by self-quotation (which can never be the quotation of a self or a subject) like something merely recited by heart or repeated. Rather than putting us into the decision "Hölderlin" puts us into radical (i.e., subjectless, Being-less) undecidability.

To summarize, let us retrace Heidegger's interpretation of the question "what else does it want?" step by step in order to mark better how our reading of the question as undecidable diverges from Heidegger's path. Heidegger's effort is an attempt to efface the opening "Not" of the poem, to read "Not them" as "Precisely them," "Nothing but them," or Not "Not them." His interpretation accomplishes this on the basis of what he calls the grounding mood of holy mourning. This grounding mood (the mood of the ground) is an ontological category—like the mood of dread in **Being and Time**—and it provides the horizon of understanding against which the poem is to be read. It is the pre-understanding of the poem. The question "what else does it want?" is first read against the background of this horizon, in terms of the mood of holy mourning. But, on the other hand, the grounding mood of holy mourning is read on the basis of this question: that is, on the basis of the question read as not really a question but as an assertiveness and decidedness (**das entscheidende Wort**), in short, as a rhetorical question. Heidegger is explicit about this, but he dismisses the question of reading as only a question of **linguistic form**—a purely ontic concern, the ontic aspect of language, one could say. The circle in Heidegger's reading is explicit: the reading of the question as rhetorical is decided on the basis of the grounding mood, the grounding mood is decided on the basis of the reading of the question as rhetorical. And this is not some hermeneutic circle of part and whole but an ontologized circle of pre-understanding and understanding based on the existential structure of **Dasein**'s self-understanding: its always already being concerned with the question of the meaning of Being (Cf. **Being and Time**, section 32). But what we are saying is that this circle is broken by reading. First of all, the question "what else does it want?" can also be read literally, and such a reading would give rise to an other history, one which plays itself out not as a story of us and them, of us and the Greeks, but as a story of us/them/ and **their** them, Hesperians/Greeks/and Egyptians (or the Orient). In such a history, the Greeks would be the name of a radical disjunction between us and . . . ourselves, the Egyptians (because, according to Hölderlin's letter to Böhlendorff, the relation of nature and culture for us and for the Egyptians is the "same"). I have read Hölderlin's other history elsewhere.[6] For my purposes here, it is more important that this (always possible) other literal reading is only the sign of a gap inscribed in the question: a gap not (just) between one (literal) meaning and another (figurative) meaning (masterable by a sufficiently rigorous hermeneutics that can hold both together) but

rather a gap between meaning, the horizon of meaning, the grounding mood, the semantic pole, rhetoric . . . on the one hand, and the linguistic form of the question, syntax, grammar on the other—a gap, in short, between the meaning of words and the order of words, between the word as carrier of meaning and the word as place-holder or "syntactical plug." The question "what else does it want?" stands in the place of this gap—it makes a hole, as it were, in the text—and it is its status as mere place-holder, non-signifying syntactical plug, that interferes with its semantic function as carrier of meaning. This mutual, asymmetrical interference—and not its lexical richness, polysemy, or ambiguity—is what renders the question truly undecidable in de Man's or Derrida's sense: undecidability is "the irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic." ("Its semantic void **signifies**, but it signifies spacing and articulation; it has as its meaning the possibility of syntax; it orders the play of meaning. **Neither purely syntactic nor purely semantic**, it marks the articulated opening of that opposition."[7]) And it is undecidability in this "sense" that always comes to interfere with Heidegger's attempt to reduce Hölderlin's syntax to ontological semantics, to questions of meaning that have nothing (ontological "Nothing") to do with questions of pure linguistic form, grammar, syntax. One could say that "linguistic form," syntax—and the necessity to dismiss it as ontic—mark an irreducible, necessary remainder of the technical, of Technik, in any language, not matter how "ontologized," as language.

A helpful interpretation of Heidegger on language and grammar can help us to summarize this point: "It is possible to distinguish between an ontic and an ontological aspect of language, even if such a distinction disrupts the fundamental unity of the language phenomenon. The grammar of language, Heidegger suggests, corresponds to its ontic, the words to its ontological dimension. Language can do justice to Being only if it is possible to free it from the bondage of grammar." Why so? "Grammar and logic place the word into a linguistic or logical space which threatens to obscure its meaning. There is a tendency to interpret the word entirely in terms of the context in which it appears. To learn what a word means, one should, according to this view, ask how it is used, how it operates within a given language. This brings us back to the example of the blind man, making the judgment: The sky is blue. The grammatical approach would have difficulty in finding anything wrong with this judgment. And yet, it is quite clear that the sentence when spoken by a blind man is only repetition rather than response to the call of Being. The grammatical approach fails to do justice to the

problem of meaning. The demand to free language from grammar is a demand to free it for its real task of revealing meaning. The context in which a word operates should not be permitted to obscure its essential meaning."[8] What we are saying, in short, is that the grammar of language (in a broad sense) makes us all blind men, that the failure "to do justice to the problem of meaning" is a necessary, constitutive failure of language--a failure, one should add, that is almost the sole "theme" of Hölderlin's poetry[9]--a failure that pays no attention to our "demand to free language from grammar" and that has nothing (a linguistic "nothing" here) to do with our permitting or not permitting it to "obscure essential meaning."

It may be good to remember that the word "Deconstruction" is also subject to this "failure," it is always a place-holder as well as a carrier of meaning: overdetermined, in process, not one, in America.

Andrzej Warminski
Yale University

NOTES

[1]This holds, I would say, from the most trivializing journalistic efforts all the way to the most "advanced" humanist, Marxist, or **nouveau** pragmatist attempts to characterize (and dismiss) deconstruction. For a pragmatist refusal to read the supplement, see Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention," **Critical Inquiry**, Volume 11, Number 1 (September 1984). Rorty's characterization of the "dilemma" that Derrida purportedly has to face entails statements like "You can't have a ground without a figure, a margin without a text" (p. 10)—when Derrida's whole project could be read as an attempt to undo (and re-inscribe) the dialectical logic of such a "without," to say that there is indeed **nothing but**—supplementary "nothing"—"a margin without a page of text."

[2]The remarks that follow are a much condensed version of the final pages of a longer essay called "Heidegger Reading Hölderlin" to appear in: Andrzej Warminski, **Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

[3]Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," in **Erluterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung** (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1971), p. 47.

[4]All references marked as **HH** are to: Martin Heidegger, **Hölderlins Hymnen 'Germanien' un 'Der Rhein'** (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1980). This is volume 39 of the **Gesamtausgabe.**

[5]Paul de Man, **Allegories of Reading** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 12.

[6]In "Endpapers: Hölderlin's Textual History" and "Hölderlin in France," **Studies in Romanticism** (Summer 1983). Both essays will appear in: **Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger.**

[7]All the quotations about undecidability and syntax are from: Jacques Derrida, "The Double Session," in **Dissemination** trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 219-222.

[8]Karsten Harries, "The Search for Meaning," in: George Schrader, ed., **Existentialist Philosophers: Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty** (New York: McGraw-Hill , 1967), pp. 197-198.

[9]Cf. Andrzej Warminski,"'Patmos': The Senses of Interpretation," **MLN** (April 1976), also in **Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger.**