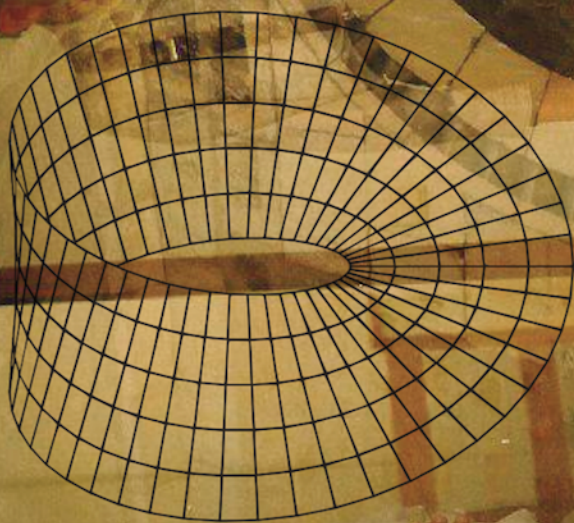


Derrida and Queer Theory

Edited by Christian Hite



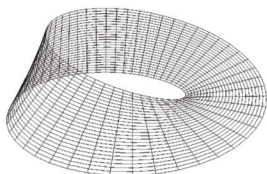
You have to know how to die of laughter
when practicing inversion.

—JACQUES DERRIDA, *Glas*



St. Michael Fighting the Devil (Theodor Mintrop, 1858).

Derrida and Queer Theory



Edited by Christian Hite

PUNCTUM BOOKS

Earth, Milky Way • 2017



DERRIDA AND QUEER THEORY
Edited by Christian Hite, 2017



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

This work is Open Access, which means that you are free to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to the authors, that you do not use this work for commercial gain in any form whatsoever, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build upon the work outside of its normal use in academic scholarship without express permission of the author and the publisher of this volume. For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.

First published in 2017 by
punctum books
Earth, Milky Way

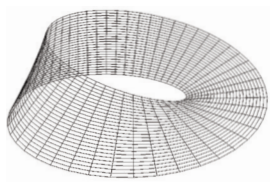
ISBN-10:
0-9985318-9-8

ISBN-13:
978-0-9985318-9-2

Book design: Christian Hite

For Pierre Angélique

Contents



- 10 The Gift from (of the) “Behind” (*Derrière*):
Intro-extro-duction
Christian Hite
- 24 Preposturous Preface: Derrida and Queer Discourse
J. Hillis Miller
- 68 Impossible Uncanniness: Deconstruction and Queer Theory
Nicholas Royle
- 92 No Kingdom of the Queer
Calvin Thomas
- 108 Derrida and the Question of “Woman”
Sarah Dillon
- 132 Les chats de Derrida
Carla Freccero

- 164 Derrida's Queer Root(s)
Jarrold Hayes
- 184 Deco-pervo-struction
Éamonn Dunne
- 200 A Man For All Seasons: Derrida-cum-"Queer Theory,"
or the Limits of "Performativity"
Alexander García Düttmann
- 216 "Practical Deconstruction": A Note on Some Notes by
Judith Butler
Martin McQuillan
- 234 Performing Friendship
Linnell Secomb
- 250 Postface: Just Queer
Geoffrey Bennington
- 262 Appendix: Supreme Court (1988)
David Wills

The Gift from (of the) “Behind” (*Derrière*): Intro-extro-duction

Christian Hite

Intro- *prefix* [ME, fr. MF, fr. L, fr. *intro* inside, fr. (assumed) OL *interus*, adj., inward] **1:** in: into <*introjection*> **2:** inward: within <*introvert*>—compare EXTRO-

Extro- *prefix* [alter. of L. *extra*-]: outward <*extrovert*>—compare INTRO-

—WEBSTER'S NINTH

Coming from behind (*derrière*)—how else to describe a volume called “Derrida and Queer Theory”?—as if arriving late to the party, or, indeed, after the party is already over. After all, we already have *Deleuze and Queer Theory*¹ and, of course, *Saint Foucault*.² Judging by Annamarie Jagose’s *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, in which there is not a single mention of “Derrida” (or “deconstruction”)—even in the sub-chapter titled “The Post-Structuralist Context of Queer”—, one would think that Derrida was not only late to the party, but was never there at all.³

1. *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, eds. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). See also Nick Davis, *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013); and any number of titles featuring the “Deleuzian” words “becomings” and/or “assemblage,” e.g., *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, eds. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011); and Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

2. See David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

3. See Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 1996). The recently published *Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, eds. Annamarie Jagose and Donald E. Hall (New York: Routledge, 2013), does little to rectify this erasure. Hereafter cited in the text as RQ.

Yet, anyone who has tried to read Derrida's *Glas* (1974)⁴—to single-out what is perhaps the most obvious example, with its double-sided, double-crossed reading(s) of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel with Jean Genet (and vice versa)—could easily get the feeling that, maybe, the great, unsurpassed work of “queer theory” already lies behind it, still waiting to be read, as if the “queer theorists” able to read a text like *Glas* (and its speculations on a “general fetishism,” for example) are still to come, as if the “future”—what lies ahead—is already “behind” (*derrière*).⁵ But a “future” that is already “behind” is perhaps less a “no future” than a “catastrophic future,” precisely in the etymological sense of an “overturning” (fr. Gk. *kata-* + *strephein* to turn—see STROPHE; Gk. *strophē*, lit., act of turning, fr. *strephein* to turn, twist; akin to Gk. *strobos* action of whirling), a “future,” then, as if turned to its “back” (*dos*)—or even backside up (who can tell?)—and thus accessible only with a kind of “(be)hindsight,” to quote Lee Edelman,⁶ for the eye, too, as Freud taught us, is a sphincter.⁷

4. See Jacques Derrida, *Glas* [1974], trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986). Hereafter cited as G.

5. On “general fetishism,” see Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, 206-211. See also, perhaps the one exception, Geoffrey Bennington, “Fetishism in *Glas*,” in *Other Analyses: Reading Philosophy* (Lexington: CreateSpace, 2008), 183-202. Some of the (queer) implications of a “generalized fetishism”—that is, of the deconstruction of the “metaphysics of fetishism”—are legible in the texts of David Wills, for example, who has, following Derrida, pursued an “originary technoprostheticity.” See David Wills, “Order Catastrophically Unknown,” in *Inanimation: Theories of Inorganic Life* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2016), 66. Hereafter cited as OCU. For more on this, see Arthur Bradley, *Originary Technicity: The Theory of Technology from Marx to Derrida* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). For a “queer theorist” who is perhaps moving in this direction, see Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in The Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013).

6. See Lee Edelman, “Seeing Things: Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 96, 99, 101. Hereafter cited as ST.

7. “The eye acts as a sphincter.” See B. Grunberger, “Some Reflections on The Rat Man,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 47 (1966): 160. See also “Iris Sphincter Muscle.” Online. Retrieved 3 February 2017: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iris_sphincter_muscle

I say we are “still waiting” for “queer theorists” able to read a text like *Glas*, because, apparently, even Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick could not (or did not) do this. How else to explain these lines from 1990:

Deconstruction, founded as a very science of *différ(e)a/nce*, has both so fetishized [*sic*] the idea of difference and so vaporized its possible embodiments that its most thoroughgoing practitioners are the last people to whom one would now look for help in thinking about particular differences.⁸

It is remarkable (although not uncommon, as some essays in this volume demonstrate) to read such lines from a canonical figure of “queer theory” like Sedgwick, whose *Epistemology of the Closet* relies so much on the very “deconstruction” she/it dismisses.⁹ By contrast, Nikki Sullivan, whose *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* is more generous to “Derrida,” has this to say about “deconstruction” (I quote at length, if only to offset the curt dismissal of Sedgwick):

Deconstruction could be said to constitute a critical response to the humanist belief in absolute essences and oppositions. The idea that heterosexuality is a naturally occurring and fundamental aspect of one’s identity, and, moreover, that it is the polar opposite of homosexuality, is one example of humanist ontology. Deconstruction works away at the very foundation of what Derrida refers to as Western metaphysics (a historically and culturally specific system of meaning-making), by undermining the notion of polarized essences. It is important to note, however, that deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction: it does not involve the obliteration and replacement of what is erroneous with that which is held to be true. In other

8. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), 23.

9. Besides Sedgwick, canonical figures such as Judith Butler, Jonathan Dollimore, and Michel Foucault come under scrutiny here. See, for example, Martin McQuillan, “‘Practical Deconstruction’: A Note on Some Notes by Judith Butler”; Nicholas Royle, “Impossible Uncanniness: Deconstruction and Queer Theory” (Dollimore); and Geoffrey Bennington, “Just Queer” (Foucault), all in this volume.

words, a deconstructive approach to the hierarchized binary opposition heterosexuality/homosexuality would not consist of reversing the terms or of attempting to somehow annihilate the concepts and/or the relation between them altogether. Rather, a deconstructive analysis would highlight the inherent instability of the terms, as well as enabling an analysis of the culturally and historically specific ways in which the terms and the relation between them have developed, and the effects they have produced.¹⁰

The juxtaposition of these two versions of “deconstruction” illustrates in a snapshot what might be called the disavowed debt to “Derrida” in canonical “queer theory,” and perhaps helps to explain why such a preposterous volume—“Derrida and Queer Theory”—appears (if it appears) just now.¹¹

Just now.

Of course, the “now” referred to by Sedgwick above—when describing the practitioners of deconstruction as “the last people to whom one would now look for help”—is “1990,” a moment now recognized—looking back in retrospect—as the emergence of “queer theory” in North America. As the editors of *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* put it: “a new—or at least newly visible—paradigm for thinking about sexuality . . . emerged simultaneously across academic and activist contexts in the early 1990s, constituting a broad and unmethodical critique of normative models of sex, gender, and sexuality” (RQ xvi). It is to this “primal scene”—“the early 1990s”—that I now wish to turn, and specifically to what is/was one of the seminal texts of (nascent) “queer theory,” namely, *Inside/Out* (1991), a volume edited by Diana Fuss.¹² Unlike the insinuations

10. Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 50-51.

11. For more on “preposterous” (meaning literally “with hindsight in front”), rendering undecidable the straightforward positionalities of “before” and “after,” “front” and “behind,” see J. Hillis Miller, “Preposterous Preface: Derrida and Queer Discourse,” in this volume.

12. Diana Fuss, ed. *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991). For a different genealogy of “queer theory” that focuses on the role of (underground) “queer ’zines,” see John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), esp. 141-152.

of Sedgwick, Fuss's *Inside/Out* not only openly acknowledges its debt to "Derrida" (albeit in a footnote),¹³ but also contains what could be called a full-frontal critique of "Derrida," written by Lee Edelman, no less, in which Derrida's *The Post Card* (1980) is lumped together with John Cleland's *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749) and Tobias Smollett's *Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), as three texts featuring the ostensible outrage and scandalization of a "presumptively heterosexual spectator's unobserved surveillance of a sexual encounter between men" (ST 95).¹⁴ As Edelman writes:

[F]or Cleland and Smollett . . . and Derrida, as for countless others who intervene more oppressively in the politics of discursive practices, any representation of sodomy between men is a threat to the epistemological security of the observer—whether a heterosexual male himself or merely heterosexual-male identified—for whom the vision of the sodomitical encounter refutes the determinacy of positional distinctions and compels him to confront his too clear implication in a spectacle that, from the perspective of castration, can only be seen as a "catastrophe." (ST 113)

In the case of *The Post Card*, of course, the "sodomitical scene" (ST 110) in question involves a 13th-century illustration of "plato" and "Socrates" by Matthew Paris reproduced on a postcard encountered in the Bodleian Library gift shop. (Fig. 1) As "Derrida" writes of this encounter in "Envois" (a loveletter dated "6 June 1977"):

For the moment, myself, I tell you that I see *Plato* getting an erection in *Socrates*' back and see the insane hubris of his prick, an interminable, disproportionate erection traversing Paris's head like a single idea and then the copyist's chair,

13. In footnote 8 of her Introduction, Fuss notes: "Very few of Jacques Derrida's works, a corpus to which the present essay is obviously indebted, fail to take up and to work over this classical figure of inside/outside." See Diana Fuss, "Inside/Out," in *Inside/Out*, 9.

14. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* [1980], trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987). Hereafter cited as PC. Edelman's focus is primarily on the "Envois," whose epistolary style is compared to Cleland's *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*.



Fig. 1: Image from *The Post Card* (1980).

before slowly sliding, still warm, under *Socrates*' right leg, in harmony or symphony with the movement of this phallus sheaf, the points, plumes, pens, fingers, nails . . .

What is going on under *Socrates*' leg, do you recognize this object? It plunges under the waves made by the veils around the plump buttocks, you see the rounded double, improbable enough, it plunges straight down, rigid . . . Do people (I am not speaking of “philosophers” or of those who read Plato) realize to what extent this old couple has invaded our most private domesticity, mixing themselves up in everything . . . [t]he one in the other, in front of the other, the one after the other, the one behind the other? . . . this *catastrophe* [my emphasis—C.H.], right near the beginning, this overturning . . . our very condition, the condition of everything that was given us. (PC 18-19)

Since more than one essay in this volume already address this “sodomitical scene” (I alert the reader, in particular, to essays by Alexander García Düttmann and, especially, Jarrod Hayes, who notes that Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington re-stage this scene in a photograph included in their joint, *Jacques Derrida* [1991], in which Bennington plays [*Socratic*] “top” to Derrida’s [*platonic*] “bottom”),¹⁵ I will not dwell here on the many ways in which “Derrida” literally makes an ass of himself (in the “Envois” and elsewhere), explicitly implicating the proper, patronymic “Derrida” with “*Derrière*” (the French word for “behind”),¹⁶ except to point out how everything in Edelman’s full-frontal critique of “Derrida” seems to rest on a certain (mis)reading of the ubiquitous word “catastrophe” in *The Post Card*, as if behind that word lurked the moralistic condemnation and outrage of a homophobe. (Needless to say, the festering of Edelman’s catastrophic reading of “Derrida” in one of the seminal texts of “queer theory” is perhaps yet another reason why such a preposterous volume—“Derrida and Queer Theory”—appears [if it appears] just now.)

The ubiquity of the word “catastrophe” in *The Post Card* is evident in David Wills’s “Order Catastrophically Unknown,” an essay that takes its title from a passage in “Envois” (“My post card naively overturns everything. In any event, it allegorizes what is catastrophically unknown about order” [Derrida, qtd. in Wills, OCU 56]). As Wills glosses these lines:

The French is “*l’insu catastrophique de l’ordre*,” which might be rendered more literally as “the catastrophic unknown concerning order.” The order Derrida is referring to is, in the first place, *sequential* ordering. He continues, “Finally

15. See Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), 11. Hayes also notes that Derrida’s text, “Circumfession,” runs along the “bottom” of the page. See Jarrod Hayes, “Derrida’s Queer Root(s),” in this volume.

16. In *Glas*, then, we read: “*Derrière*: every time the word comes first, if written therefore after a period and with a capital letter, something inside me used to start to recognize there my father’s name . . . *Derrière*, behind, isn’t it always already behind [*déjà derrière*] a curtain, a veil, a weaving. A fleecing text” (G 68).

one begins no longer to understand what to come, to come before, to come after, to foresee, to come back all mean” [PC 21]. But one should also read it in the context of the generic or taxonomic conundrum that Derrida wants his postcard to represent, as the catastrophe of what is unknown concerning *classification*. (OCU 56; emphasis in original).

In other words, the idea that “Derrida”—or one of the many “male”/“female” voices that (de)constitute the presumed author(ity) and identity of texts such as “Envois”¹⁷—would be threatened and/or outraged by what Edelman calls a “figuration of sodomy in terms evocative of the (il)logical structure of the moebius loop, the (il)logic that dislocates such spatio-temporal ‘situations’ as ‘pre’ and ‘post,’ or ‘before’ and ‘behind’” (ST 113), seems highly unlikely given that, as Wills notes, such a “taxonomic conundrum” of straightforward sequential and classificatory “order” is precisely what *The Post Card* represents, and, indeed, in terms recalling a moebius loop. Hence:

What I prefer, about post cards, is that one does not know what is in front or what is in back, here or there, near or far, the Plato or the Socrates, the recto or the verso. Nor what is the most important, the picture or the text, the message or the caption, or the address. (Derrida, PC 13)

“Now what distinguishes a moebius loop,” as Edelman tells us, “is the impossibility of distinguishing its front and its back, a condition that has, as I have already implied, an immediate sexual resonance” (ST 97). And yet, remarkably, Edelman never cites the above lines from “Envois,” nor does he cite Derrida’s *Right of Inspection* (1985), or David Wills’s “Supreme Court” (1988) (an essay included as the “Appendix” to this volume), two texts that address and disturb many of the issues raised by Edelman (issues of *surveillance*; the supposed *distance* of the [male, heterosexual] gaze; and [lesbian] *sodomy*—or are

17. Beyond “dialogues,” as more than one essay in this volume note, the style of many texts signed by Derrida could be called “polylogues.” See, for instance, Sarah Dillon, “Derrida and the Question of ‘Woman’”; and J. Hillis Miller, “Preposterous Preface: Derrida and Queer Discourse,” which includes a reading of the “polylogue,” *Right of Inspection* (1985).

we to assume “sodomy” as the sole privilege of “homosexual men?”¹⁸

The “catastrophe” of *The Post Card*, then, could perhaps be likened to the “travesty” of another found postcard, namely, the so-called rectified readymade of Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), featuring a postcard reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mono Lisa* onto which Duchamp drew a black moustache and goatee in pencil, adding the letters “L.H.O.O.Q.” to the “bottom.” (Fig. 2) As critics have pointed out, when pronounced in French, the letters “L.H.O.O.Q.” sound like “*Elle a chaud au cul*” [“She is hot in the ass”] (**cul**, *n.m.* *Vulg.* bottom, posterior, rump, backside, ass, behind; *avoir dans le cul*, to be screwed), while Jack Spector has also traced Duchamp’s allusion to the French “*queue*” in the final letter “Q” (**queue**, *n.f.* tail), thereby crossing a “feminine” phallic behind (tail) with a “masculine” hot bottom (vagina or anus?), noting Duchamp’s own loose translation of the pun as: “There’s a fire down below.”¹⁹ Down where? Front or back?

“Behind there”²⁰

*Derrière*da

Fort/da

Da*Da*-sein

Derridada

dadamamapapapeepeepoopoo “etc.”²¹

18. As David Wills notes, antisodomy laws in the U.S. until 1968 have defined sodomy as “the carnal knowledge and connection against the order of nature by man with man, or in the same unnatural manner with woman.” See David Wills, “Supreme Court,” in this volume.

19. See Jack J. Spector, “Duchamp’s Androgynous Leonardo: ‘Queue’ and ‘Cul’ in *L.H.O.O.Q.*,” *Notes in the History of Art* 11.1 (Fall 1991): 34.

20. “Behind there” is punningly repeated in Jean-Luc Nancy’s essay, “Borborygmi,” which considers, among other things, “de-nomination” in “Derrida,” asking: “What or who is there behind Derrida [*derrière Derrida*]?” To which he adds, *a la* Warhol, “There is nothing behind it.” See Jean-Luc Nancy, “Borborygmi,” trans. Johathan Derbyshire, in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 114-115.

21. See Jacques Derrida, “Et Cetera,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide*, ed. Nicholas Royle (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000), where Derrida considers the “relation without relation” of titles that take the form: “Deconstruction *and X*” (299). How does the “proper name” (“Derrida *and X*”) alter this formula, e.g., “Derrida *and Queer Theory*,” etc.?

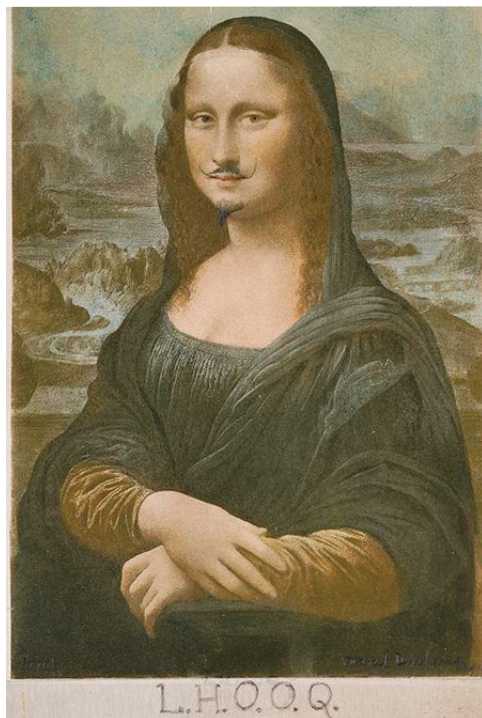


Fig. 2: *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Marcel Duchamp, 1919).

I have written elsewhere of Duchamp’s black moustache in terms of Derrida’s graphic practice of writing “under erasure” (*sous rature*), and vice versa, distinguishing it from Heidegger’s practice of crossing-out (*überqueren*) (Being),²² such that “Derrida and Queer Theory” would involve not simply an X-rated “Derrida,” but a (k)notty double-cross:

~~“Derrida and Queer Theory”~~

22. Christian Hite, “Dirt’ Doesn’t Exist—Dirty Thoughts on Mary Douglas,” *Keep It Dirty*, vol. 1 (2015). Online. Retrieved 20 February 2017: <http://keepitdirty.org/dirt-doesnt-exist-dirty-thoughts-on-mary-douglas/>

In closing, then, I turn to a counter-scene of surveillance in the corpus of “Derrida,” this time involving not a “sodomitical scene” (although, as we shall see, this is anything but certain), but what we might call a (k)notty scene of double-crossing, or interweaving, in which a prepubescent “Derrida” recalls loving “his own” shoebox silkworm(s):

Before I was thirteen, before ever having worn a tallith and even having dreamed of possessing my own, I cultivated (what's the link?) silk worms In the four corners of a shoebox . . . I kept and fed silkworms [mullberry leaves] They were especially voracious between moultings (at the moment called the frèse). You could hardly see the mouths of these white or slightly greyish catapillars, but you could sense they were impatient to nourish their secretion They were animated only in view of the transformation of the mullberry into silk. We would sometimes say the worm, sometimes the caterpillar. I would observe the progress of the weaving Like the movement of this production, like this becoming-silk of a silk I would never have believed natural, as this extraordinary process remained basically invisible, I was above all struck by the impossible embodied in these little creatures in their shoe-box. It was not impossible, of course, to distinguish between a head and a tail, and so, virtually, to see the difference between a part and a whole, and to find some sense in the thing, a direction, an orientation. But it was impossible to discern a sex.²³

I interrupt to note, not only the likeness between this *trans-* creature (“worm” or “caterpillar”?) and the moebius-loop undecidability of the postcard’s “frontback,” but how the “shoebox” here gets interweaved into what Derrida calls “a formalization—I attempted in *Glas* and elsewhere—of generalized fetishism” (SOO 350), recalling, of course, the (k)notty interlacing of “fetishism” and “art” in the leather boot(s) of Van Gogh, Heidegger, Schapiro, Freud, Magritte, etc., discussed

23. See Jacques Derrida, “A Silkworm of One’s Own (Points of View Stitched on the Other Veil),” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 352-353. Italics in original. Hereafter cited as SOO.

in “Restitutions” (1978),²⁴ where following “the movement of lace” beyond the proper “frame” (*parergon*) transforms Van Gogh’s leather boot(s) into a kind of moebius loop—“it has an internal border and an external border which is incessantly turned back in” (R 303)—provoking the question (never answered): “To which sex are these shoes due?” (R 306).²⁵ But back to Derrida’s shoebox silkworm(s):

. . . it was impossible to discern a sex. There was indeed something like a brown mouth but you could not recognize in it the orifice you had to imagine to be at the origin of their silk, this milk become thread, this filament prolonging their body and remaining attached to it for a certain length of time: the extruded saliva of a very fine sperm, shiny, gleaming, the miracle of a feminine ejaculation which would take the light and which I drank with my eyes. But basically without seeing anything. The serigenous glands of the caterpillar can, I’ve just learned, be labial or salivary, but also rectal. . . . The self-displacement of this little fantasy of a penis, was it erection or detumescence? . . . What I appropriated for myself over there, afar off, was the operation, the operation through which the worm itself secreted its secretion. . . . It dribbled. (SOO 353)

The allusions to masturbation—the appropriated “operation”—here and scattered throughout the corpus of “Derrida” (from Rousseau’s “dangerous supplement” to the onanistic seeds of *Dissemination*),²⁶

24. Jacques Derrida, “Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*pointure*]” [1978], in *The Truth of Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), 255-382. Hereafter cited as R.

25. Derrida continues: “This is not exactly the same question as . . . when we were wondering whether or not there was a symbolic equivalence between the supposed “symbol” “shoe” and such-and-such a genital organ, or whether only a differential and idiomatic syntax could arrest bisexuality, confer on it some particular leading or dominant value, etc. . . . yet the attribution of shoes to a subject-wearer—of shoes and of a sex—a masculine or feminine sex, is not without its resonance with the first question . . . Graft of sex onto the shoes. [. . .] Schapiro tightens the laces around ‘real’ feet. [. . .] He doesn’t know that the shoes already form a prosthesis. And perhaps the foot does too. It can always be someone else’s” (R 306-316).

26. For more on this, see Murat Aydemir, *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation/Masculinity/Meaning* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007), esp. 183-208.

bring us back to the “brown mouth,” to the serigenous glands that, as Derrida notes above, could be “labial or salivary, but also rectal,” thus calling into question the exact “nature” of this gift we call “silk” (“spit”? “sperm”? “feminine ejaculation”? “shit”?). Freud, of course, when writing of masturbation [*Masturbatorischen Sexualäusserunge*] in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), explicitly links a sort of silky worm of shit—i.e., the brown column or phallic log in the intestines—to a problematics of the “gift” [*Geschenk*], as follows:

The contents of the bowels [silky worms of shit], which act as a stimulating mass upon a sexually sensitive portion of the mucus membrane [the sphincter; the brown mouth], behave like forerunners of another organ [the phallus], which is destined to come into action after the phase of childhood. But they [the silky worms of shit] have other important meanings for the infant. They are clearly treated as a part of the infant’s own body and represent his first “gift” [*Geschenk*]: by producing them [outside; *extro-*] he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them [inside; *intro-*], his disobedience. From being a “gift” they later come to acquire the meaning of “baby”—for babies, according to one of the sexual theories of children, are acquired by eating and are born through the bowels.²⁷

This “gift” from (of the) “behind,” as Freud goes on to elaborate, via the auto-hetero-affection of the sphincter muscle—i.e., through a kind of *fort/da* rhythmic intro-extro-duction of the silky shit worm—becomes for the child (“male” or “female”) “a masturbatory stimulus upon the anal zone” (TS 53). (Freud implies, too, it should be noted, a vast realm of literal digital manipulation, opened by “the actual masturbatory stimulation of the anal zone by means [of the rhythmic intro-extro-duction] of the finger, provoked by a centrally determined or peripherally maintained sensation of itching” [TS 53].) Here, we might say, Freud puts his finger on something David Wills

27. See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* [1905], trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 52. Hereafter cited as TS.



Fig. 3: *Santa with Butt Plug and Tree, Chocolate Figurines* (Paul McCarthy, 2014).

has traced throughout the corpus of “Derrida”—”behind” its “back,” so to speak—namely, what he calls the “dorsal turn” (something that will have been, perhaps, behind everything we have risked here). As Wills puts it:

What touches on the back, even the surprise prod or slap of a friend or a stranger, implies an erotic relation, a version of sexuality, a version that raises simultaneously and undecidably the questions of sex and gender, of species, and of objects. A sexuality therefore that is not, at least not in the first instance, determined as hetero- or homosexual, as vaginal or anal, as human (or indeed animal) or prosthetic, not even as embracing or penetrating, but which implies before all else a coupling with otherness.²⁸

28. See David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008), 12. See also Nicholas Royle, “Back,” *Oxford Literary Review* 18 (1996): 145-157.

Preposterous Preface: Derrida and Queer Discourse

J. Hillis Miller

My preface comes both before and after, preposterously, in the etymological sense. It comes first for you, dear reader, but after for me, since it is being written after I have read all the essays in this book. I have read them with admiration and intellectual excitement. They have changed my assumptions about queer theory.¹

I have heard of a philosophy professor who said of Jacques Derrida, mendaciously, “Well, he’s dead so we don’t have to worry about him anymore.” Derrida, in the final interview with *Le Monde*, given just a few weeks before his death, said, perhaps ironically, perhaps not, that he expected he and all his works would be forgotten two months after his death.² Just the opposite has happened. A great outpouring of distinguished conferences, essays, and books from all over the world has occurred since his death. This book is a wonderful example of that. It is the first book focused on the relation between Derrida’s work and queer theory. The essays are admirably diverse and learned. Each explores a different facet of Derrida’s work. Each essay shows in detail a given facet’s indispensable function in one or another feature of queer theory today. Each has, in a distinctive way, an enviable conceptual and linguistic exuberance. This not only echoes Derrida’s similar exuberance, but also bears witness that the humanities are still vigorous, even in these bad times for them. These essays testify movingly to the fundamental role that Derrida’s work has played

1. [Note: Miller’s preface was written in 2010 and refers to an earlier version of this volume, which has been slightly altered. —Ed.]

2. Jacques Derrida, *Apprendre à vivre enfin* (Paris: Galilée, 2005); *ibid.*, *Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, N. J.: Melville House Publishing, 2007).

in establishing the new discourse called “queer theory.”

Permit me to call attention to one characteristic feature of these essays. They tend to turn away from the copula announced in the title between Derrida and what one might falsely imagine to be some unitary discourse called “queer theory.” One essay, for example, is about Derrida’s cats and about what he said about being an animal himself in *L’animal que donc je suis*.³ Another centers on Gayatri Spivak’s “Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle,” with its wonderful pun on “umbrella.” The pun is probably a reference to Derrida’s remarks about the note Nietzsche’s editors left out as too trivial: “I have lost my umbrella.” Another spends as much time on Derrida’s speech act theory (by way of his word “performativity”) as on queer theory as such. Still another shifts to Melville’s *Billy Budd*. . . . “*Et Cetera*,” to borrow the title of an essay by Derrida that Nicholas Royle collected in his *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide*.⁴ Since the essays in this book are exercises in queer theory as well as being *about* it, I conclude that such diversion or perversion, in the etymological sense of a turning away, is a pervasive feature of queer theory. Nor have I escaped such deviation in my reading of an essay by Derrida later in this “preface.”

In spite of the diversity of the essays they seem, for the most part, to agree on the following propositions:

1. Queerness is not an essence, even though political and social change may depend on sometimes at least implicitly accepting the notion that a given person is male or female, straight, lesbian, or gay, just as the success of the women’s movement has depended to some degree on assuming that there is an “essence” of being “a woman.” What would the gay rights movement or the attempt in the United States to lift the ban on service in the military by “gays” be if being gay were not considered by the authorities to be an essence? Assuming otherwise might lead to the extremely threatening

3. Jacques Derrida, *L’animal que donc je suis*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006); *ibid.*, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

4. Jacques Derrida, “*Et Cetera*,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Deconstructions: A User’s Guide*, ed. Nicholas Royle (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 282-305.

assumption that everyone, even the most apparently “straight” in feeling and behavior, is, as Freud put it, to some degree “polymorphous perverse.” An op-ed piece by Frank Rich in the *New York Times* for February 7, 2010, “Smoke the Bigots Out of the Closet,” puts the usual assumption succinctly in the context of favoring lifting the ban on “gays” in the military: “Most Americans recognize that being gay is not a ‘lifestyle’ but an immutable identity, and that outlawing discrimination against gay people who want to serve their country is, as the admiral [Mike Mullan] said, ‘the right thing to do.’”⁵

2. Queerness is not just socially constructed by the interlocking pressures of some vague entity called heteronormative society. Queerness is to some degree linguistically generated, even though that language may express the social forces lying behind it, and even though the resulting queerness may come to be embodied in this or that person as well as in language. Body and language are intertwined like the couples of women lovers in the photo-novel I shall conclude this preposterous preface by discussing. This is a controversial point, as Nicholas Royle’s polemic with Jonathan Dollimore in his essay in this volume shows. Someone who has “come out of the closet,” and who has suffered various forms of concrete persecution as a result can be pardoned for saying, “Don’t tell me it is just a matter of language!” though perhaps without quite understanding what queer theory scholars mean when they talk about language as an essential feature of queerness. Judith Butler’s exploration of “hate speech” faces this issue head on.⁶

3. “Queer” refers not just to some form of homosexuality, or bisexuality, or ambiguous sexuality. By what some might see as an outrageous figurative extension, “queer” refers to human life and human language use in general. Queerness queers everything, as when we say, “The deal was queered.” Queerness is everywhere, like irony and like puns, and, like irony and puns, it resists control by understanding or by theoretical fiat dividing this from that, for example male from female. Queerness undoes from within

5. www.nytimes.com/2010/02/07/opinion/07rich.html?th&emc=th

6. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

what Derrida called “phallogocentrism.” Deconstruction is not an operation performed on phallogocentrism. Phallogocentrism has always already deconstructed itself, queered itself.

4. Derrida’s writing, even those books and essays that seem to have little to do with queerness in the limited sense of homosexuality, for example “*La différence*,”⁷ or “Before the Law,”⁸ have determined the form “queer theory” has taken. And that, these essays all assume, is a good thing.

* * *

I could stop here, with an exhortation to all who read this preface to turn now to read the admirable essays in this book. They are irrefutable testimony to the continued power of Derrida’s writings. I cannot resist, however, putting in my two cents or my two senses of what the relation between Derrida and queer theory is. I do this in the form of commentary on a relatively little-known essay by Derrida. This essay is, already in 1985, a brilliant and exemplary piece of queer theory, even though neither Derrida, nor anyone else to my knowledge, calls it that.⁹ The book of 100 pages of black and white photographs in which the essay appears is called *Droit de*

7. Jacques Derrida, “*La différence*,” in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minit, 1972); *ibid.*, “*Différance*,” trans. David Allison, in *Speech and Phenomena* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973; also in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-27.

8. Jacques Derrida, “*Préjugés—Devant la loi*,” in Derrida et al., *La faculté de juger* (Paris: Minit, 1985), 87-139; *ibid.*, “Before the Law” (a partial translation of the French essay), trans. Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston, in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 181-220. Judith Butler asserts in the 1999 preface to a new edition of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xv, that a reading of Derrida’s reading of Kafka’s “Before the Law” started her on the course of thinking that led to her book.

9. [See David Wills’ essay, “Supreme Court” (1988), in this volume, for another early reading of this little-known essay by Derrida. Wills’s essay could itself be regarded as an exemplary piece of Derridean “queer theory,” if such a thing exists. —Ed.]

regards.¹⁰ Many pages set more than one photo in montage. The French title is translated by David Wills as “Right of Inspection.” Derrida’s essay is called “*une lecture*,” “a reading.”¹¹ That’s a queer idea, if you think of it, or at least a disorienting figurative transfer: a “reading” of a sequence of photographs! What does it mean to “read” a mute photo? Derrida spends a lot of time in his essay

10. Benoît Peeters tells me in an email that he and the photographer, Marie-Françoise Plissart, at first intended to have the title in the singular, *Droit de regard*, “the right to look,” but had to change to the plural when they discovered a mediocre pornographic photo-book already existed with the same title, i.e. with “*regard*” in the singular. When Plissart and Peeters first showed the photographs to Jacques Derrida, in already finished form, “*regard*” was still in the singular, and Derrida was unhappy with the necessary change when he heard about it. “They have stolen your title,” he said. When Plissart and Peeters visited Derrida in Paris to ask him to write an essay about their photo-novel without words, he at first demurred, but then in the summer of 1984 wrote the wonderful essay that was then published at the end of the book and that I am discussing here.

11. Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards, avec une lecture de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Édition de Minuit, 1985); Marie-Françoise Plissart and Jacques Derrida, “Right of Inspection,” trans. David Wills, in *Art & Text* 32 (Autumn, 1989), 22-94; Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, photographs by Marie-Françoise Plissart, trans. David Wills (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998). Citations from the French are identified by capitalized roman numerals, which are used in the French book. Page numbers are not given in the book version of the translation, but a miniature version of each French page is on the upper corner of each English page, so the pagination of the English translation corresponds to the pagination of the French original. Interested readers can find the context of an English citation by searching out the location of the miniature French page being translated. I have used a magnifying glass. Derrida in his essay associates magnifying with “blow ups.” The reader will note how the original photographer, Plissart, gradually, in version after version, becomes subordinated to Derrida, who after all only wrote a “reading” of the photographs that were the main “text.” Once again patriarchy has won the day, and this powerful woman’s work (though Benoît Peeters collaborated) is sold as by a man. I do not think this can be entirely explained by Derrida’s world fame.

The “credits,” or, in French, the “*Générique*,” of this book lists Benoît Peeters, along with Marie-Françoise Plissart, as responsible for the “Scénario et Montage” of *Droit de regards*. Peeters was a close collaborator with Plissart in setting up the photographs and arranging their

worrying about that. As Derrida, or one of his spokespersons, says in the first sentence of his reading of the photographs by Marie-Françoise Plissart that open the book and that precede Derrida's reading: "*Tu ne sauras jamais, vous non plus, toutes les histoires que j'ai pu encore me raconter en regardant ces images*" (I). ("You [tu] will never know, nor will you [vous], all the stories I kept telling myself as I looked at these images.") This sentence already exemplifies the complex play of pronouns that takes place in Derrida's reading. He lists them at one place: "*Je, tu, vous, il, elle, on, nous, vous, elles, ils*" (III). Somewhat similarly, I could never finish telling all the stories Derrida's reading of "*Droit de regards*," not to speak of the photographs themselves, makes me want to tell. Perforce, however, I must be (relatively) brief. I shall only touch, and lightly, on several facets

sequence. He has been kind enough to read my essay, make suggestions, confirm my readings of the photographs, and to send me in email messages an abundance of precious information about the genesis of this remarkable work and about its intended meaning or, rather, resistance to clear meaning. I have incorporated much of this information here and there in my essay. Where I refer to or cite what he has told me, it is to be understood that I am citing his emails to me of different dates in February, 2010. Benoît Peeters has also generously arranged permission to reproduce several of the photos in my essay. They are copyright © Marie-Françoise Plissart. I am extremely grateful to Marie-Françoise Plissart for this permission and to Benoît Peeters for his invaluable help.

For an account of Benoît Peeters' work in the "photo-novel," including *Droit de regards*, see his "*À la recherche du roman-photo*," a chapter of his *Écrire l'image: Un itinéraire* (Brussels: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2009), 29-46, esp. 35-38. He speaks in this section of his book about his collaboration for *Droit de regards* with Marie-Françoise Plissart: "Contrary to what happens with the comic strip, much more with cinema, no sharp separation existed between the scenario and its realization in our photo-novel work. Marie-Françoise Plissart intervened more and more in the elaboration of the scenario; I was present during the taking of the photographs, even though it was she who physically took them; as for the selection of images and putting them in pages, we worked together" (36) (my trans.). Plissart and Peeters intended to have their photo-novel without words entirely resistant to translation into words, to have it "make sense," if it does make sense, entirely as a visual experience (*Écrire l'image*, 35-6). That did not stop Derrida from writing his "reading," though he insists repeatedly in that reading that nothing can be said about the photographs, that they do not need or accommodate words.

of this wonderful double book.

I urge everyone, however, to get a copy of *Droit de regards* in French or in English, and to read Derrida's essay, preferably in French or with the French and English side by side. As much as any of Derrida's writings it depends on more or less untranslatable wordplay in French. This wordplay is not just willful linguistic hijinks. It is essential to what Derrida is saying, as I promise to show. Wills's explanatory footnotes call attention, helpfully, but also somewhat helplessly, since there would be no end to such footnoting, to some of the difficulties of translation. They are compounded by Derrida's penchant not just for puns and other wordplay, but also for outrageous and unauthorized neologisms. I shall return later to the function of this wordplay that is not play.

One reason for reading the original French is that this version contains all one hundred of the photographs' pages. Wills's translation in the first publication in *Art & Text* only reproduces some of them, and in reduced size. The book version in English reproduces all. The other reason is that Derrida persuasively, though counter-intuitively, argues that the photographs are in French. That seems like a weird or even queer idea, particularly since the photographs have no captions or balloons. They are speechless. Here, however, is what Derrida, or one of his spokespersons, says to another spokesperson: "*Car si je vous suis, ce chef-d'oeuvre photographique serait lié par un contrat secret aux ressources originales d'une langue, le français. Voilà des photographies intraduisibles, illisible dans un pays dont les habitants ne seraient francophones. Parleriez-vous de photographies de langue française?*" (XX) ("For if I follow you, this photographic masterpiece would be bound by a secret agreement to the original resources of a particular language, namely French. These photographs would be untranslatable, illegible in a country where French isn't spoken. Would you go so far as to speak of photographs being 'in French?') The simplest way to take this—though not the only way—is to think of the photographs as rebuses, charades, tableaux, mute visual expressions of some word or phrase, in all cases in French. I shall return to this oddness. If the photographs are in French then any adequate "reading" of them by means of verbal discourse will also, necessarily, be in French. I've therefore given some of my citations in the original French as well as David Wills's English translation.



Fig. 1: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 3.

I remember that when Derrida gave me a copy of *Droit de regards* twenty-five years ago, he smiled and said, "Don't just look at the photos. Read my essay." I see what he means. The one hundred black and white photo pages come in groups or sequences, or in a series of series (if that is what they are) of stills from apparently ongoing actions like making love or playing checkers or walking rapidly in long halls of a grand but empty and dilapidated palace or palaces ("*palace*" or "*hôtel*" in French), down stairways, before mirrors, and in gardens or in sometimes rather sinister streets. Benoît Peeters tells me that the intention was to create a labyrinthine series of photographs that would resist rational understanding.¹² No captions or balloons, such as an ordinary photo-novel would have, and no words but an enigmatic notebook entry in Spanish one of the characters ("Pilar") is shown writing (Peeters tells me in an email it is from Borges's *El hacedor* [*The Maker*]);¹³ the word "filter" on a

12. Here is what Peeters's email says: "From one end of the book to the other, places are mixed, unrecognizable, undecidable. We wanted to make space as labyrinthine as time, to break all the effects of linearity. We have used two 'palaces,' as you say, passing from one to the other in complete freedom. We have especially used an old abandoned department store, 'Old England,' on the 'Place Royale' (again a 'King!'), in the heart of Brussels. These different places pleased us especially for the echoes that they created of *Last year in Marienbad*." (my trans.).

13. More precisely, it is from a short prose poem in Borges's book called "*Los espejos velados*" ("The Draped Mirrors"). See Jorge Luis Borges, *El hacedor* (Madrid: Alianza, 1997), 19, 20; *ibid. Dreamtigers*, trans. Mildred Boyer and Harold Morland (New York: Dutton, 1970), 27. Much could be said about the function of this citation in Plissart's photo-novel. The passage "Pilar" is photographed writing in her notebook expresses the "horror of a spectral duplication or multiplication of reality" felt "before large mirrors," such as the "*psyché*" Derrida names in his essay, with help from Francis Ponge, or such as all those large mirrors shown in Plissart's photographs, or such as the photographs themselves as mirrors of reality. Borges's odd text then goes on to tell the story (only part is written down by Pilar) of the speaker's (non)love affair with a girl who goes mad because she sees his image rather than her own in the mirrors in her room. She therefore drapes her mirrors. The first sentence of Borges's text, not written down by Pilar, recalls the Islamic belief that if you defy the prohibition against representations of living creatures you will at judgment day commanded to bring them to life. When you fail, you will be cast with the images "into the fires of punishment" ("*al fuego del castigo*").

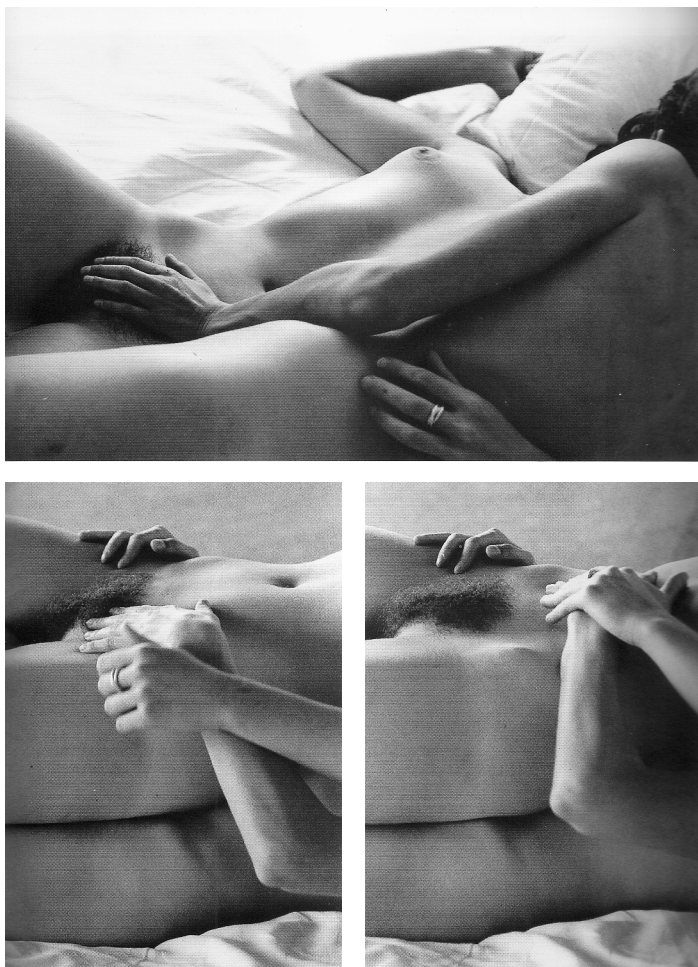


Fig. 2: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 1.

cigarette box; strange letters in chalk on a wall: DE=OR, with the word SEX erased but faintly visible just above on the wall (Derrida saw only “SE”); and part of a “no smoking” sign in Flemish and French on an inside wall of the palace. The photographs were all taken in bilingual Brussels. The credits at the end mention “*l’Hôtel Astoria*” and “*l’Hôtel Palace*,” which suggest that two vacant mansions were used as sets, but Benoît Peeters tells me in an email, as I have already noted, that they also used a defunct Brussels department store. That store was called, ironically enough, “Old England,” as when a restaurant in the United States advertizes itself as serving “authentic French cuisine.” (See footnote 12) The sequences may or may not be in chronological order. They may or may not be coherent sequences in themselves. The first and last sequence shows in great detail close-ups of two women making love, or at any rate in poses mimicking making love, or at any rate that is what it looks like they are doing. (See Figs. 1-3) Peeters says the lovemaking is always frustrated, never complete. Someone with a camera, the reader should remember, was there to take pictures of this mimic lovemaking, as of the other sequences. The characters are always shown in couples, but a third hidden spectator is always there to click the camera shutter. Often a third woman is shown on the sidelines, looking on. (See Fig. 4) So it’s always a threesome, with an odd woman out. Sometimes a camera-woman is shown at the edge of the scene snapping pictures. The end seems to loop back around to the beginning to make a single sequence, as in *Finnegans Wake*, though that is not certain, since the rooms are clearly different, even though the women are the same. The two assignations appear to take place in two different empty and dilapidated buildings. The photographed entrances are different.

The first scene takes place on a low bed in a sumptuous room in an empty and dilapidated “*palace*.” This room has elaborate windows, walls with mouldings, doors, mirrors, and an elaborate chandelier. Two paintings with baroque or rococo scrolled frames are built into the wall high above the bed. (See Fig. 3) Though the paintings are hard to make out, the right hand one seems to show two more or less naked women in poses not unlike those of the “real women” on the bed, though the painted ladies are not entangled in one another’s arms, while the left hand one looks to my eye faintly like another half-naked woman on the right side being looked at by



Fig. 3: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 7.

a male figure on the left, perhaps a faun or satyr looking at a nymph, perhaps Bacchus looking at Ariadne. You, dear reader, should exercise your own “right of inspection” over these paintings. Derrida does not comment on the paintings, therefore not on the way they echo what is taking place on the bed, in another of the *mises en abyme* that abound in the photos.

Five different women appear in the photographs, plus one man. Some take photographs. Derrida calls them, without any authority whatsoever for doing so, Dominique, Claude, Camille, Andrea, and Pilar. The male he calls Pedro. In addition, another sequence shows two young and fully clothed girls, heavily made up, whom Derrida names, again without authority, Marie and Virginie, because of their “*perverse virginité*” (XXXI). They are photographed performing various actions. These mimic in detail all the other sequences, including the motifs of cigarette smoking and drinking, running down stairs, falling on the stairs, chasing one another down corridors, photographing one another, being reflected in various mirrors, embracing on a bed, playing French checkers, and so on. They are shown playing at being women (*jouant aux dames*), with an intentional pun, as Peeters tells me, on *jeu de dames*, the French name for checkers). (See Fig. 4)

It is hard to resist exercising your “*droit de regard*” with the lovemaking sequences especially, though Derrida observes that these are images, not realities. Nevertheless, looking at them raises (for me) all sorts of questions and feelings about what it means to be a “male” spectator of “lesbian” lovemaking, even if their status as photographs or sometimes photographs of photographs distances the scenes. I become the excluded third, like a number of the putatively female personages in these photographs, an envious onlooker of the pleasure of others, even a *voyeur*. Marcel Proust famously dramatizes male jealousy of lesbian sexuality, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. His putatively straight protagonist, “Marcel,” sees through a window Mlle Vinteuil making love with her partner and spitting on her father’s photograph. Later Marcel suffers torments of jealousy aroused by his unverifiable suspicion that his beloved Albertine has women lovers. This is, scholars note, a transposition of the jealousy the real Marcel Proust felt about the possible infidelity of his male partner, a chauffeur and aviator, who died in a plane crash, just as Albertine died unexpectedly in a fall from a horse. Note the bisexual



Fig. 4: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 67.

name, “Albertine.” It is like the names “Claude, “Dominque,” “Andrea,” and “Pilar,” Derrida gives to the five women in the photographs. Four of those names can be used for either males or females (André for Andrea), as Derrida implicitly notes in a passage in “*Circonfession*” about his cousin named “Claude.” He apparently had both male and female cousins of that name. The passage in “*Circonfession*,” at least one essay in this book notes, is perhaps the only explicit references Derrida makes to his “impossible homosexuality” or bisexuality.¹⁴ I say the personages in the photos are “evidently” female because three at least are photographed at times unclothed and appear anatomically female. “*Pilar*” means “pillar” in Spanish. It is a woman’s name, an abbreviation of “*Maria del Pilar*,” a reference to “*Nostra Señora del Pilar*,” “Our Lady of the Pillar.” This is a reference to the way the Virgin is in Spain commonly shown standing on a pillar, combining the phallic pillar and the Virgin Mary. So “*Pilar*” is another androgynous name. The “real names” of these actresses and the one actor (in the order of their appearance or, as the French say, “*apparition*,” as if they were ghosts) are given in the “*Générique*,” the “Credits” or “Trailer” printed at the beginning and end of *Droit de regards*. I shall return to that odd (to an American ear) word, “*Générique*.”

Derrida says all the pictures in *Droit de regards* are images,

14. For “Claude” see Jacques Derrida, “Circumfession,” in Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 159; *ibid.* “*Circonfession*,” in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 150. The name Claude had already appeared in a provocative context in the account at the beginning of “Telepathy” of a dream Derrida says he had: “I had a premonition of something nasty [*vicié*] in it, like a word, or a worm, a piece of worm that would be a piece of word, and that would be seeking to reconstitute itself by slithering [*en rampant*], something tainted [*vicié*] that poisons life. . . . I felt, from a distance and confusedly, that I was searching for a word, perhaps a proper name (for example, Claude, but I do not know why I choose this example right now, I do not remember his presence in my dream)” (Jacques Derrida, “Telepathy,” trans. Nicholas Royle, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Vol. I, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007], 226; *ibid.*, “Télépathie,” in *Psyché: Inventions de l’autre* [Paris: Galilée, 1987], 237-238).

simulacra at several removes from the staged “reality” Plissart photographed, since each original photograph is reproduced, photographed again, for the book, and since the characters are often shown taking photographs of one another, in a photograph of a photograph, or are shown in the act of snapping a picture, exercising one form of the “*droit de regards*.” A number of actual photographs are photographed as part of another photograph and even shown framed on the wall, in another *mise en abyme*. (See Fig. 5) One chief topic of Derrida’s reading and of the photographs themselves is photography. He cites Walter Benjamin as having noted that photography and psychoanalysis appeared at the same time, both forms of a modern “right of inspection” (XXIII). Both use a technique of the “blow up” to magnify small details and inspect them for hidden significance.

Derrida explores at length in various places in his “reading” the complex meanings the phrase “*droit de regards*” may have. Taking a photograph is an exercise of the “right to inspection,” but so is just looking, as you or I look, or as Derrida once upon a time looked, at the photographs, or as the characters in the photographs look at one another, though never, as Derrida observes, directly in one another’s eyes, and often, as Derrida also sees, seeing without being seen seeing, as a kind of lurking spy, sometimes a spy with a camera. When you spy or take a covert photograph, however, take care, since someone else may be snapping a picture of you. All these photographers are being photographed. *Droit de regards* also can name a legal right exercised by some higher authority, as David Wills notes in the “Translator’s Note” to the book version in English.¹⁵ You are not granted a right to inspect the photographs in the Amazon listing of Wills’s translation, though you can see the cover, back, and sample pages of Derrida’s text in translation. Amazon withholds the “*droit de regard*.” Our youngest daughter, when she was three or four, put her eye up against her mother’s leg and repeated what the mother had often said: “I’ve got my eye on you!” The “*droit de regard*” is not distant and impersonal, but close, intimate, bodily.

Though all these photos are staged simulacra, nevertheless,

15. *Right of Inspection*, ed. cit., not numbered, but 101.

they attract your attention, to put it mildly, as does the challenge of figuring out what story or stories are hidden behind these images. Both arouse desire. Perhaps it is the story of a woman's betrayal of her male partner by way of a liaison with a woman. One sequence, the only one involving a man, suggests that. That may be why he is angry enough to smash a drinking glass on the floor. Two of the women wear a ring, though it looks to me as if the rings are on the middle fingers of the left hand, rather than the fourth fingers, as would be the case for a married woman's wedding ring, at least in the United States. Is there some queer code in the rings' placement? Perhaps in the photographs it is a question of an all-female triangle of lesbian jealousy, or several such. Attention to tiny details, as Derrida notes, is necessary to "reading" these photographs, in a way that echoes, as I have said, the attention to perhaps significant detail in psychoanalysis.

Finding such stories would be at least one way of putting the sequences together. Unfortunately none of the stories can be verified. The photographs do not speak. They keep mum. They tell no tales. They keep their secrets, though they generate endless stories in the beholder's imagination. The sequences may represent a game of checkers ("*jeu de dames*" in French), since two games of checkers are photographed and the photos record an intricate play of black and white squares in windows, floors, walls, mirrors, a chest of drawers, women dressed in white or black, etc. Each photo page may correspond to one of the 100 squares, or "cases," in a French checkerboard, or "*damier*." An infinite number of other possible stories may be mimed, perhaps all at once. The absence of any captions, or balloons, or verbal subtext, such as are given, for example in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, means that the stories these pictures tell are fundamentally undecidable.¹⁶ The spectator is on

16. A splendidly comic passage in Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* hyperbolically expresses this undecidability. To reverse the common adage, Twain implies that *a caption is worth a thousand pictures*. The interpretation of a picture is, for Twain, necessarily verbal. Without an explicit indication in words of what the frozen narrative moment the picture represents, the spectator vibrates back and forth among contradictory alternative stories. The picture might be illustrating any of them. On this, see my *Illustration* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992; London: Reaktion Books, 1992).



Fig. 5: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 18.

her or his own, but without any possibility of verifying her or his conclusions. That is one aspect of the pictures' queerness, as Derrida indicates, though without using that word.

The fascination these pictures inspire, the desire to make sense of them, makes it easy to forget to read Derrida's "reading." That would be a mistake, since it is a work of great genius and without doubt a prototypical work of queer theory and of queer discourse, though Derrida does not describe it as that.

* * *

In the interests of brevity and to avoid interminable reflections, like all those mirror images and images of images, photos of photos, in the photos, framing doorways behind doorways receding back to infinity, etc., I shall concentrate on two ways "*Droit de regards*" is an essay in queer theory. I say "interminable reflections" not only because of the complexity of the essay in itself, but also because it is interlaced with the lexicon and the "concepts" of all Derrida's other work before and after, for example the notion of the "*tout autre*," the "wholly other," to which we have "a relation without relation" ("*ce rapport sans rapport*") (XXXV), or of a "hauntology," as in *Specters of Marx*.¹⁷ The essays in *Derrida and Queer Theory* testify to the way Derrida's work forms an immensely complex whole that is not a whole.

The two topics on which I shall touch are coupled in a single phrase early in Derrida's essay. He (or whichever of the plural interlocutors is speaking; I shall return to this plurality) says of the photo sequences: "The *question of genre* is of course a name I give to it, a common name, a name like any other, although it is also the name of everything else (or 'of something entirely other?')" (trans. modified). ("*La question du genre, bien sûr, c'est un nom que je lui donne, un nom commun, un nom comme un autre mais c'est aussi le nom de tout autre chose*" [VI]). Well, it is not exactly "a name like

17. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); *ibid.*, *Spectres de Marx: L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil, et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).



Fig. 6: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 23.

any other," since every name has its peculiarities, this one included, just as does every proper name. What does it mean, for example, when a name takes the form of a question? Just what is involved in the act of unauthorized naming? Naming is a sovereign speech act, for sure. It is one of J. L. Austin's paradigmatic examples in *How To Do Things with Words*.¹⁸

The speaker, whoever she or he is at this early moment in Derrida's reading, goes on to specify that the name he (or she) proposes is double. It both names the question of what entirely new genre, a genre for which the name is still lacking, the 100 photo pages create and, at the same time, it names the question of genre in the sense of gender: "What genre does this work belong to? But it is here that the said question of genre doubles over on itself, it suddenly becomes two while also being only one, it remains alone, a single double coupled as one." (*De quel genre cette œuvre relève-t-elle? Mais voici que ladite question du genre se dédouble aussitôt, elle fait deux d'un coup, toutefois ne faisant qu'une aussi, elle reste seule, une seule double en une couplée* [VI].) The implicit reference, of course, is to the coupling of the two (evidently) women in two (or one, if the one at the end loops back on the one at the beginning) of the photo sequences. The two women make the "beast with two backs," as Iago calls it (*Othello*, I, 1, 126), there before the spectator's eyes, in which two become one, in two different queer ways. The photographs show the women both face to face and also both lying on their backs, one atop the other, back to front, a double beast with one back and one front. This last pose is, it may be, a rebus for the doubling of pieces in the French version of checkers, *le jeu de dames*, to make what we call "Kings" and what the French call "*Dames*," in a reversal of our gender for checker pieces. I shall return to this.

Let me lay out, in the simplest and most schematic way the assumptions that underlie Derrida's "reading" and make it a masterwork of queer theory before the fact. Traditional gender binaries assume that a given person is either male or female, immutably. Males are the superior gender, with females a defective image of "man." These fallacious assumptions, in Derrida's view,

18. J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

are fundamentally linked to what he calls “logocentrism.” Hence Derrida’s famous portmanteau word, “phallogocentrism.” The word implicitly combines “*genre*” in both senses: the various genres of Western discourse and Western assumptions about gender.

Logocentrism assumes that: 1) Good stories have a beginning, end, and underlying unifying ground or *logos*, so that any narrative collection of words or other signs (such as a series of photographs) tells, or ought to tell, one identifiable and verifiable story. 2) Words are, or ought to be, univocal. They ought to have a single dominant head meaning. Puns and word play are accidental infelicities that should be avoided. Grammar and syntax should also be unambiguous. 3) As a result, a given collection of words or other signs, in any rule-governed genre, should be open to a definitive, unambiguous, verifiable, and unified reading. Any story that cannot be read that way is defective, missing some essential member or part, like a spiral or an open circle, just as women, in the tradition going back to Aristotle, are seen as defective men.

Deconstruction is the dismantling of these radically sexist assumptions, or, rather, it is the demonstration that in any given case they have always already dismantled themselves. Insofar as this dismantling always takes the form of a putting in question of fixed gender binaries, and it always does take that form, even if sometimes only implicitly, then one can say that “Deconstruction *is* queer theory.”

This deconstruction of gender binaries by the photographs that make up *Droit de regards* is asserted overtly in more than one place in Derrida’s “*lecture*.” In one case, this happens through a characteristic play on the word “*touche*,” and also with a characteristic reference back to another author important for Derrida, Stéphane Mallarmé. By constructing a new temporality and a new interior space, “a *topophotographic* event,” say two of Derrida’s speakers:

— . . . the work “tampers with” sexual difference, in the sense in which Mallarmé once said that “verse had been tampered with” [*on a touché au vers*]. (You see, we are progressing through a series of touchings and touch-ups, while passing the word or camera among us.) Thus someone has dared to transgress, move around, displace,

and upset the order. For if something has *moved* in this series of immobilized poses or frozen movements, it is well and truly that. The sexual marks or boundaries always cling to the edges, ready to pass over to the other side. Inversion always seems imminent, at least in terms of the alternating *parerga* [marginal elements, outside the main “work”] connected with the body: the play of black and white clothes, pants, dresses, tights, and then the range of hair styles: long or short, boyish or otherwise, over the ears or not, the head completely shaven, male and female at the same time.

— It is not just that they have tampered with sexual difference. “It” seems to do it to itself [*Celle-ci semble se toucher elle-même*], by means of, although not within the limits of what one might rashly call, starting from the “original” or “primal scene,” homosexuality and the masturbatory caress. All the possible narratives, all the origins [*genèses*] of sexual difference are held in reserve. (XI-XII in the French)

The speaker apparently means by “primal scene” the opening sequence in the photographs showing the two “women” making love. (See Figs. 1-3) The ironic reference, however, is to Freud’s definition of the “primal scene” as the lovemaking between my parents that engendered me and that I want to be able to see, or to have been able to see, in a sovereign exercise of the “*droit de regard*.” Whether this opening scene is really the primal scene is elsewhere put in question in the “*lecture*.” It may be, as one of Derrida’s interlocutors affirms, a memory or an unconscious image within one or both of the woman in a later sequence showing two women in bed together (Fig. 5), only one of whom is the same as one in the first sequence: “One of the two women, awake or asleep, is able to dream up this photograph, dream about it, develop within it the story of its potential (real or phantasmatic, but always photographic) development. According to this hypothesis, the original scene [Figs. 1-3] would only be a derivative *part* included within a development whose own ordering would have ‘already’ ‘begun’ in another primal scene [Fig. 5] that is prior to it but that comes later in the exposition” (XIV in the French). Later one of

Derrida's interlocutors reformulates this law of reversibility, crucial to Derrida's "*lecture*," this time apropos of the photograph of Claude's fall down some steps. That photograph appears as the last in the montage that makes up photo page 17, but reappears framed and hanging over the bed in photo 18 (Fig. 5): "As with all that follows, everything that precedes *takes place* in this photograph, can be engendered by it or lose itself in it, begin or end. But it can also occur within the depths of another photo, such as one of those that serve to trigger or launch another move" (XXXII in the French).

Since sexual difference has been definitively tampered with or "touched" by the photographs and by Derrida's discourse about them, I shall try systematically to keep the usual words—"male," "female," "straight," "gay," "lesbian," "homosexual"—suspended, at least implicitly, by the clothespins of quotation marks. Derrida argues in one place, with Agamben's help, that to think (*penser*) itself is a form of suspension (XXV in the French). The words I have just listed express the attempts at legal and patriarchal control by the phallogocentric authorities and their police, for example those in charge of copyright protection of the photographs and of Derrida's commentary.

In Derrida's "*Lecture*" of *Droit de regards* the double deconstruction of *genre* takes two forms:

1. The series of 100 photo pages is persuasively shown to be itself a work of queer theory and a questioning of genre/gender fixities in their interrelation. Not only, for example, is the apparently commanding personage or "*Grande Dame*," "Pilar," with her, his, its shaved head and androgynous clothes, ambiguous in gender (Fig. 7), and not only is queer lovemaking photographed as well as other forms of queer desire, but also the photographs in their sequencing are a systematic undoing of the three phallogocentric assumptions about words, grammar, and stories I have identified above. One of Derrida's speakers puts this succinctly: "— Sexual difference has been tampered with by this photographing photographs. The always existing possibility of such a montage brings together the two questions of *genre* in a coupling, the two separating and dividing up the territory in order to join up later, one returning to the other, like a phantom . . ." (XII). Derrida's reading is a brilliant and hyperbolically exuberant demonstration that this is the case.

2. Derrida's own discourse is in manifold ways not just a conceptual identification, through analysis of the photographs as example, of the presuppositions of what came to be called queer theory. It also *enacts* the thing it talks about in its own form and language. It is "perperformative."¹⁹ It is definitely queer, like the photographs it "reads."

* * *

Let me expand on these two points. First the photographs themselves: As Derrida shows in detail, they dramatize gender uncertainty in various ways. Moreover, as an essential concomitant of that uncertainty, it is impossible to make a verifiable unified story out of the sequences. No definite beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle would have been appalled. The inspector/reader can, as Derrida's first speaker begins by saying, make innumerable different stories out of the sequences of sequences. It is, furthermore, impossible to tell what temporal order the different sequences actually have, or had, or should have, since there appear to be manifold flashbacks and flashforwards. The sequences are endlessly reversible. Each sequence can be seen as proleptic, metaleptic, and analeptic. The sequences may be a hyperbolic example of *hysteron proteron*, "late-early," the cart before the horse. Derrida once mentions *hysteron proteron* in the "lecture" (XXI in the French). Some sequences, as I have said of one important such possibility, may represent dreams or fantasies of one character or another, and so be inside another sequence rather than adjacent to it. The photographs of a chest of drawers with photographs in one drawer is a visual rebus of this possibility. Benoît Peeters observes in *Écrire l'image* that the chest of drawers is a visual pun on a French idiom, "*récit à tiroirs*," a story in "invaginated" segments, one inside the other. In English we call the inserted story an "interpolated tale" (Peeters, 36).

As Derrida repeatedly says, the part may be larger than the whole, while at the same time being contained within that whole.

19. [For more on the "perperformative," see Éamonn Dunne's essay, "Deco-pervo-struction," in this volume. —Ed.]

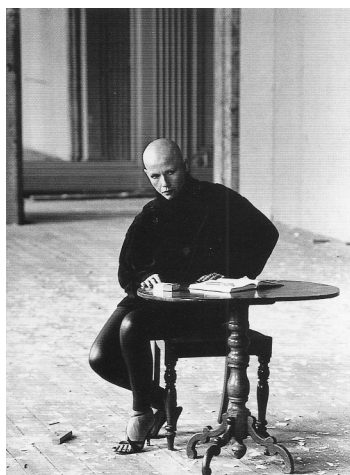
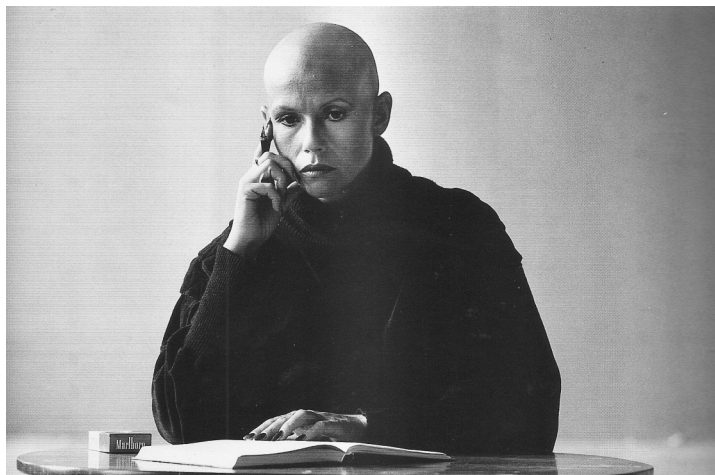


Fig. 7: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 51.

The entire set of photographs may represent a game of checkers, which would then be the “first level” of mimesis, the “primal scene,” as Derrida calls more than one of the sequences, among others the scene(s) of apparently lesbian lovemaking that opens and closes the suite of photos.

Checkers is called “draughts” in England and, by a fortuitous accident, “*jeu de dames*” in French. The pieces are called “*pions*.” Taking another piece by jumping it is called “eating” it. What we in the United States call “Kings,” the French call “*Dames*,” that is the doubling of a piece, making a pile of two pieces, when it reaches the far end of the opponent’s side of the board. Becoming a *Dame* is a vast extension of a *pion*’s power, of its *droit de regard*, in one sense of that phrase. The *Dame* or King, as any checker-player knows, can “jump” any adjacent other piece or pieces in any direction on a diagonal, sometimes “taking” a multitude of the opponent’s pieces in a single move, hopping back and forth across the board. A *pion* can also make multiple jumps, though only forward at a diagonal.²⁰

Calling this game a “*jeu des dames*” falls into Derrida’s hands as a way of naming the complex interactions among the various women and girls that take place in the sequences. It is a good example of the way the photographs are “in French.” The ambiguities of gender difference are highlighted by the fact that a feminine game in French is masculine in English. Our “King” is their “*Dame*.” How queer! A French checkerboard, a “*damier*,” has one hundred squares or “*cases*,” ten by ten, with twenty pieces on each side, whereas an American checkerboard has only sixty-four squares, eight by eight, with twelve pieces on each side.

The two *jeux de dames*, one between two of the young girls and the other the shaven-headed personage (“Pilar”) is photographed setting up (which may or may not be the same board and game), are not, however, explicitly encompassing events, since each is also just a part of one of the sequences. This is a good example of the systematic way the part/whole relation in the photographs is subject to an illogical reversibility. Any one of the sequences may be inside one of the others, or outside and encompassing it, just as the

20. On the rules of *jeu de dames*: www.stratozor.com/dames/regles.php

chronological sequence is endlessly reversible or able to be re-arranged in any order.

What the photographs are, that is, photographs, is often represented in the sequences, for example in the form of framed photographs on the wall, or of photographs and people reflected in mirrors, or of torn photographs on the pavement in checkerboard-like cobblestone squares, or photographs of a camera or of someone using a camera to photograph someone, becoming a spectator who is exercising his or her “*droit de regards*” over the photographs, or in the form of a room that is like the inside of a box camera (*camera* means “room” in Italian), or by way of a doorway that looks like a camera lens facing you. By means of this complexity, a vertiginous, abyssal set of stories within stories is “developed.” That structure is also mimed in the elaborate framing of doorways behind doorways in some of the photographs, a visible *mise en abyme* (Figs. 5-6).

Note, however, the way the photographs and Derrida’s reading of them by way of technical camera terms like “develop,” “diaphragm,” “lens,” and “shutter” refer to a now more or less archaic photographic apparatus. Had the photographs been taken with digital cameras, downloaded to a computer and altered there with Photoshop, the rhetoric of the photos and of Derrida’s punning discourse about them would have been impossible, or at least would have needed to be drastically altered. One photo sequence shows one of the young girls taking a polaroid photo and pulling it out of the polaroid camera, then later cutting it up. How quaint! But the possibility of doing that is essential to the action being photographed. Nowadays it is not so easy to destroy a photograph once it is taken. Photos have a way of proliferating around in cyberspace in innumerable copies.

Derrida gives in one place the name “invagination” (already used by me) to the inside/outside reversal mentioned above as a feature of photographs of photographs. This is another example of a happy (for Derrida) word that both describes a physical form and has a sexual meaning. “Vagina” means “sheath” in Latin. “Invagination” is a medical term naming the reversal of outside into inside in a bodily organ or organs. Invagination is a turning *inside out* and *outside in* that is like turning the finger of a glove back into the glove, or the toe of a sock back inside the sock. What was the “outside” of the glove or sock is now “inside.” The outside surface

becomes an inside surface. Derrida uses the word “invagination” more than once elsewhere, for example in “The Law of Genre” and “Living On: Border Lines.”²¹ The photographs in *Droit de regards* are, or may be, a spectacular example of invagination in more than one sense. One of the most overt of these is what Derrida calls the climactic “*coup de theater*” of the whole 100 photos. He observes that this short sequence resists being made part of a discursive, linguistic accounting. It is purely visual, purely “montage.” It does something you can do in pictures but not in words. It breaks the law of verbal, logical, grammatical, phallogocentric representation.

In this climactic theatrical gesture, one of the young girls confronts a framed photograph hanging on the wall of the first scene in the sequence of the interaction of “Marie” and “Virginie,” a “long shot.” She (Marie) takes it down, holds it high over her head, and smashes it on the floor, in a highly dramatic gesture that echoes an earlier moment when the one male character angrily smashes a drinking glass on the floor. The photograph magically changes when it reaches the floor into a different framed photograph covered in broken glass, perhaps a broken mirror, perhaps the transparent glass that once covered the framed photograph. The photograph now shows the girl in the act of casting the first photograph down. (See Fig. 8) Talk about invaginations and *mises en abyme*! Derrida’s spokespersons, as you might imagine, have a lot to say about this event:

— . . . One of the heavily made-up little girls, Marie, raises the framed photograph—it is the opening credits or trailer for their sequence [*leur propre générique*—]over her head. For a moment she resembles Moses in a tableau concerning the law or rights of inspection [*le droit de regard*], holding it above her head before dashing it to the ground. The glass shatters like the stone tablets [*les Tables de la loi*], like the Decalogue. But what the photograph shows is more or less indescribable within the normal system of objective representation (as if one had transgressed the Judaic

21. See Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” in *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (Autumn 1980), 55-81; *ibid.*, “Living On: Border Lines,” in Harold Bloom, et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

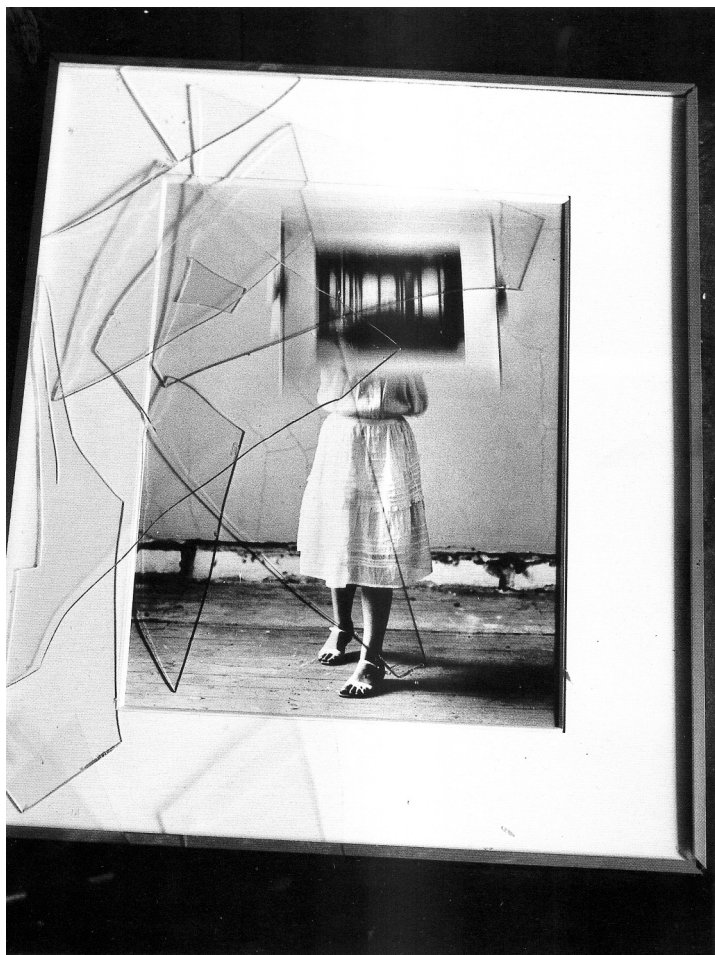


Fig. 8: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 81.

prohibition against iconic representation).

— So stop naming and describing, let them look. This was set up for the very purpose of discouraging or preventing you from speaking about it, in order to put a limit on your discourse, to limit the norms to which discourse generally subscribes, its grammar. What you can't say keep silent about. [This is a reference to a famous formulation by Ludwig Wittgenstein at the end of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. (JHM)] What you can't arrange in the space of representation or according to the grammar of your discourse is, however, to be found *there*, in this *tableau*. This tableau of the shattered tablet is possible in accordance with the grammar of photographic montage . . . (XXXIII in the French; trans. modified)

The photographs hide an unrepresentable, unrepresentable secret, or may hide such a secret, as Derrida says at the beginning of his "*lecture*." It is nevertheless possible to present or to hint at this secret in an indescribable montage, a grammar foreign to verbal discourse. Derrida's "reading" ends with a claim that the photographs' resistance to phallogocentric domination means that, in their spiraling reversibility, they should be called not only "*Droit de regards*," but also "*l'invention de l'autre*," the invention or finding of the other, in both senses of the genitive, inventing the other and becoming subject to an act of invention by the other. "*L'invention de l'autre*" is of course the subtitle of both a book by Derrida called *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* and of the title essay in the book, called "*Psyché: Invention de l'autre*."²² That essay takes off from Francis Ponge's little poem "*Fable*," cited at the end of Derrida's "*lecture*" and also discussed in his book on Ponge, *Signéponge/Signsponge*.²³ Ponge's poem is an appropriate place to end the "*lecture*" because it economically names and exemplifies the invagination and temporal reversal that Derrida identifies in the photographs called *Droit de regards*. The poem begins with the invaginated lines, "*Par le mot par*

22. See footnote 14.

23. Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

commence donc ce texte / Dont la première ligne dit la vérité. (“By the word by this text then begins / Whose first line tells the truth.”)

The poem ends with a parenthetical sentence in parentheses and italics that reverses the temporality of the folk belief that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad luck: “(APRES sept ans de malheurs/Elle brisa son miroir.)” (“AFTER seven years of misfortunes / She broke her mirror”) (XXXVI in the French). For Ponge the bad luck precedes the mirror breaking, in another *hysteron proteron*. “*Psyche*” is a Greek word meaning “wind,” “breath,” and “soul.” It is also the name of a mythological figure, the female protagonist in the late Greek story about Cupid and Psyche that dramatizes a battle over the “*droit de regards*.” “*Psyche*” is also a French word for a large pivoting mirror, such as that in which a woman or man can look at herself or himself, narcissistically, from head to toe, in the privacy of bedroom, bathroom, or *boudoir*.

* * *

I have now shown that Derrida shows (in a doubling showing) that the photographs labeled “*Droit de regards*” are a work in queer theory. The photographs create a new genre appropriate for raising “*la question du genre*,” in both senses of the word. These senses are as closely intertwined as the bodies of the lovers in the opening and closing sequences of photographs. The photographs’ form and the stories they tell are deconstructions of phallogocentrism. I shall now show that Derrida’s “*lecture*” is itself a work of queer theory and also a queer work (not the same thing) in this double sense.

I have already indicated some queer features of Derrida’s discourse in his “*lecture*,” but two features are especially salient. One is the fact that the “reading” is what Derrida calls a “*polylogue*” (XXX). It is made up of the give and take of statement and response by an uncertain number of unnamed speakers of uncertain gender, but including one or more speakers explicitly referred to as “*elle*,” “she.” Others are referred to as “*il*,” “he.” The speakers disagree constantly, nitpicking over terms, reading procedures, and readings. They cannot all be right. It is, however, impossible to tell which speaker is right, or even which one is speaking at a given time. The result is that Derrida’s discourse is distressingly lacking in a

head or chief *logos*, a single voice of reason that commands the rest. Socrates has that role in the Platonic dialogues. Derrida's "lecture" is polylogical. He uses this polylogue technique elsewhere, in "Restitutions" in *La vérité en peinture*, in the "Envois" in *La carte postale*, in *Feu la cendre* (*Cinders*), and in "Sauf le nom."²⁴ As Derrida says in the preface to *La carte postale*, "Tu as raison, nous sommes sans doute plusieurs." ("You are right, doubtless we are several.")²⁵

The effect of this proliferation of speakers of uncertain gender is disquieting, definitely queer. I can testify to this not only by my reaction to reading Derrida's "lecture," but also from my memory of what it was like to hear Derrida present "Restitutions" as seminars at Yale. You quickly lose track of who is speaking. You seem to be hearing an androgynous cacophony of voices. Which are the putatively male, which the female? You cannot tell for certain. Are these really the "several" Derrida's speaking or just personages he has invented? Most people are used to being able to identify unambiguously the gender of whoever is speaking or writing in a given case. This is an everyday reassurance about gender distinctions. Derrida's polylogical discourse deconstructs that reassurance, along with gender binaries in general.

One effect of this, at least on me, is to raise questions about my assumptions concerning my own gender. Am I really so unequivocally a heterosexual male as I like to think I am? How would I know for sure? Derrida comments on the way the photographs seem to look at you and to place you in a "subject position" that they generate. This is mimed in the way one of the photos shows one of the women pointing a camera at you, the spectator. This act performs a sovereign "right of inspection" that, it may be, unmans the putatively male spectator. Any one who looks at these

24. See Jacques Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978); *ibid.*, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); for *La carte postale*, see footnote 8; Jacques Derrida, *Feu la cendre* (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1987); *ibid.*, *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher, bilingual edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); *ibid.*, "Sauf le nom" (Paris: Galilée, 1993); *ibid.*, "Sauf le Nom (*Post Scriptum*)," in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

25. French, 10; English, 6.

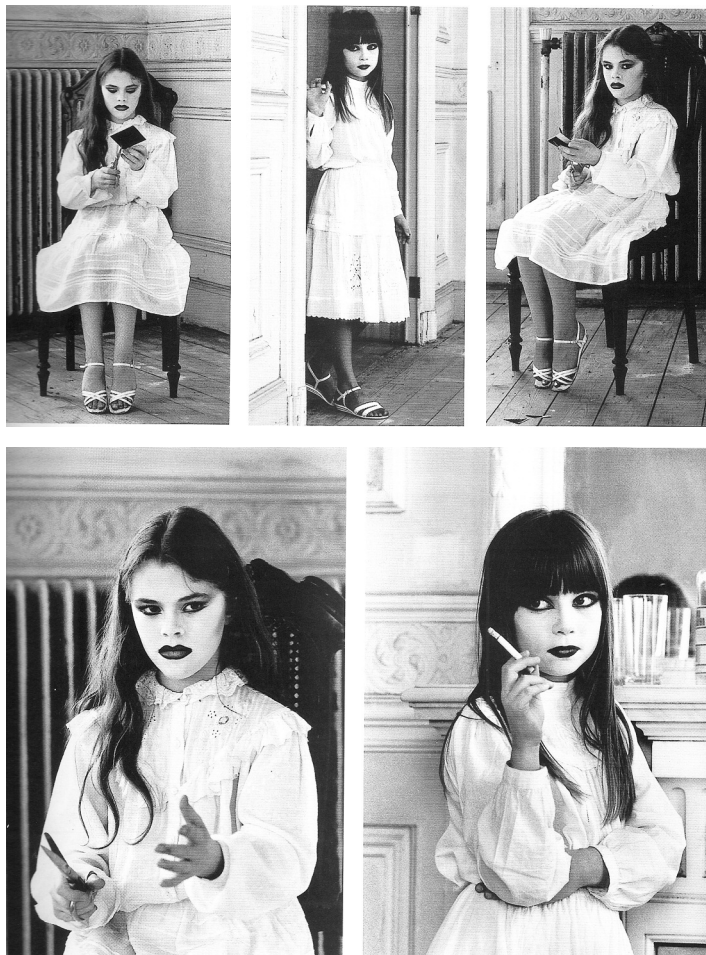


Fig. 9: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* (1985), photo 76.

photographs, “male” or “female,” becomes willy-nilly part of the game, a pawn in the game of checkers, *le jeu de dames*. The looker becomes the looked at, and, distressingly, loses his or her “*droit de regard*.”

* * *

A concomitant feature of Derrida’s discourse reinforces in spades this queerness. This is the systematic resistance of the “*lecture*,” even any of the separate speeches, to be read as a logical argument or coherent discourse, such as we are taught in school to make any essay we write be. This includes essays in literary criticism. A good essay should have a beginning, middle, and summarizing end, topic sentences, and all the other paraphernalia of “good writing.” Derrida’s “reading” does not fulfill those expectations or obey any of those laws. It does not go neatly from point to point. It spirals all over, with innumerable digressions, partly because the various interlocutors are often quarreling among themselves, even though the “reading” eventually settles down to follow, more or less, the photographic sequences one by one. A teacher of composition would find Derrida’s “*lecture*” most unsatisfactory. It is as if Derrida were self-consciously defying all they taught him in Algeria and France about a good “*explication de texte*,” whether of literary or of philosophical texts. *Glas*, for example, is anything but an acceptable academic treatise about Hegel (left column) or a rule-bound literary critique of Genet (right column).²⁶ These texts are like games of checkers played by exceedingly peculiar rules that the player makes up as he or she goes along. No doubt a good bit of the resistance to Derrida’s work is outrage at his way of writing. “You can’t do that,” his readers think to themselves.

* * *

The most outrageous and the queerest feature of Derrida’s “*lecture*,” however, if we mean by “queer” the deconstruction of phallogocentrism, is Derrida’s exuberant word play. He tends to stop at almost any word he uses, to jump up and down on it, to twist it this

26. Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974).

way and that, until it breaks and plunges the reader into a fathomless abyss of something approximating nonsense, as Walter Benjamin, in “The Task of the Translator,” says Hölderlin’s translations of Sophocles do.²⁷ “[I]n them,” says Benjamin, “meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language.” (“*In ihnen stürzt der Sinn von Abgrund zu Abgrund, bis er droht, in bodenlosen Sprachtiefen sich zu verlieren.*”)²⁸

Paul de Man’s auditors at his inaugural lecture as a new professor at Yale frowned their disapproval when, referring to the Archie Bunker television series, then popular, he spoke of Derrida as an “archie Debunker,” “a de-bunker of the *arche* (or origin).”²⁹ The audience was not amused. You just do not do that sort of thing in a solemn academic lecture, perhaps particularly not at Yale, and perhaps particularly not at your inaugural lecture. Some of de Man’s new colleagues, it may be, never forgave him. De Man’s pun, nevertheless, was true to Derrida’s practice, though it was only a faint echo of what Derrida actually does with language, or shows that language does to you, any “you,” however hard you try to use it to say straightforwardly just what you mean. For Derrida, whenever you try to say something unambiguously, you end up also saying something else, or several somethings else. He debunks origins, including the belief that a word has, or ought to have, a single literal, original, head meaning to which all the other meanings are subordinate, mere figurative displacements.

Derrida in his “reading” of *Droit de regards* commits the stylistic sin of wordplay outrageously on every page. It is one of his

27. David Wills, in his helpful “Translator’s Preface” to the book version of *Right of Inspection* (101), calls attention to some of these punning sequences, “*droit de regards*,” “*demeure*,” “*genre*,” “*générique*,” “*partie*,” “*pièce*.” Wills also notes the ambiguous play of pronouns and the “polylogical” form of Derrida’s “reading.” Wills’s focus, however, is on the challenges these wordplays present to translation, not on the queer, anti-phallogocentric, significance of Derrida’s habit of extravagant wordplay.

28. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 83; *ibid.*, *Illuminationen*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 69.

29. The pun remains in the printed essay. See “Semiology and Rhetoric,” in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 9.

ways of showing that phallogocentric discourse is impossible because language itself is irreducibly queer. The reader keeps wanting to say, "Come on, Jacques! Stop it at once. That's enough, and more than enough. Tell us unequivocally just what you mean to say. No more puns, please. Remember what Samuel Johnson said, 'He that would make a pun would pick a pocket.' Puns are theft of the solid currency of good language, a devaluation of that currency." Derrida wants to show, on the contrary, that you cannot not pun. As soon as you open your mouth, puns proliferate. This proliferation is out of your control. It is a fact about language, not some malicious playing with words.

The first named chair I held at Yale was called the "Neil Gray Professorship of Rhetoric." Cleanth Brooks had held the chair before me, so it was a great honor to be given that chair when he retired. I asked the then President of Yale, Kingman Brewster, what were the conditions of this chair. He acted a bit as if I were looking a gift horse in the mouth, which I guess I was. Nevertheless, he had someone look it up. It turned out that Neil Gray, bless his heart, endowed a professorship at Yale for someone who would teach students how to expunge metaphors from their language. I was made more than a little anxious by that news. I still have a guilty conscience about not being able to do what I had been appointed to do, even though I know it cannot be done, not even by Cleanth Brooks, much less by me. I also know, however, that Neil Gray was right to be worried. There is something perverse about wordplay and irony. Manly men and womanly women do not make puns. As Samuel Johnson also said, puns were the fatal Cleopatra for whom Shakespeare was willing to sacrifice the whole world, as Mark Antony sacrificed his masculine military might for dalliance with the Egyptian queen, the "serpent of the Nile."

The French word for "pun" is "*calembour*." This is a distinctly odd or queer word to an English-speaker's ear. *Calembour* names a homonym, two words that sound the same, or perhaps are the same, but have different meanings. One of the word's roots is "*bourde*," which means "a lie used to abuse or play with someone"; "a heavy gross fault"; "a gaffe"; a "*bourdon*." A "*bourdon*" is, among other things, a printer's omission of words from a text being set. A "*faux bourdon*" is the male of a beehive. That returns us to gender difference, after a wild goose chase of pun after pun buried just in

the final syllable of “*calembour*.” The French word for pun is itself a complex pun, even putting aside the initial syllable “*cal-*,” which may mean “wise,” “instructed,” “difficult,” or “stall.” Derrida notes “*je cale*” in “*Télépathie*” means: “I’m stalled, stuck, unable to move forward.”³⁰ Does that mean a *calembour* is a grossly mistaken use of a word that stops you from going any further with what you are saying? Derrida’s puns often work to stop forward movement by creating a whirlpool of comment on a word that he has used in a perfectly idiomatic expression. Once Derrida begins speculating about a given innocent word, he deviates perversely for sentence after sentence rather than getting on with it.

I am using the word “pun” to name all the wordplay in Derrida’s “reading,” all those places where he uses a word in more than one sense, or calls attention to the multiple and contradictory meanings of a given word in French. William Empson’s admirable *The Structure of Complex Words* implies by using the word “structure” in its title that complex words are likely have a rational structure in their multiple meanings, perhaps with a single literal meaning and a complexity of subordinate derived meanings.³¹ For Derrida a complex word most likely has no such rational structure. Such words, and they abound, just have a bewildering multiplicity of different irreconcilable meanings. Extravagant puns or plays on words make up the constant texture of Derrida’s “reading.” I am claiming that this is an anti-phallogocentric feature, that is, a queer feature, in what Derrida writes. This is the case both in his essay for *Droit de regards* and throughout his work, whatever he happens to be talking about.

I have already given examples of *calembours* in Derrida, for example the way “*dame*” can mean both a “lady” and a piece in the game called “*jeu de dames*.” The phrase “*droit de regards*,” as I have also demonstrated, has several not entirely compatible meanings for

30. “*Télépathie*,” 230; “Telepathy,” 242. See my *The Medium is the Maker* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 28-9, for a discussion of the way “*caler*” is part of a long string of words in “c” and “l” in “*Télépathie*” that includes “*Claude*,” the name, as already noted, that one of Derrida’s interlocutors in his “*lecture*” gives to one of the women in *Droits de regards*.

31. William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951).

Derrida. “*Genre*” can mean a kind of art form (like “novel,” “poem,” “photo-novel,” or “reading”), but it can also mean “gender.” “*Genre*” is related to another word that Derrida plays games with in his “reading”: “*générique*.” To an English or American speaker that use of the word seems extremely queer. It looks like it ought to mean “generic,” belonging to the genus, the general, not the specific, as in “generic drug.” In one of its senses “*générique*” does mean this, but its main meaning in *Droit de regards* is to label the “credits” or “trailer” at the beginning and end of the book, that is, the list of names of the photographer, those in charge of scenario and montage, and all the actresses, the one actor, and others, including Derrida, who have participated in making this book. The term is borrowed from French film language and reapplied to the photo-novel. The “*Générique*” at the end gives credit to those who have generated the book. It repeats the list already given at the beginning, though there the word “*générique*” is missing. That word’s reference to generation in the sense of “creating,” “making,” partly by way of its cross-reference to “*genre*,” also has a sexual meaning. It can refer to the act of generation. Derrida uses it to name initial photographs that generate a sequence, for example the one on the cover of two intertwined “women” on a big mattress on the floor of a huge formal room. (Fig. 3) The cover photo generates the initial sequence of apparent lesbian lovemaking, though it is also part of that sequence. Another “*générique*” is the photograph at a distance of the two young girls fully clothed playing *le jeu des dames*, French checkers, in an echo with a difference of the cover photo. (Fig. 4) Derrida also claims that all one hundred of the photos are “*génériques*,” that is, the starting places of further moves in the *jeu de dames*, in more than one sense, that make up the whole set of photographs.

Puns are everywhere in the “*lecture*.” Tracking them all down would require a virtually endless process of word by word reading on my part. The entire texture of the “*lecture*” is pervaded and permeated with self-conscious wordplay.

The opening pages, for example, begin with some give and take about the French word “*histoire*,” as opposed to “*discours*,” about a story that is “*raconté*,” about a “*récit*,” or “*narrative*,” or about “*l’inénarrable*,” the “unnarratable,” which the photographs in their sequences are said to be (I). One of the speakers then on the next page warns another to play the game, to stay within the rules,

to be bound by the frames or squares. He or she does that by saying something perfectly idiomatic in French, though it sounds odd to an American ear: “*Je te mets en demeure . . .*” (II). (“I put you on notice.”) That leads to a couple of wild pages in which those French words are turned this way and that. “*Demeure*” may mean a mansion, such as those in which many of the photographs were taken. “*Mise en demeure*,” and just “*demeure*,” and just “*mise*,” however, have all sorts of punning meanings. “*Demeure*,” for example, can mean “hold still,” said to the “subject” when you are about to snap a photo. “*Mise en demeure*” in French means “order of placement.” It is also a legal term meaning putting a hold on something so it can be officially inspected, or a summons to perform such and such. A “*demeure*,” according to *Littré*, the authoritative French dictionary, cited *in extenso* by one of Derrida’s speakers, is “a delay, the time that exceeds the limit within which one is required to do something (III).”³² These meanings are not too far from the corresponding English word “demur,” which means “to take exception,” “to enter or interpose a demurrer” (legal), and “to delay.” The head swims and the mind boggles or demurs, but Derrida is not yet through. One speaker runs through a long series of different things that the “*mise*” in “*mise en demeure*” can mean, all variations on “pose, position, supposition, the place of each *subject*” (III).

In one case this penchant for wordplay is highlighted and commented on, unfavorably, by one of Derrida’s interlocutors. He or she accuses another speaker not only of a penchant for puns or “*équivoques*,” but even of falling for the illusion of a single head meaning of which all the other meanings are figurative transfer. That other speaker plays on “develop” and “development” as naming both bringing out with chemicals a photographic negative (in a now obsolete technology) and, at the same time, in good Aristotelean terminology, the progress of a narrative. Another speaker criticizes

32. A book by Derrida on Maurice Blanchot is called, in exploitation of these equivocations, *Demeure: Maurice Blanchot* (Paris: Galilée, 1998); *ibid.*, “*Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*,” with Maurice Blanchot, “The Instant of My Death,” both trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

this:

— You exploit too many equivocal words, “development” for example. You use it in the sense, among others, of photographic technicity (film, negative, print), as if photography allowed you to speak literally about it and figuratively about everything else. And what if you were to say “one develops the photograph one has *taken*” (XV in the French)

The other speaker answers not by denying this, but by extending the pun or “*équivoque*”: “*Comme on prend des dames, en somme, et des dames en photographie*” (XV). (“In effect, the way one takes pieces in checkers, the way women are taken by photography” [XIV in the English].) In this formulation, “*prend des dames*” can mean, all at once and at the same time, to take women sexually, to take the pieces called “*dames*” in the French checkers game called “*le jeu dames*,” and to take photographs of women. As you to see, there is no limit to Derrida’s penchant for puns and to his quick invention of various quite different senses in which a given quite ordinary word, “*prend*” (“take”) in this case, can be used in different contexts.

In another place, one of Derrida’s speakers takes the two innocent letters, “*Ph*,” and spins out a whole sequence of words this acronym can stand for, bringing together in one phoneme various not entirely compatible regions of his discourse: “*Au lieu de pays* [that is, the strange country to which the photographs transport the viewer], *il faudrait formaliser, dire le Ph: ce qu’il est indifférent d’appeler phainesthai* [“to appear” in Greek] *ou phos* [“light” in Greek], *phénomène, phantasme, fantôme ou photographie*” (XXI). (“It should be possible to formalize this not in terms of a *pays* [“pronounced “pe(j)i,” like the French letters *p* and *i*,” as Wills observes in his notes] but rather as the *Ph.*, referring indiscriminately to the *phainesthai* or *phos*, phenomenon, phantasm, phantom, or photography.”)

In another give and take between two speakers, various puns on the word “*tirer*,” “draw,” and related words are drawn out. “*Se retire*” means “withdraw” or “retreat.” “*Tiré*” means “printed.” “*Attirée*” means “attracted.” A chest of drawers figures in the photo-

graphs, as I noted earlier, and is an allusion to the French idiom, “*récit à tiroirs*.” The drawers are pulled open (“*se tirent*”) (XXIV).

Here, in conclusion, is one of the most explicit basket-full of puns in the whole text, as well as the most explicit analysis of their functioning. That will be enough, and more than enough, in this linguistic game in which each pun begets others, in an endless excessive proliferation punctuating Derrida’s discourse with undecidabilities of meaning that point back to the secret that may not be a secret.

That secret, if there is one, lurks at the center, what Derrida calls “*le pays-O*” (“the country O”) (XX). This is the place of the wholly other that is both revealed and hidden by the circulation in both directions of the 100 photographs. “*Le pays-O*,” of course, also has a sexual meaning, as do so many of Derrida’s puns. Think of Heinrich von Kleist’s “*Die Marquise von O*” as an analogue for the sexual meaning of that “O.” Puns seem to have a secret attraction for sexual innuendo. Here is what one “Derrida” of indeterminate sex has to say about “*partie*,” in stern accusation of another of the Derridas. It is also an admirable summing up of Derrida’s queer practice with words in this essay and in his work generally. That may justify making a final long citation. Wills’s translation interpolates the key words in French:

— you are not content to name, you also give titles to each subject. For some time now all you have done is repeat “you see her depart,” “she leaves the room [*la pièce*].” You play on the meaning of all these words—the parts of the body, particularly the private parts, the *partie de dames*, the part of a whole, the party to a dispute, those who depart and who thus become all those other part(ie)s, and all that in a room [*pièce*] which is also a play [*pièce de théâtre*], a bedchamber or camera, and a piece in checkers. You make *partie* into an essential piece of the play [*une pièce essentielle de la pièce*] and *pièce* into a part of the game [*une partie de la partie*], not to mention the other words whose various implications you exploit—there have been so many of them recently. You lead one to believe this photographic masterpiece merely develops a lexicon, as if it were “revealing” what exists invisibly in certain powerful words. That would amount to the most effective of silent

metadiscourses, operating, for example, through these two words and several others, setting before us their syntax, their play, their ruses and simulacra. The words remain as negatives, but they are indeed photographed by this sort of rebus. One only needs to immerse them in the sympathetic fluid of your developer, and then fix them on the page. Contrary to what you've said up until now, this is really an homage to the word and to rhetoric, a right of inspection accorded the word, which remains therefore as that which was in the beginning. (XX)

To this play on words in “*part*,” I add that the neatly typed little slip of paper inserted in the copy of *Droit de regards* reads: “*De la part de Jacques Derrida*.” The gift was “on Jacques Derrida’s part.”

To the forceful reproach I have just cited, the accused, unrepentant, but, as always, with something to say, answers with the riposte already cited in part. S/he asserts that these photographs are in French:

— Not so much a homage to the spoken word [*parole*] as to language [*langue*]. [This is a reference to Saussure’s distinction between “*langue*” (a language as it is in itself, with all its rules) and “*parole*” (a given use of that language by a particular speaker to say something or other)]. For if I follow you, this photographic masterpiece would be bound by a secret agreement to the original resources of a particular language, namely French. (XX)

Well, enough, and more than enough, of Derrida’s puns. They make me dizzy, as if I were circling around in a whirlpool or maelstrom, or hanging over an abyss leading down to the Country of O.

* * *

I conclude this preposterously long preface with a summary, as all proper essays should (for I am not so defiant as Derrida of the rules). I have sincerely praised the essays in this book. I have then contributed to them by proposing a reading of Derrida’s “reading” of Marie-Françoise Plissart’s and Benoit Peeters’s *Droit de regards*.

Both the photographs and Derrida's commentary are, I have shown, works of queer theory and queer works. I add one final thing, however. One of Derrida's personages speaks in one place of the way the photographs generate the desire to tell more stories. Those stories "arise, they grow within you like desire itself, they invade you" (II in the English; III in the French). Reading Derrida's "lecture" and looking at Plissart's photographs have had a similar effect on me. They have generated a desire to tell more stories, both in helpless submission to their power and as an apotropaic attempt, not entirely successful, to protect myself from that power, to ward it off.

Impossible Uncanniness: Deconstruction and Queer Theory¹

Nicholas Royle

What can this ciphered letter signify, my very sweet destiny, my immense, my very near unknown one? Perhaps this: even if it is still more mysterious, I owe it to you to have discovered homosexuality, and ours is indestructible.

—JACQUES DERRIDA²

Queer's not just a queer word but belongs, if it belongs, to a queer time. I would like to think of that sentence as a tiny installation, a snowflake of sound, around which one might take one or more queer turns, or sketch a few queer footnotes. There is, perhaps, a queer theory of the First Sentence. In a dreamy, radical passivity, I imagined an encounter of “deconstruction and queer theory” in relation to the writings of Leo Bersani, starting with the falling into place of the First Sentence. What is the character of a first sentence? How, along what paths and with what effects, does the tone adopt you as much as you it (to borrow Derrida’s formulation)? How does it commit or even (in the strongest sense) determine you? Bersani is fascinated by what happens, like lightning, by what is struck or striking in first sentences. “There is a big secret about sex: most people don’t like it.”³ “The vagina is a logical defect in nature.”⁴ “Psychoanalytically speaking, monogamy is cognitively inconceivable

1. A version of this essay appears in Nicholas Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009), 113-134. Reproduced here with permission of Edinburgh University Press via PLSclear.

2. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 53.

3. Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *October* 43 (1987): 197.

4. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, “Merde alors,” *October* 13 (1980): 22.

and morally indefensible.”⁵ These are three of his first sentences, the opening words of “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” “Merde alors” (an essay co-authored with Ulysse Dutoit), and “Against Monogamy,” respectively. I could envisage devoting a separate essay to each of these sentences, in homage to the thinker who, it seems to me, first elaborated, a good while before Judith Butler and others, the theoretical and political dimensions of deconstruction and queer theory.⁶ But in the limited time I have here, this will have to be signalled as a bypath—a bypath that inevitably takes in *Billy Budd*, a path by Billy, a billy by-blow, proceeding and even coming into bud, by way of the opening of Chapter 4 of that masterpiece in which Melville’s narrator declares: “In this matter of writing, resolve as one may to keep to the main road, some paths have an enticement not readily to be withstood. I am going to err into such a bypath. If the reader will keep me company I shall be glad. At the least, we can promise ourselves that pleasure which is wickedly said to be in sinning, for a literary sin the divergence will be.”⁷ Does *Billy Budd* have a main road? What would it mean to keep its narrator company? How should we construe the pleasure of literary sinning and what might be discovered on its bypaths?

* * *

“*Queer’s a queer word*”: that is a quotation, as some might recognize, from two men, co-authors, indulgers or “collaborators,” as Wayne Koestenbaum calls them, in “doubletalk” or “double writing.”⁸ Who came out with this phrase (and so doing deliberately omitted

5. Leo Bersani, “Against Monogamy,” *Oxford Literary Review* 20 (1998): 3. Reprinted in Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 85-101.

6. For more on Bersani and the first sentence, and his first sentences in particular, see “Beyond Redemption: An Interview with Leo Bersani,” *Oxford Literary Review* 20 (1998): 179ff.

7. Herman Melville, “Billy Budd, Sailor,” in *Melville’s Short Novels*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: Norton, 2002), 103; here 113. For Billy Budd as “by-blow,” see 110; for the suggestive instance of a “budding pink,” see 170. Further page references to this text are given parenthetically as BB.

8. Wayne Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (London: Routledge, 1989). Hereafter cited in the text as DT.

the quotation marks around queer)? Is it to be read or heard in the voice of Andrew Bennett or of his co-author?⁹ Of an authorial double-voice or double-double-voice? Queer is instilled at the very quick of quotation, queer would be in the ear, like a bypath in the voice. It falls outside the scope of this essay to discuss my love of Andrew Bennett, or my collaboration with him. But no doubt, as in the case of *Billy Budd*, I shall be addressing this, even or especially when I appear not to be doing so, or when I am most firmly convinced that I am not doing so, tacitly immersed in the kinds of logic and experience that Kostenbaum discusses in his fascinating book about “the erotics of male literary collaboration,” starting with his contention that “double authorship attacks not primarily our dogmas of literary propriety, but of sexual propriety” (DT 8-9), and examining how, for example in the case of the novel called *Romance* (1903) that Joseph Conrad wrote in collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer (almost twenty years his junior), double-writing entails a queer mixing of voices or rather (as I would like to designate it here) a magical thinking writing in which voice is queer. Koestenbaum quotes the narrator Kemp recalling his sense of being one “I” and simultaneously another, Kemp’s queerly unkempt self-division in the act of speaking: “in a queer way, the thoughts of the one ‘I’ floated through into the words of the other.”¹⁰

* * *

Queer belongs, if it belongs, to a queer time. In a number of texts, perhaps most notably “Freud and the Scene of Writing”¹¹ and *Archive Fever*,¹² Jacques Derrida suggests that one of Freud’s greatest discoveries is, or was, or will have been, *Nachträglichkeit*, deferred

9. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, “Queer,” in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 2nd edition (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall, 1999), 178 and ff. Hereafter cited in the text as Q.

10. See Joseph Conrad in collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer, *Romance* (London: Dent, 1949), 533; quoted in Koestenbaum, DT, 172.

11. Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), esp., 203.

12. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), esp. 80.

effect, delayed action, delayed or deferred sense or meaning, after-effect or effect of deferral, deferred event, event in deferral, and so on. It seems to me that comparatively little has been made of this discovery, as yet, in the context of queer theory. Deferred effect is, I just said, or was or will have been and even, I would like to add, might be, one of Freud's most extraordinary and most disruptive discoveries, still might be, might have been or might be. There is a necessary *might* that, I think, comes into play or comes out here, as if by a mole-like progression, through the supplementing of Derrida's reading of Freud (in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" and *Archive Fever*, for example) with his reading of Hélène Cixous and the "might" of literature (in later texts such as *H.C. for Life* and *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres and Genius*).¹³ I am referring here to what Derrida says about "the strange tense of [the] *puisse* [might] or *puissiez-vous* [would that you might]" (HC 60) that is to be found, in an exemplary fashion, in the writings of Cixous. It is the question of a strange tense, a mighty optative that "would attest to unpower, vulnerability, death," even as it affirms a certain omnipotence, an omnipotence that is "in league with the im-possible" and that "would do the impossible," in short an optative that would respond to the fact that "desire [can] reach where the distinction between phantasm and the so-called actual or external reality does not yet take place and has no place to be" (HC 107-108). This "might," I would like to suggest, is intimately related to what Cixous and Derrida have to say about sexual differences in the plural, to their singular but shared affirmations of the polysexual, "a sexuality without number" (as Derrida calls it), "beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond bisexuality as well, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing."¹⁴

13. Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say . . .*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); hereafter cited in the text as HC; *ibid.*, *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

14. Jacques Derrida, "Choreographies," trans. Christie V. McDonald, in *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 108.

* * *

Here's an apparently straightforward, if not straight, example of deferred effect or event in deferral. In an essay published in *Radical Philosophy* in 2000 called, "Wishful Theory and Sexual Politics," originally given as a talk at a conference (the same year) entitled, "30 years of Radical Politics and Philosophy," Jonathan Dollimore reflects on the state of queer theory, writing as follows:

The more fashionable Queer became, the more it was appropriated by those who wanted to be fashionable and the more inclusive and meaningless the term became. As I write, an anthology of literary theory arrives on my desk which reprints work of mine as representative of queer theory even though that work was written before queer was a glint in anyone's eye. A few days before that another book arrived, an introduction to the work of E. M. Forster, in which the author, Nick Royle, boldly explores the idea that Forster wrote not one queer novel but six. Somehow Nick, I don't think so. But then, when the deco boys start to out-queer queer, maybe it's time to move on.¹⁵

For me, the deferred effect here consists, first of all, perhaps, in the fact that I only became aware of Dollimore's essay some five years after it was published. If you thought you were queer, even a little bit, if you thought what you were *writing* was queer, even a little bit, or even if you thought only that you were writing *about* queer, if you were hoping or imagining (the cheek!) that you might have had some very slight contribution to make to elaborating on the nature of queer or queer theory, for example in the context of Forster's work and the relationship between queer and literature staged there, you were wrong, boy. But the scene and logic of deferred effect is even more complicated. Indeed, as with the question of how one translates *Nachträglichkeit* into English, it is about irreducible multiplicity from the beginning.

15. See Jonathan Dollimore, "Wishful Theory and Sexual Politics," *Radical Philosophy* 103 (Sep/Oct 2000): 19. Hereafter cited in the text as WT. I am grateful to Alex Thomson for bringing this essay to my attention.

Queer's a queer time. Jonathan Dollimore testifies to this in more than one way, and not only when he appears to resist or reject it. Thus, for example, towards the end of his essay, he will explicitly propose that “desire, and perverse desire most acutely, is at once an effect of history, and a refusal of history” (WT 22). It is, of course, part of the purpose of Andrew Bennett and the other man’s account of the queerness of queer in their chapter entitled, “Queer” (first published in the second edition of their book, in 1999, though presumably without Dollimore’s knowledge), to suggest that “the entry of the word ‘queer’ into the English language is itself a study in the queer ways of words,” and to explore what they call the *delay*—the “delay of more than four hundred years between the introduction of the ‘odd’ or ‘singular’ sense of the word into English and the introduction of its ‘homosexual’ sense,” in other words, from the first recorded use of “queer” (“*Heir cumis awin quir Clerk*” in William Dunbar in 1508) to its alleged first “homosexual” use (where, as the authors note, the word “queer” is, a little queerly, already in quotation marks) in a US government report published in 1922 (Q 178). It’s as if this “delay” that they talk about was a feature of its usage from the beginning, as if for example pre-1922 writing (such as that of Forster, Conrad, Henry James and numerous others, going back at least as far, as we shall see, as Gerard Manley Hopkins) were concerned with establishing in advance the need to read “queer” in quotation marks. The word “queer,” says the *OED*, is “of doubtful origin,” and this is effectively also, as the dictionary goes on to note, one of its primary meanings: i.e., “Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character. Also, of questionable character, suspicious, dubious” (sense 1a). There can be no queer theory, we might say, without doubtful origin.

* * *

Dollimore’s prose is rich and suggestive, not least in its apparent colloquialism and simplicity. Let us consider, for example, his reference to the anthology that, after the fact, by deferral, reprints some of his work “as representative of queer theory even though that work was written before queer was a glint in anyone’s eye.” In this reworking of the phallo-paternal, heterosexual, reproductive “twinkle” into the “glint” that is more readily associated with the

killer or with sheer lust, Dollimore's writing intimates a compelling priority of the body or of physical gesture: "Queer" begins in the eye of a beholder; in the beginning was the glint. At the same time, he also appears to want to argue for a sense of history, an orderliness and chronologism, which queer, starting perhaps with the queer history of the word itself, queers the pitch of. Not insignificantly, this double gesture (the glint and the logocentric, rectilinearist affirmation of history) is subordinate, in Dollimore's sentence, to the strange time of writing: "As I write, an anthology of literary theory arrives on my desk which reprints. . . ." The writing, the arriving, and even the reprinting all seem to come together in the present, or at least under that sort of "false appearance of a present" that Derrida so resonantly evokes in the opening pages of "Outwork" in *Dissemination*, apropos the drawing-everything-together time of a preface.¹⁶

But who am I to talk? I'm *so* last week (and this was already years ago). "A few days before that another book arrived, an introduction to the work of E. M. Forster, in which the author, Nick Royle, boldly explores. . . ." I like that "that" ("A few days before *that*"), as if Nick Royle arrived before writing, *avant la lettre*. Anyway, apparently (it was in the late 90s, let's remember) I wanted to be fashionable and therefore I appropriated "Queer." To quote Dollimore again: "the more fashionable Queer became, the more it was appropriated by those who wanted to be fashionable and the more inclusive and meaningless the term became." Is "queer" meaningless? What does it mean to say that a word, or a concept, a proper name even (for Dollimore here gives "Queer" a capital letter), becomes *more* "meaningless"? What is the relation here between "meaningless" and "inclusive" or, conversely perhaps, meaning and the *exclusive*? Without launching off into a full-scale *Limited Inc* kind of response here, I would just like to suggest that, if there is or was something "fashionable" about "Queer," this had nothing to do with any effort on my part and, moreover, I do not believe that it is possible to appropriate anything in writing, not least when it has a capital letter, whether it be a theory or an autobiography

16. See Jacques Derrida, "Outwork," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 7-12.

or one's own so-called proper name. In writing, as in any work of identification, however personal or political or personal-as-political (as people used to say), whether construed as love of oneself or of the other, the very movement of appropriation is an expropriation, as Derrida makes lovingly clear in text after text. Deconstruction (if there is any) is what cannot be appropriated: it is the undoing of any movement of appropriation.

It's not a matter (as many early critical commentaries in the 1970s and 1980s supposed) of deconstruction as the blank rejection of "presence," a dismissal of the desire for appropriation, or of feelings of identification or "belonging." It's a matter of rendering these things "enigmatic" (as *Of Grammatology* explicitly states)¹⁷ with a view to their being thought and activated *otherwise*: this is what is going on in Derrida's interest in what *Limited Inc* calls "literatures' or 'revolutions' that as yet have no model."¹⁸ Deconstruction, if there is any, is first of all a deconstruction of the spontaneous, of what is supposedly immediate or of one's own free will. In this respect, Derrida's work has an affiliation with Lenin's. As Lenin nicely puts it, in a chapter entitled "The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the Social-Democrats" in *What Is To Be Done?* (1901): "There is spontaneity and spontaneity."¹⁹

17. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 70. Hereafter cited in the text as OG.

18. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 100.

19. V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm#v05ff61h-373-GUESS). In note 16 to this chapter, Lenin writes: "It is often said that the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily, *provided*, however, this theory does not itself yield to spontaneity, *provided* it subordinates spontaneity to itself. Usually this is taken for granted, but it is precisely this which *Rabocheye Dyelo* forgets or distorts. The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism; nevertheless, most widespread (and continuously and diversely revived) bourgeois ideology spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class to a still greater degree."

There is a thread to be followed here in regard to what Derrida refers to as “a sort of crypto-communist legacy” in deconstruction. Deconstruction, he notes, inherits something of the “condemnation of ‘spontaneism’” in Lenin. As he summarizes in a discussion with Maurizio Ferraris in 1994: “what remains constant in my thinking [is] a critique of institutions, but one that sets out not from the utopia of a wild and spontaneous pre- or non-institution, but rather from counter-institutions. . . . The idea of a counter-institution, neither spontaneous, wild, nor immediate, is the most permanent motif that . . . has guided me in my work.”²⁰ Permit me, here, simply to signal the importance of the question of queer theory and counter-institutions, and the indissociable links, in my view, between deconstruction, queer, and a certain communism. It’s a question also of spectrality, and I will try to say a little more about this shortly. Suffice to recall for the moment Derrida’s remark about communism in *Spectres of Marx*: “communism has always been and will remain spectral: it is always still to come and is distinguished, like democracy itself, from every living present understood as plenitude of a presence-to-itself, as totality of a presence effectively identical to itself.”²¹

* * *

Derrida’s “crypto-communist legacy,” as he calls it, also entails another thinking of the “crypto-,” of the hidden and secret. There is spontaneity and spontaneity, but there is also always going to be a secret of “me” for “me.”²² This notion of the secret is crucial to the hesitation I have been trying to mark vis-à-vis the time to which queer belongs, if it belongs. Queer would have to do with a queering of time as such, and with a deconstructive thinking

20. See Jacques Derrida, “I Have a Taste for the Secret,” in Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 50. Hereafter cited in the text as TS.

21. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 99.

22. See Jacques Derrida, “Dialanguages,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 134.

of the secret as what “does not belong.”²³ It’s not a question of appropriation, but rather of the experience of its impossibility. It’s not a question of spontaneity, but of reckoning with the argument (already explicit in *Of Grammatology*) that “immediacy is derived” (OG 157). As Derrida writes of the logic of deferred effect, delayed sense, or *Nachträglichkeit*: “The temporality to which [Freud] refers cannot be that which lends itself to a phenomenology of consciousness or of presence and one may indeed wonder by what right all that is in question here should still be called *time* [or *now* or *delay*, etc.]” (OG 67; my emphasis). Insofar as it is a question of affirming one’s identity (I am queer, or I am a queer, I will have been or I might be queer, and so on), it is also one of attending to the secrecy and non-belonging that structure all movements of identification. As Derrida says in *A Taste for the Secret*: “The desire to belong to any community whatsoever, the desire for belonging *tout court*, implies that one *does not belong*. . . . *Accounting for* one’s belonging—be it on national, linguistic, political or philosophical grounds—in itself implies a not-belonging” (TS 28). Derrida wants to affirm *not-belonging*, in part because “belonging,” “the fact of avowing one’s belonging” or “putting in common,” in his terms, “spells the loss of the secret” (TS 59). As he says in a related essay, “Passions: ‘An Oblique Offering’”: “*There is something secret*. But it does not conceal itself. . . . It remains inviolable even when one thinks one has revealed it. . . . It does not belong therefore to the truth, neither to the truth as *homoiosis* or adequation, nor to the promised truth, nor to the inaccessible truth.”²⁴ This secrecy is at issue every instant, and in every word. One name for it might be “queer.”

* * *

Permit me to add one or two further remarks concerning the passage I quoted from Jonathan Dollimore: “[Royle’s book] boldly explores

23. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 92. Cf. TS, 59.

24. Jacques Derrida, “Passions: ‘An Oblique Offering,’” trans. David Wood, in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 21.

the idea that Forster wrote not one queer novel but six. Somehow Nick, I don't think so. But then, when the deco boys start to out-queer queer, maybe it's time to move on." It really does look as if Dollimore doesn't approve, even if he expresses this in a touching gesture, at once patronizing and affectionate as well as comical, of turning aside from his discourse in order to address me directly: "Somehow Nick. . . ." Boldly, but apparently quite erroneously, trying to explore the idea that Forster wrote not one but six queer novels, I am labelled a "deco boy." I must admit it makes me smile, this performative moment, this embedded act of naming whereby I become a "deco boy." What do deco boys do? Do they get to meet deco girls or do they only meet other deco boys? Or do they get up to something else? And are there deco men as well as deco boys? Was Derrida a deco man or just another deco boy? And what would be the relation between a deco boy and a deco man, or between one deco boy and another (perhaps you, my love), before or beyond, before and beyond all thinking of the filial or homo-fraternal? No one, so far as I know, has ever called me a deco boy before or since, and as the years go by the chances of it happening again no doubt continue to recede. Am I, was I, will I have been a "deco boy"? Supposing that "deco" refers principally not to "deco" (as in art deco) or to "decko" (as in having a quick look, possibly with a glint in one's eye) or to "decoy" (despite its perhaps special aptness and allure in this context) but to "deconstruction," I wonder about the relationship between "deconstruction" and "queer theory" that is being suggested here. It looks, at least at first decko, as if it would be antagonistic, even oppositional: "But then, when the deco boys start to out-queer queer, maybe it's time to move on."

I need to step sideways here, or at least note a footnote, which I believe helps to illuminate the passage in question. It comes after the sentence about Forster writing "not one queer novel but six." There's a footnote following "six" in which Dollimore quotes me as saying, in the Introduction to my book: "I hope to establish a sense of Forster's novels not only as queer . . . but also . . . queerer than queer."²⁵ "Somehow Nick, I don't think so": this brisk and

25. See Nicholas Royle, *E. M. Forster* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999), 6. Hereafter cited as EMF. Qtd by Dollimore, WT 19-20, n.6.

witty sentence, in which my book is summarily dismissed (six words for a reading of six novels), is also, as far as I am aware, the only thing that anyone has ever said in print about this book, at least as a reading of Forster and “queer.” So, in some ways, I can only be grateful. But it is also a pity, I think, that this critic couldn’t have taken a little longer over the reading and, perhaps, over his assessment. First he tells me “I don’t think so,” but then he says *but then*: “But then, when the deco boys start to out-queer queer, maybe it’s time to move on.” This rather curious “but then” is more or less directly followed by another. For Dollimore, at this point, ends the paragraph and begins a new section under the heading “Out-queering,” which begins with another kind of “but then,” this time in the form of the phrase “Except that.” He writes: “Except that out-queering was always an aspect of queer, especially in relation to perversion” (WT 19). In this way his text appears to gesture in two directions—an outflanking of the “deco boy,” on the one hand, and on the other a lingering (as if uncomfortable or inadvertent) suggestion that there is something to be affirmed about deconstructive thinking in this context, specifically regarding its focus on the *hyperbolic* or *exorbitant*, its attention to how queer, perhaps, always already exceeds itself, or is indeed generated out of this very logic of out-queering. One might reasonably expect a critic as astute as Jonathan Dollimore candidly to acknowledge this, but his work’s relationship with deconstruction remains uneasy: I have written elsewhere regarding its avoidance or elision of deconstructive questions.²⁶

So there is something about queer that out-queers itself: this “was always an aspect of queer.” Queer cruises new senses and directions and continues to alter. As Judith Butler notes in *Bodies That Matter*, in a passage that I also cite in the book on Forster:

If the term “queer” is to be a site of collective contestations,

26. See Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003), 102 n.6 and 122-23, and the review of Dollimore’s *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (London: Allen Lane, 1998) in *Textual Practice*, 13.2 (Summer 1999): 389-94, where I discuss the “marvellously perverse” absence of Derrida from that work.

the point of departure for a set of historical considerations and future imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes.²⁷

I cannot explore in detail the more intricate or twisted and perhaps unsettling dimensions of Butler's argument here except to note that "queer theory" would have to do with deferred effect and the incalculable, with what cannot be "anticipated in advance," as she puts it; and indeed that this can and must include the possibility of the disappearance or obsolescence of the term "queer" itself (Butler BM, 228). This logic of deferred sense and the incalculable, of disappearing and spectrality, is, I think, one of the ways in which deconstruction and queer theory can be aligned or even be seen to merge into one another. In this context, there is perhaps a further irony in Dollimore's remarks, namely, that Nicholas Royle's book on E. M. Forster contains not a single reference either to Derrida or to deconstruction. "Deco boys," you can spot them a mile off: go figure.

* * *

"A sudden lurch" (Melville BB, 125): it's off, it's by, it's across the path, veering.²⁸ "The greasy liquid streamed just across [the] path" (BB 125) of Claggart, the master-at-arms. Over and over, apparently off at a tangent, coming back to this climactic spillage, for instance, with a couple of sentences about passion at the start of

27. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 228. Hereafter cited in the text as BM. Quoted in Royle, *E. M. Forster*, 87.

28. [For more on "veering," see Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011), esp. 5-8, where Royle lists many words related to the Latin verb *vertere* ("to turn"), including: "veer," "verse," "version," "subvert," "pervert," and "vertigo." One of Royle's points is that "verring is intricately entwined with the emergence and history of what we call 'queer.' However you may want to think about it, veering is not straight. To focus on veering in literature (and beyond) is to engage with new and perhaps unexpected, even unheard-of orientations" (8).—Ed.]

Billy Budd, Chapter 13: “Passion, and passion in its profoundest, is not a thing demanding a palatial stage whereon to play its part. Down among the groundlings, among the beggars and rakers of the garbage, profound passion is enacted” (BB 130). It’s mourning, top of the mourning, highest mourning, as of the beautiful queer butterflies, or *papillons*, Derrida writes about in his “Circumfession,” their colorings “a mélange of black and white,”²⁹ with you I go down, by you, yes, neither to the woods nor Buckingham Palace, but to the municipal tip, delirious dog-days of blazing sun and streaming grief to do and have done it, we eye the totter in a *folie à deux*, following flowing towards this soiled sublime blond rugged agelessly old-young creature of the dump transfixing us as we make love to his presence totting an account as if suddenly able to see shadowing sweating heaving in the blistering heat of a fire neither of us can put out, to semen the portmanteau, coming in voice, “homosexual ventriloquy” (C 160), as Derrida calls it, high writing cementing, seeing men at sea, panting from the foretop, our Billy Budd, the one with whom we come, in secret, every time.

* * *

In *E. M. Forster*, I argue that homosexuality and queerness constitute a crucial aspect of all of Forster’s novels: in this, despite Jonathan Dollimore’s “I don’t think so,” I am not claiming anything particularly controversial, or even new. A significant collection of essays entitled *Queer Forster* had already appeared in 1997.³⁰ In the case of *The Longest Journey*, for example, I examine what I refer to as “all its queer coding, switching and multiplying of sexual identities” (EMF 32). (In passing I would just remark that if *The Longest Journey* isn’t a queer novel, we are still in need of inventing a critical language to respond to it. This takes us in the direction of what I tentatively refer to as “queerer than queer,” which would include

29. Jacques Derrida, “Circumfession,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 166; *ibid.*, “Circonfession,” in *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1991), 156. The English is hereafter cited in the text as C.

30. *Queer Forster*, ed. Robert Martin and George Piggford (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).

above all perhaps questions of telepathy and spectrality, especially as these pertain to the anonymous, affective, burrowing, tugging strangeness of identification and disidentification in literary fiction. My text is a modest attempt to explore the sense that Forster is at once cannier and uncannier than readers generally give him credit for. There is, if you will, a Forsterian “I don’t think so” addressed to every one of his readers, waiting in the wings. This is related to the sort of mindgameful, cryptic, mole-like curiosity that is evident, for example, in a Forster diary entry from 25 October 1910: “To work out: The sexual bias in literary criticism . . . What sort of person would the critic prefer to sleep with, in fact.”³¹ End of tautological parenthesis.) I try to elucidate what seems to me a Freudian aspect of Forster’s work, or at least the Freud who declares in his 1919 essay on Leonardo da Vinci:

Everyone, even the most normal person, is capable of making a homosexual object-choice, and has done so at some time in his life, and either still adheres to it in his unconscious or else protects himself against it by vigorous counter-attitudes.³²

On this basis, I contend not only that “all men are queer,” but, more specifically, that that queerness has to do with a time that may never be consciously experienced, a time that doesn’t belong. I seek to illustrate this in various ways, and, indeed, to let it (however anachronistically or *deferentially*) come out in the writing, as a way of trying to countersign what I believe pervades Forster’s.³³

By way of a brief example, I would like to turn, not to one

31. Oliver Stallybrass, Introduction to E. M. Forster, *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 17, n. 12. Hereafter cited in the text as I.

32. Sigmund Freud, “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood” (1910), trans. Alan Tyson, in *Art and Literature, Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 14, ed. Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 191, n. 1 (note added 1919).

33. I picture the copy-editor, and then perhaps the reader, who thinks that there was an error in this sentence, supposing “deferentially” to be a spelling mistake. Elsewhere I hope to elaborate a more extensive account of this queer-looking neologism.

of the novels (which constituted the focus of my earlier work) but to one of Forster's short stories, his unpublishable "sexy stories" as he called them (I 16). "Ansell" (written probably in 1903) is narrated by a 23-year-old man called Edward who is supposed to be writing "a dissertation on the Greek optative."³⁴ Forster's marvellous little text works and plays with, along and through the bypaths of this word "optative," defined in two principal current senses in the *OED* as "adj. *Grammar*. Having the function of expressing wish or desire" (sense 1); and "Relating to choice, or expressing desire; relating to the future and to the decisions it involves" (sense 2a). The 23-year-old has just a month in which to complete his dissertation, and then he'll get "a Fellowship" (A 29) (those were the days). He leaves Cambridge to stay with his cousin in the country, accompanied by a hefty box containing the relevant books and a mass of notes—"editions interleaved and annotated, and pages and pages of cross-references and criticisms of rival theories" (A 30). "The optative," as the narrator puts it, "does not admit of very flowing treatment" (A 30). On this visit to his cousin's, the main focus of Edward's attention is Ansell, the former "garden and stable boy" (A 28), "now gamekeeper . . . and only occasional gardener and groom" (A 29). In their youth, the narrator tells us, they had been "on the most intimate footing" (A 28). As Ansell drives him from the railway station, along a road high above a river, the horse is sent wild by "clegs" and, in the ensuing "bang[ing]" and "back[ing]" and "crack[ing]" (A 31), the box containing the narrator's books and thesis-notes slides and falls "into the abyss," breaking open "like a water-lily," disseminating its contents down "through the trees into the river" (A 32). They try to recover them but, as the narrator puts it, "of the unfinished dissertation and the essential notes there was not a sign" (A 34).

So much for academic life. The story concludes: "Whenever we pass the place Ansell looks over and says 'Them books!' and laughs, and I laugh too as heartily as he, for I have not yet realized what has happened" (A 35). It is this extraordinary final sentence that, to my mind, most resists "flowing treatment." In a bizarre,

34. E.M. Forster, "Ansell," in *The Life to Come*, 29. Hereafter cited in the text as A.

impossible present, it conjoins what narratologists call a pseudo-iterative (“Whenever we pass the place”), a sense that this happens on numerous occasions and yet it is just this one time, with a shared laughter that is attributed to a future that has not yet happened, that cannot yet have happened: “I laugh too as heartily as he, for I have not yet realized what has happened.” This is not so much the “not yet” of homoerotic friendship at the end of *A Passage to India*, but rather the strange “would have,” “might have” and even, in the same sweeping moment, “did” and “do” of *Maurice*, in particular of Clive’s cryptic turn to apparent heterosexuality at the end of that novel, marked by his perception of Maurice’s departure on the last page of the novel. As Forster puts it: “To the end of his life Clive was not sure of the exact moment of departure, and with the approach of old age he grew uncertain whether the moment had yet occurred.”³⁵ This sense of deferred queerness, or queer deferral, in *Maurice* is staged at the end of “Ansell” in the laughter of what I would like to call a deconstructive optative or, with a wink at Jonathan Dollimore, *deco-optative*.³⁶ It is the dreaming of literature,

35. E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 215.

36. This notion of the deconstructive optative would perhaps provide an illuminating point of agreement and disjunction with what Dollimore has to say about queer theory more generally. For him, queer theory is “wishful theory.” As he puts it: “Queer radicals, far from liberating the full potential of homosexuality, tame and rework it in various ways.” In particular, “they tend to represent themselves as personally immune to the subversiveness of desire” (WT 21). Queer theory, he goes on, is “[w]ishful as in wishful thinking. It is a pseudo-radical, pseudo-philosophical, redescription of the world according to an *a priori* agenda. . . . In wishful theory a preconceived narrative of the world is elaborated by mixing and matching bits and pieces of diverse theories until the wished-for result is achieved. . . . [T]he contrived narratives of queer theory insulate their adherents from social reality by screening it through high theory, and this in the very act of fantasizing its subversion or at least its inherent instability” (WT 21). Dollimore’s is an intriguingly “literary” version of queer theory: queer theory is characterized, at least in part, in terms of its narrative contrivances and its power of fictional or quasi-fictional redescription. I would broadly subscribe to what he has to say here, concerning the ways that critical or theoretical discourse loses sight of what he calls “the subversiveness of desire.” Beginning with the remarkable *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991),

its dream-power, the strange might of a narrator (here a fictional “I” called Edward, but just as often an anonymous “I” or so-called “third-person”) who knows more than he or she should or could, with a strange knowingness which is perhaps too easily and too quickly organized and transposed into the familiar filters and grids of narratology. At issue here is the question of a new and altogether queerer vocabulary for *flashback* (*retrospection* or *analepsis*), *anticipation* (*foreshadowing* or *prolepsis*), *omniscience*, *point of view* and *focalization*, indeed for the entire workings and effects of magical thinking in literature, for its twisted, impossible knowledge and knowledge-effects: “for I have not yet realized what has happened.” I am homosexual, I am queer, from now on, without realizing it, in a future that has not yet happened, that *cannot* yet and yet *must have* happened.

* * *

On another little bypath, close yet almost out of the picture, I see the figure of Lee Edelman, or more specifically his provocative book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.³⁷ Though resolutely Lacanian and curiously silent on Derrida, Edelman’s book has notable affinities with the concerns of the present essay. Specifically, we might think here of the stress he gives to a deconstructive notion

Dollimore’s work seems to me to offer admirable analyses and a powerful affirmation of the incalculable, unforeseeable, protean or (as I would like to call it) *veering* character of desire. At the same time, however, I wonder if his characterization of queer theory as “wishful” doesn’t actually have the effect of eliding the question of the wish, or at least of bracketing off attention to the ways in which desire is necessarily at work in what is called “theory.” The phrase “wishful theory” perhaps inevitably suggests that there is also “non-wishful theory,” or indeed that theory should be not wishful but, rather, separable from wishing or desire, as if its discourse could be free of all affectivity, optativity or performative effects (whether intentional, unconscious or, more generally, *iterable* in Derrida’s sense). For more on the notion of “wishful theory,” see Dollimore’s earlier essay, “Bisexuality, Heterosexuality, and Wishful Theory,” in *Textual Practice* 10.3 (1996): 523-39, as well as the revised version of some of this material in his *Sex, Literature and Censorship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

37. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Hereafter cited in the text as NF.

of irony, “that queerest of rhetorical devices” as he calls it (NF 23);³⁸ or his characterization of queer theory in terms of a “refusal . . . of every substantialization of identity . . . and, by extension, of history as linear narrative . . . in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself —*as itself*—through time” (NE 4). In other respects, Edelman’s argument might seem contrary to what we are trying to elucidate in these pages: “queer,” for him, “comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form” (NF 4). Queerness, he thus comes to assert, “promises, in more than one sense of the phrase, absolutely nothing” (NF 5). Edelman’s work is predicated on the force of its polemical negative: think queer, he says, as “no future.” Queer would be that which “cuts the thread of futurity” (NF 30), above all insofar as that future comprises “reproductive futurism” (NF 4, 27). This may look quite far from Derrida’s thinking, especially if one recalls his repeated affirmation of the “democracy to come,” and his cautioning against “los[ing] sight of the *excess* . . . of the future”; the very notion of “no future,” in this respect, would be linked with totalitarianism.³⁹ But Edelman’s polemic, I think, is a lot closer to Derrida than it may initially appear. For the force of his argument is in fact bound up with what I’ve been referring to as the deconstructive optative: what is at issue is not so much “no future,” as it is a thinking of the future in terms of a *wilful* commitment to “disturbing, [and/or] queering, social organization as such” (NF 17), in terms of “embrac[ing]” this precisely as “the impossible” (NF 109), an “impossible project” that we “*might* undertake” (NF 27; emphasis added). No “no future” without deconstructive desire, without “what is queerest,” namely, the “*willingness* to insist intransitively—to insist that the future stop here” (NF 31; emphasis added).

38. Edelman specifically invokes uncanniness when he writes: “Queer theory . . . would constitute the site where the radical threat posed by irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers who no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence the disfiguration, of identity itself” (NF 24). The word “assume” is up to mischievous business in this formulation—its ambiguity (merely “assuming”) nicely sidestepping the question of “owning” or “appropriating.”

39. See, in particular, Jacques Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, 22.

* * *

Would that you might taste me. Would that you might taste my selftaste. Impossible, but desired. Such would be the deconstructive optative. In “Justices,” the late great essay on deconstruction and queer theory, apropos J. Hillis Miller and Gerard Manley Hopkins (first given as a lecture in April 2003), Derrida suggests that this is where love and friendship come from. (We may also recall how profoundly his work elsewhere intertwines the two—friendship and love, love in friendship—above all, perhaps, in *Politics of Friendship*.)⁴⁰ He writes:

Love and friendship are born in the experience of this unshareable selftaste: an unshareable experience and nevertheless shared, the agreement of two renunciations to say the impossible. As for hatred, jealousy, envy, cruelty, they do not renounce. That is perhaps why they go together more often with knowledge, inquisitorial curiosity, the scopic drive, and epistemophilia.⁴¹

I would like to relate this renunciation, this double renunciation “to say the impossible,” to the radical passivity to which I alluded at the beginning and to what seems to be happening at the very heart of *Billy Budd*, in other words, to the force of Melville’s work as “an inside narrative” that lets us see the “hatred, jealousy, envy [and] cruelty” embodied in Claggart, alongside the declaration that what “may have” happened in the final interview between Billy Budd and Captain Vere, “each radically sharing in the rarer qualities of our nature,” was “never known” (BB 156). But time is running out.⁴²

40. At issue here, in particular, is the importance of the term *aimance* (“lovingness,” or, in George Collins’s translation, “lovence”): see Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 7-8, and *passim*.

41. Jacques Derrida, “Justices,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Provocations to Reading: J. Hillis Miller and the Democracy to Come*, ed. Barbara Cohen and Dragan Kujundzic (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 238. Hereafter cited in the text as J.

42. A sudden lurch, she is saying in my ear, into a footnote, scarcely a whisper, concerning the Handsome Sailor or foretopman of such “masculine

“Justices” contains all sorts of strange and surprising treasures. It picks up Miller’s picking up the remarkable phrase “selftaste” in Hopkins, in his early book *The Disappearance of God*, linking it with a taste for the secret and a taste for deconstruction, as well as with

beauty” but also embodying something of “the beautiful woman” (BB 111), his voice “singularly musical” but with one “defect,” viz., “an organic hesitancy” (111), the murmur and proliferation of voices echoing (like that of each or any reader subvocalizing or reading aloud as s/he goes) in the wake of the appalling benediction at the heart of Melville’s text, the work so worked upon (from 1886 up until his death in 1891) and so deferred in appearance (eventually coming out in print only in 1924, but have we really even begun to read it, for example the hesitancy of its title, turning between “Billy Budd, Sailor” and “Billy Budd, Foretopman,” into its abyssal subtitle, “an inside narrative?”), the last words of Billy, “delivered in the clear melody of a singing bird on the point of launching from the twig”: “God bless Captain Vere!” (BB 163). Billy Budd might seem to resemble one of the *papillons* in Derrida’s “Circumfession”: the sailor’s “external apparel, white jumper and white duck trousers, each more or less soiled, dimly glimmered in the obscure light of the bay like a patch of discolored snow in early April lingering at some upland cave’s black mouth. In effect he is already in his shroud, or the garments that shall serve him in lieu of one” (BB 159). As with the “bypath” with which I began, this fragmented sentence or two might detain us sinning at literature’s pleasure for an inordinately long time, among other things precisely in terms of its derangement of time, the internal shiftings or the ruinously, magically, impossibly internal-external shiftings of a narrative perspective between past (“dimly glimmered”), present (“In effect he is already in his shroud”) and future (“the garments that shall serve him”). Even more intensely than *Moby-Dick*, *Billy Budd* seems at once to emerge out of and to provoke the experience of what Leo Bersani calls “the inability to stop reading.” (See Leo Bersani, “Incomparable America,” in *The Culture of Redemption* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990], 136-54: here, 150.) This inability is figured perhaps most sharply in the extraordinary subtitle of Melville’s last work, “an inside narrative,” a phrase that alerts us to the irreducibly and inexhaustibly telepathic or literary dimensions of this apparently “historical” account. It may be tempting to categorize and thus effectively bracket off the question and experience of this “inability” in terms of a principle of uncertainty that would be “queer”-identified. This is a danger that seems to me at issue in Robert K. Martin’s suggestion that the “adoption of a queer model that proposes contingency instead of certainty seems likely to offer the best future for the study of sexuality in Melville’s texts” (Robert K. Martin, “Melville and Sexuality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Robert S. Levine [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 200). Citing these words, in an

the meaning of “queer” and the “unspeakable.”⁴³ Derrida stresses the queer character of the term and concept of “inscape,” Hopkins’s neologism for the uniqueness of design and pattern, the singularity and even, one might say, the signature, or signature-effect, of his perception and experience of the world. “All the world is full of inscape,” writes Hopkins: “looking out of my window I caught it in the random clods and broken heaps of snow made by the cast of a broom.”⁴⁴ Snowflakes of sound, fallen or still falling, falling without cease, still to fall, as in the extraordinary lines describing the storm and coming shipwreck in “The Wreck of the Deutschland”: “Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivellèd snow / Spins to the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps.”⁴⁵ Inscape is queer, Hopkins affirms; it becomes queer: “Now, it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped.”⁴⁶ As ever alert to

essay on “Gender and Sexuality” in Melville, Leland S. Persons likewise seeks to propound the notion of a critical “queer model” in terms of uncertainty: “Uncertainty is such a common feeling for Melville’s readers and contingency such a common experience for Melville’s characters, that a ‘queer model’ of approach to just about any issue in Melville’s writing makes good sense” (Leland S. Person, “Gender and Sexuality,” in *A Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Wyn Kelley [Oxford: Blackwell, 2006], 244-5). Uncertainty as a “queer model” here risks becoming an end in itself, in a sort of repetition of that error by which deconstruction in earlier days became identified with “indeterminacy” or “indeterminism.” If queer theory has a special relationship with dubitation, this has to do with *more*, not less, critical and inventive modes of questioning, with trying to affirm and analyze, affirm by analyzing *singularity* (whether of signature, event or context), not with referring things back to some generalized logic or model of uncertainty, as if for its own sake. The inability to stop reading is still a matter of reading. (To be continued.)

43. See J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1963).

44. *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 230; cited in “Justices,” 239.

45. “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” Part 2, stanza 13, in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4th edition, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 55.

46. *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford UP, 1955), 66; cited in “Justices,” 240.

the minuscule shifts of words, Derrida notes this slippage from “inscape” to “escape”: “It is [Hopkins’s] destiny, his virtue, but also his vice, not to have managed to escape the inscape. He was not able to escape the becoming-vice, the becoming-queer, of this virtue” (J 240). In this veering from “inscape” to “escape,” there is a queer, cryptic veil or *cape* that is perhaps another way of getting at the strangeness of “selftaste.” Inscape has to do with vice and virtue and with the absolute singularity and aloneness that is you, yourself. “In a childlike fashion,” as Derrida puts it, you wonder what it feels like to be the other, or rather how it tastes to be Hillis Miller or, let’s say, Jinan Joudeh, or even God. Derrida argues that it is on the basis of Hopkins’s “solitude and the unspeakable singularity of [his] selftaste” that he “speaks, addresses himself to another, and gives to be shared just that, the unshareable of his own taste” (J 241).

Derrida asks: “How does the word ‘queer’ impose itself on Hopkins?” (J 240). In doing so, his text bears witness at once to the queer time of “queer” and to the deconstructive force of substitutability, that logic according to which the irreplaceably singular can and must be replaced on the spot.⁴⁷ For here is “queer” in Hopkins, at least in Derrida’s reading of it, long before the date of 1922 specified in the *OED*, and here is this essay, “Justices,” prompting us to wonder in turn: “How does the word ‘queer’ impose itself on Derrida?” The author of “Justices” declares: “The singular says itself, but it says itself as ‘unspeakable.’ What is strange and ‘queer’ here is that all this comes down to an experience and, in Hopkins’s own words, to a sort of theory of the queer, if not to the impossible uncanniness of a ‘queer theory’” (J 240). It is in the context of this question of “impossible uncanniness” and its “unlimited” pertinence, experience of the impossible necessarily partaking of or sharing in what he calls “the experience of thought and literary writing” (J 243-244), that Derrida arrives at perhaps his most aphoristic, haunting and haunted formulation: “To be is to be queer” (J 243). If Derrida’s work argues for—while enacting—a queering of being, the same can be said of time: deconstruction

47. See, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (with Maurice Blanchot’s *The Instant of My Death*), trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 41.

queers being and time.

* * *

I would like to conclude anecdotally, with another footnote of sorts. The brutality, and brutal actuality, of homophobia remains. It is an overdetermined, cryptic story, no doubt, of departures and railway stations (such as the one recalled by Jonathan Dollimore at the start of his book *Sexual Dissidence*). The day after the “life after theory” conference at the University of Loughborough in November 2001, early in the morning, I drove Jacques Derrida to the station (“the oldest railway station in England,” as a little plaque on the wall told us), to see him off on his journey back to Paris via London. Such farewells were always strange, disturbing, touching on the uncanny. As he says in *The Work of Mourning*, precisely apropos scenes of “parting in a train station”: “we do not know if and when and where we will meet again”⁴⁸ We arrived at least forty minutes early and were the only people there. It was cold, so we went into the waiting room, where we talked about, among other things, the uncanny: I asked him if he would come to Sussex and speak on the subject and he agreed to do so. (This was to have been in June 2003: the seminar never happened, in fact, for by then he was ill.) By the time the train for London arrived there were quite a few people on the platform, including a corpulent railway employee with closely cropped hair, evidently the so-called station master. (Thomas the Tank Engine eat your heart out.) Having been far and away the first people waiting for the train, we were somewhat slow to find the right coach, and then, still on the platform, we said farewell in our customary way. We embraced and kissed. We kissed in French style, *bises*, lovingly, cheek to cheek. And at this, it became obvious, the nearby official was incensed with disgust. I could see it clear as day in his eyes. He ordered the doors closed before Jacques was able to get on. I managed to stick my foot in, just in the nick of time: the official was forced to have the doors reopened and Jacques was able to board. Without a word on this subject ever being exchanged afterwards, the train departed.

48. “Letter to Francine Loreau,” in *The Work of Mourning*, eds. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2001), 95.

No Kingdom of the Queer

Calvin Thomas

Queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.

—LEE EDELMAN¹

Queer, in its deconstructive sense, designates a kind of Derridean *différance*.

—CARLA FRECCERO²

It has been written somewhere that deconstruction in the United States was successful among feminists and homosexuals. And there is always something sexual at stake in the resistance to deconstruction.

—JACQUES DERRIDA³

Deconstruction, insofar as it insists on the necessary non-coincidence of the present with itself, is in fact in some senses the [queerest] of discourses imaginable.

—GEOFF BENNINGTON⁴

At the heart of something seemingly natural, self-identical, and proper, enabling or prolonging its functionality, stands something that is unnatural, or other, or improper, with the result that the so-called opposition between natural and unnatural, self and other, proper and improper is called into doubt, and what, by rights, should only be on one side of the equation is found to be already on the other. Such instabilities, *Derrida argued*, are more common than it may be thought, and represent a grave and irreducible challenge to any concept of self-identity.

—LESLIE HILL⁵

As we know, as “it has been written,” and as I have emphasized in what you will have just (epigraphically) read, “Derrida argued.”

1. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

2. Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Hereafter cited in the text as QEM.

Or, if you prefer, as I do, to obey the still regnant rhetorical convention and employ the present tense when describing what “has been written” (and so, in a sense, bring the dead back to life), then, as we might argue:

Derrida (still) writes.

Without nostalgia (except perhaps for the phrase “without nostalgia” itself); without future (or perhaps with an unjustifiable embrace of *No Future*, refusing, heretical as the assertion may sound, any responsiveness to or responsibility for any future whatsoever); without “critical authority” or any desire to establish, inhabit, or exercise it, but also without much—it must be admitted—in the way of queer credibility, much less “Derridean” expertise (being only inexactly queer ourselves, Derrida and I, and my not having read anything like *his* every word), I (nonetheless) write, respond to an invitation to have written, that Derrida, though still, still writes, in a present tense that will of course have always already failed to be fully present or ever safely past or reassuringly *future anterior*, and so still sends trembles through “the heart” of anything “seemingly natural, self-identical, and proper,” through “any concept of self-identity,” through all the sedimented foundations of Western metaphysics, of course, but also through all the coagulated institutions of heteronormativity, and especially through any heteronormatively determined “I” (if I—“a heterosexual”—might venture to say so).

As much as any other, it was Derrida who helped to initiate and perpetuate these tremblings—helped, that is, to initiate and proliferate critical queerness, helped, in other words, to queer theory. By (still) writing. By (still) having written. For example, that:

. . . *différance* is not. It is not a present being, however

3. Jacques Derrida, “Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 16.3 (2005): 139-157. Hereafter cited in the text as WIB.

4. Geoff Bennington, “Demanding History,” in *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 15-29.

5. Leslie Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by a capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. And it is always in the name of a kingdom that one may reproach *différance* for wanting to reign.⁶

Obviously, the title of what I will have written here is drawn from this remarkable passage from “*Différance*.”⁷ As you see, I have in my kingdomless title substituted the word “queer” for the non-word “*différance*”—just as, in the epigraph from Bennington above, I have inserted the outrageously wrong word (“queerest”) in the bracketed place where the proper words, the intended words, the authorized words (which were “most historical,” in case you were wondering) should appear. Such catachreses invite the question of what makes the fungibility (though not the marriage) that I have arranged between the wrong word, the disturbing word “queer” and the non-word, the non-concept “*différance*” possible (if not, from a certain perspective, all too easy), as well as the question of *what* might abrade or even (of *who* might desire to) prohibit this hardly matrimonial alliance. And perhaps the problem of the very distinction between the *what* and the *who* will assume a crucial importance here, whether I take the Freudian slogan *Wo es war soll Ich werden* seriously to heart (as I invariably *must*, if I am to become

6. Jacques Derrida, “*Différance*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 21-22. Hereafter cited in the text as DM. For a variant translation, see *ibid.*, “*Différance*,” in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1973), 129-160. Hereafter cited as DSP.

7. In this essay, I employ both the Alan Bass and the David Allison translations of “*Différance*” (from *Margins of Philosophy* and *Speech and Phenomena*, respectively), usually for the sake of sound alone (for example, “No Kingdom of the Queer” sounds better than “No Realm of the Queer”). In one case, marked as such, I have mixed and modified the translations, trading Bass’s “tyrant” for Allison’s “king.”

anything of an “I” at all),⁸ or whether I make a complete hash of it (as I also unavoidably must, since “I” remains an other, since, as Derrida remarks in *Glas*, “I—mark[s] the division”).⁹

Or, as Derrida allows the questions to be posed in “*Différance*”: “What differs? Who differs? What is *différance*” (DSP 141)? Or again, as Donald E. Hall titles a chapter in *Queer Theories*, “Who and What is Queer?”¹⁰ And yet:

If we answered these questions even before examining them as questions, even before going back over them and questioning their form (even what seems to be most natural and necessary about them), we would fall below the level we have not reached. For if we accepted the form of the question in its own sense and syntax (“What?” “What is?” “Who is?”), we would have to admit that *différance* is derived, supervenient, controlled, and ordered from the starting point of a being-present, once capable of being something, a force, a state, or power in the world, to which we could give all kinds of names: a *what*, or being-present as a *subject*, a *who*. (Derrida DSP, 145)

We will therefore not answer these questions or accept them in their given form, but merge and deform them—“What and who (queers) differs? What is (queer) *différance*?”—so as to let them provoke an alternative interrogative series. To wit:

What can we—who profess to know a *thing* or two about this *who/what* division as *internal to* and *constitutive of* subjectivity, as a difference not *between* subject and object but *within* the subject

8. *Wo es war soll Ich werden*, usually, as in the “New Introductory Lectures,” is translated as “Where Id was, there shall Ego be.” See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Vol. 22*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), 80. But also, in Lacan’s *Écrits*, “Where it was, I must come into being.” See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 435. Or again, to take a stab at it myself, “Where a *what* was, a *who* must establish itself.”

9. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 165.

10. Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003). Hereafter cited in the text as QT.

itself, we who claim to be conversant with the ins and outs of “deconstructive anti-identitarian critical and political practice” (Freccero QEM, 6)—what can we *decisively* say about “everything within *us* that desires a kingdom”? Can we confidently state that *whatever* this “everything within us” might end up being, it cannot possibly be queer? That there can be “no kingdom of the queer” in exactly the same way as there can be “no kingdom of *différance*” and for exactly (or roughly) the same reasons? Can we conflate this (perhaps) anything-but-queer desire for a kingdom with what Derrida, in “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” calls the desire for “coherence in contradiction,” for “a fundamental ground . . . a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude”?¹¹ Can we relate the fundamental ground of this desired epistemological and ontological kingdom not only to “the privilege accorded to consciousness,” and thus to the “privilege accorded to the present,” but also to the privilege accorded to *heterosex* as the reassuringly normative coherence of *erotic* contradiction, and so assert that “this privilege [i.e., heterosexual privilege] is the ether of metaphysics, the very element of our thought insofar as it is caught up in the language of metaphysics” (DSP, 147), caught up in the language of heteronormativity, the pro-identitarian language of the desire (ours? theirs?) for a kingdom?¹² Does Lee Edelman’s designation of queerness as that

11. Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 279. Hereafter cited in the text as SSP.

12. Note the variations on the words *coherence*, *contradiction*, and *consciousness* that appear in the following description of “heteronormativity” in Berlant and Warner’s “Sex in Public”: “By heteronormativity we mean the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of the rightness produced in contradictory manifestations—often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions.” See Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (1998): 547. Hereafter cited as SIP.

which “can never define an identity but . . . only ever disturb one” allow us to assert that queerness is not “incompatible with the theme of *différance*” (DSP 146) as that theme is elaborated in the writing called “*Différance*”? Or that queerness and *différance* are “the same without being identical” in that both can be said to “instigate the subversion of every kingdom”—particularly the kingdom of self-identity (but is there any other kind?)? In other words, allowing (at least provisionally) an intimate correspondence between queer disturbance and desedimenting *différance*, and given what Derrida signals, in the following, as the *regicidal* proximity of the latter, can there be any such entity as “the queer who would be king”?

The *a* of *différance* . . . cannot be heard; it remains silent, secret, and discrete, like a tomb. It is a tomb that (provided one knows how to decipher its legend) is not far from signaling the death of the tyrant. (DSP 132; translation modified)

Of course, contemporary homophobic popular culture—to give one particularly vicious example of it—knows exactly how to answer that last question, even in its appeals to ancient legend. From the perspective of the 2007 film, *The 300*, there can indeed be such an entity, such a personage: it’s clear enough that this hyper-hetero-masculine (and so inadvertently self-queering) spectacle intends its antagonist—the marauding “Persian ‘God-king’ Xerxes”—to be deciphered as a gigantic, invasive, raging *faggot*. Perhaps, for a certain political imaginary, all “strange gods” are queer.

As for myself, I hope, in what I will have ended up writing here, to have arrived, if not at my letter’s destination, then at least “not far” from some very different, non-homophobic responses to the questions my title provokes. “On the other hand, I must be excused if I refer, at least implicitly, to one or another of the texts that I have ventured to publish” (DSP 131). Actually, no, I must *not* be excused, must *refuse* to be forgiven, for these impending textual self-references; indeed, for what little I have ventured to publish on Derrida (the worst chapter of *Male Matters*),¹³ I do not excuse

13. Calvin Thomas, *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

myself, while for what I (“a heterosexual”) have ventured to publish on queer theory (a longer but not much better list of texts), you yourself must never forgive me.¹⁴ Permit me, however, to point out that at some juncture in each of my inexcusably and unjustifiably “straight queer” texts, there does come that necessary moment of attempted authorial self-justification (in the form, kicking it old-school, of the “review of scholarship”), the moment at which I am compelled to round up the (un)usual suspects, to trundle out an enabling assemblage of proper names (Butler, Berlant, Warner, Halperin, Hall, Sedgwick, Bersani, Edelman, Dean) and critical articulations, a battery of established renegade theorists and statements,¹⁵ each brandishing its own properly queer *bona fides*, its

14. See Calvin Thomas, “Crossing the Streets, Queering the Sheets; or, ‘Do You Want to Save the Changes to Queer Heterosexuality?’” Foreword to *Straight Writ Queer: Non-normative Expressions of Heterosexual Desire in Literature*, ed. Richard Fantina (Ashville and London: McFarland Press, 2006), 1-8; *ibid.*, “Is Straight Self-Understanding Possible?” *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 13.2 (Fall 2002): 17-24; *ibid.*, *Masculinity, Psychoanalysis, Straight Queer Theory: Essays on Abjection in Literature, Mass Culture, and Film* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008); *ibid.*, “Moments of Productive Bafflement: or, Defamiliarizing Graduate Studies in English,” *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 5.1 (Winter 2005): 19-35; hereafter cited as MPB; *ibid.*, “On Being Post-Normal: Heterosexuality After Queer Theory,” in *The Ashgate Companion to Queer Theory*, eds. Michael O’Rourke and Noreen Giffney (London: Ashgate, 2008); *ibid.*, “Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality,” in *Genders 26: The Gay 90s: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Formations in Queer Studies*, eds. Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 83-115; reprinted in *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*, ed. Calvin Thomas, with Joseph O. Aimone and Catherine A.F. MacGillivray (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 11-44.

15. See, for example, Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993); Michael Warner, “Introduction,” *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii-xxxi. Hereafter cited in the text as FQP.

own “critically queer” authority, but each providing in its own way the condition of possibility (if not exactly its author’s *intentional* justification or licensure) for the “straight queer” engagement I am attempting to perform or inscribe. I will not rehearse this necessary moment yet again here. I will submit, however, that each of these enabling articulations, if read closely, reveals itself to be a “deconstructive proposition” (are there queer theorists *worthy of the name* who have not, somewhere along the line, been readers of Derrida?). Conversely, it could be suggested that any deconstructive proposition, if read closely, will reveal itself to be queer. And if we follow this particular line of thought we come perilously close to the proposition (at once abyssal and flippant) that any proposition, if read closely, could turn out to be deconstructive—and hence queer.

I will not hold back at the edge of this insignificant abyss but rather allow the “necessary moment” of which I write above to collapse (catachrestically) into the “moment” or “event” or “rupture” to which Derrida alludes at the beginning of “Structure, Sign, and Play,” the moment that “presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought.” As Derrida (still) writes:

This was the moment in which language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of center or origin, everything became discourse [. . .] that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (SSP 280)

In other words, given language’s so-called invasion of the universal problematic, given “the linguistic turn” of the universal screw, it is always already “a queer planet.” The world is always already “queerer than ever.”¹⁶ The wrong-word “queer,” like the non-word “*différance*,” signifies the disturbance of identity that corresponds to

16. I allude here of course to Michael Warner’s claim that the project of queer theory is to make “the world queerer than ever.” See Michael Warner, “Introduction,” *Fear of a Queer Planet*, xxvii.

the absence of the transcendental signified that extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*.

But “where and how does this decentering”—this queering, this *différance*, this *queerance*—“this notion of the structurality of structure, occur” (SSP 280)? If we respond with the question “Where else and how else but *in the text*?” then we acknowledge that the answers to the questions of where and how, as well as those of who and what, are nowhere (foundationally) but everywhere (figuratively) to be found. Language having invaded the universal problematic, the text, like “sex” of any all-too-human variety, has “no natural site” (SSP 280) or locus, and no supernatural or transcendental guarantee. And if there is, as Derrida (still) writes, “no outside the text,”¹⁷ then human reality (the planet, the universal problematic, the world that must always be made to mean) is also always already queer.

Yes, to be sure, I am—totally and globally, abysmally and flippantly—conflating textuality, which never confirms but only ever disturbs identity, with human reality as such, while thoroughly saturating that reality with queerness, or *queerance*, “itself.” I am suggesting, again, here, what I have already submitted in one or another of the aforementioned texts engaged with “queer theory” that I have ventured to publish, that theory “itself” (but would there ever be any such endeavor as “theory” without Derrida’s having written?) is queering, that theory and/or Derrida and/or “the linguistic turn” turned or torqued or twisted me (“a heterosexual”) into the queer thing that/who “I” is/am today, and, more specifically, that *literary* theory (will there ever be any such thing as *literature* without Derrida’s having written?) is queer, that *literature*, which never ceases to conceal/reveal the absence of natural locus and transcendental signified, is in some senses the queerest of discourses imaginable.

The fact that others, recognizably queerer than I, have articulated similar arguments means, among other things, that something resembling the “necessary moment” of unjustifiable justification is about to be re-enacted after all. So: “Let us begin

17. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Corrected Edition), trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 158.

again” (DSP 142). Or rather, “Let us begin with the problem of signs and writing—since we are already in the midst of it” (DSP 138). In the introductory chapter, called “Prolepses,” of her *Queer/Early/Modern*, Carla Freccero writes that “the *queer* of this collection of critical interventions [i.e., her own] is difficult to define in advance”:

Over the past decade and a half, this term, as taken up by political movements and by the academy, has undergone myriad transformations and has been the object of heated definitional as well as political debates. . . . It is a term that, here, does have something to do with a critique of literary critical and historical presumptions of sexual and gender (hetero)normativity, in cultural contexts and in textual subjectivities. It also has something to do with the sexual identities and positionalities, as well as the subjectivities, that have come to be called lesbian, gay, and transgender, but also perverse and narcissistic—that is, queer. At times, *queer* continues to exploit its productive indeterminacy as a word used to designate that which is odd, strange, aslant; in this respect, I argue that all textuality, when subjected to close reading, can be said to be queer. (QEM 5)

A bit further on, in a chapter called “Always Already Queer (French) Theory,” Freccero illuminates and explains that title by writing:

Queer, in its deconstructive sense, designates a kind of Derridean *différance*, occupying an interstitial space between binary oppositions. . . . This use of *queer* finds its energy from the way the term works to undo the binary between *straight* and *gay*, operating uncannily between but also elsewhere. *Queer*—precisely by marking out the space and time of *différance*—can thus show how the two, *gay* and *straight*, are inter-implicated and how they differ from themselves from within. . . . Meanwhile, *queer* can also be a grammatical perversion, a misplaced pronoun, the wrong proper name; it is what is strange, odd, funny, not quite right, improper. Queer is what is and is not there, what disaggregates the coherence of the norm from the very beginning and is ignored in the force to make sense out of the unintelligibilities of grammar and syntax. . . .

It is in this sense that queer theory seems French, that French-influenced poststructuralist theory is already queer in the U.S. context. . . . The “linguistic turn” in French theory . . . not only facilitates the rise of queer theory as a literary cultural practice in the United States, but also lends an “always already” quality to the activity of queering. French theory has, in other words, made possible the demonstration of how tropological dimensions of language subvert the very heteronormativity of Western logocentrism and thus, for example, how desire and identification may be unfixed from their sexually differentiated and opposed poles. Indeed, *queer* may be said to emerge spectrally in deconstructive critique. (QEM 18-19)

Conversely, of course, it might be said that deconstruction emerges spectrally in *queer* critique. Or, as Freccero’s commentary would seem to allow, both deconstruction and queering—deconstruction *as* queering, differing/deferring as *queerance*—emerge spectrally in and as *literary critique*, the radical critique of “normal” human reality that literature, arguably, always already enacts. Freccero insinuates as much when she suggests that “if one were being playfully adjectival . . . one might call English departments departments of queer studies” (QEM 18).¹⁸ But the funny thing about Freccero’s playful

18. And why wouldn’t one want to be playfully adjectival? Well, one might take a cautionary note from Judith Halberstam’s critique of Marjorie Garber’s excessive punning in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Starting from Garber’s pun on the term “waterloo” in describing “the drama of bathroom surveillance,” Halberstam writes: “Although the pun is clever and even amusing, it is also troubling to see how often Garber turns to punning in her analyses. The constant use of puns throughout the book has the overall effect of making gender crossing sound like a game or at least trivializes the often life-or-death processes involved in cross-identification. This is not to say gender can never be a ‘laughing matter’ and must always be treated seriously but only to question the use of the pun here as a theoretical method.” See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), 281. Here I’m tempted to rephrase the old Emma Goldman saw—if *I can’t dance at your revolution I don’t want to come*—to read: if I can’t drop a load of puns in your revolutionary bathroom, I don’t want to use it. Of course, I doubt very much Judith Halberstam cares where I stall myself.

renomination of the English department—other than the fact that it generously queers every member of said department simply by virtue of each member’s being studious, a close reader (while we all know that some of our most studious colleagues don’t read all *that* closely)—the funny thing is that it resembles (without being identical to) a certain half-serious comment I once tossed off in a text called “Moments of Productive Bafflement, or, Defamiliarizing Graduate Studies in English.” In that text (the first part of its title is owed to Gayatri Spivak), I somehow manage never to mention the word “queer” (and, even rarer for me, omit the word “fuck” altogether), but I do “playfully” suggest that “If I [as a Director of Graduate Studies in English] had my way, if I could institutionalize my slightest whims [if I were, perhaps, a king or a tyrant], I would . . . call the studies which I am supposed to direct ‘Graduate Studies in Defamiliarization’” (MPB 25).

Now, in noting this silly resemblance, am I suggesting that queering (English departments) and defamiliarizing (Graduate Studies in English) are “the same” or at least related activities, and so (given that literary formalism posits defamiliarization as defining the very “literariness” of literature itself) further attempting to lubricate the insertion of *queerance* into “the text” and textuality into “the queer”? “There is no simple answer to such a question” (DSP 153). I will say, however, that comparing Freccero’s adjectival play to my own institutional whimsy at least allows me to get the word “defamiliarization” on the table, and so keep the question of the queerness of literature and the literariness of the queer alive. But of course it isn’t as if “defamiliarization” wasn’t already *on* the table, at least in the sense that the word has a history of showing up in discussions of both deconstruction and “queering” (particularly when the verb indicates not “turning into a homosexual” but rather otherwise “making strange”). Moreover, since “defamiliarization” does in fact hold a formalist (albeit Russian) pedigree, the word tends to factor into charges of “apolitical formalism” routinely leveled against both deconstruction and queer theory.

My concern here is not to insist that defamiliarizing, deconstructing, queering, writing, and making art (not to mention “having sex”) are all “the same” activity, but to allow that all can be said to perform mutually supportive work in the ongoing “labor of ambiguitating categories of identity” (Berlant and Warner SIP, 345).

To fully demonstrate that allowance, that performance, that hard (but anti-coagulating) collective labor, would require more temporalizing/spatializing (i.e., writing) than I can allow myself here. Were I to attempt such a demonstration, however, I might begin by revisiting the old question of why Derrida insists that “*différance* is neither a *word* nor a *concept*” (DSP 130). I might suggest that while today, for us, it is no longer quite accurate to say that *différance* is not a word (for we can locate it as such in multiple dictionaries, not excluding, say, Julian Woolfrey’s *Critical Keywords in Literary and Cultural Theory*), the claim that *différance* is not a concept still obtains, and for all the reasons Derrida gives (although, for the reasons he gives and in the sense that he means, even the claim that *différance* is not a word might still prove persuasive). And, were I actually demonstrating, I might point to the moment in “*Différance*” where Derrida explains himself in this regard, where he quotes Saussure to the effect that “in language there are only differences *without positive terms*,” and then adds:

The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present to itself in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. Such a play, then—*différance*—is no longer simply a concept but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general. For the same reason, *différance*, which is not a concept, is not a mere word; that is, it is not what we represent to ourselves as the calm and present self-referential unity of a concept and sound. (DSP 140)

I would then reach further back into the history of the so-called “linguistic turn,” the history of the questioning of conceptuality’s possibility, to Nietzsche—but not without sneaking in Donald Hall’s description of Nietzsche as a “proto-postmodernist” and “proto-queer” philosopher, “who took up most intensely the late nineteenth century challenge to received notions of normality” (QT 56, 58)—and I would no doubt trot out the famous passage in “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (which is also an extra-normal sense) in which Nietzsche happily deconstructs “the

formation of concepts.”¹⁹ I would then be compelled to visit, if only in a footnote, the aptly defamiliarizing, epistemologically devastating moment in Book Five of *The Gay Science*—the section called “*The origin of our concept of ‘knowledge.’*”²⁰—but not without alluding to Nietzsche’s influence on Victor Shklovsky (who of course developed the notion of defamiliarization) and to the manner in which Shklovsky’s essay, “Art as Technique,” is explicitly formulated as an anti-epistemological intervention.²¹ I would then probably make the gesture of linking Shklovsky’s emphasis on “the principle of phonetic ‘roughening’ of poetic language,” i.e., his claim that “the

19. Nietzsche reveals how concepts are formed through the forgetting or erasure or repression of differences, if not of *différance*: “Every word . . . becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases—which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept ‘leaf’ is formed by an arbitrarily discarding these individual differences by forgetting.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 117.

20. Here is the defamiliarizing passage from *The Gay Science*: “What is it that the common people take for knowledge? What do they want when they want ‘knowledge’? Nothing more than this: Something strange is to be reduced to something *familiar*. And we philosophers—have we really meant *more* than this when we have spoken of knowledge? What is familiar means what we are used to so that we no longer marvel at it, our everyday, some rule in which we are stuck, anything at all in which we feel at home. Look, isn’t our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us? Is it not the *instinct of fear* that bids us to know? And is the jubilation of those who attain knowledge not the jubilation over the restoration of a sense of security?” See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Nietzsche Reader*, 368.

21. Question: why, in an essay that posits defamiliarization as the defining formal protocol of literary technique—i.e., the technique that produces the very literariness of literature—does Shklovsky spend so much time talking about sex? Possible answer: because human sex is *fucking strange*. See Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3rd Edition, ed. David Richter (New York: Bedford-St. Martin’s, 2007), 775-85. Hereafter cited as AT.

language of poetry is . . . a difficult, *roughened*, impeded language” (AT 783; my emphasis) to Donald Hall’s reference to queer theory’s persistent “questionings and *abrasions* of normality” (QT 54; my emphasis). Then, having roughly traded defamiliarization for queering by virtue of nothing better than a linguistic similarity, I would more than likely bring the problem of conceptuality back into the mix by quoting Julian Woolfreys’ *Critical Keywords* to the effect that:

The mobility of “queer,” its resistance to definition and its affirmation of that which in identity is irreducible to any heteronormative domestication calls into question the efficacy of any categorization. . . . Moreover, such affirmation implies a critique of the limits of normative concepts, if not the act of conceptualization itself.²²

And of course the mobile implications of this quotation would allow me to circle metaleptically back to Derrida and to suggest that there was, after all, something always already queer about his insistence that *différance* is neither a word nor a concept.

It’s really too bad that I can’t perform this demonstration, because it might very well have made the case that “*Queer*, in its deconstructive sense, designates a kind of Derridean *différance*” (Freccero QEM, 18), that defamiliarizing, deconstructing, queering, and making artful sentences can all be said to perform mutually supportive, identity-disturbing work, or play, the sort of work-play or word-play that troubles any calm and present self-referential unity.

What, then, about the aforementioned/unmentioned “having sex”? At the end of the day, shouldn’t “queer” pertain in some specific way to the practice of sex or the question of sexuality? Derrida specifies with sufficient vagueness that “there is always something sexual at stake in the resistance to deconstruction” (WIB 148). Although I would doubt the inverted form of this proposition, i.e., doubt that there is anything deconstructive in the resistance to having sex, I would say that there is everything deconstructive in the

22. Julian Woolfreys, *Critical Keywords in Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006), 202-203.

resistance to having *a* sex, having to have or be *one* sex, having to have one identifiable “sexual orientation,” having the “truth” of one’s sexual or erotic or corporeal being-in-the-world reduced to one specific identity category or another. And since categorization is the essential act of heteronormative conceptualization *qua* domestication *qua* naturalization, to the extent that deconstruction resists it, to that extent deconstruction plays its part in queerness as “resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner FQP, xxvi), “which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom,” and which, finally (but without finale), makes it obvious that there can be no kingdom of the queer, if only because there can be no queer without catachresis.

Or, as Derrida (still) (queerly) writes:
 “Let us begin again.”

Derrida and the Question of “Woman”

Sarah Dillon

This essay resumes after an anacoluthic interruption.¹ It returns to the question of “woman” which I raised but left unanswered in a paper presented at the *Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy* conference.² When I presented that paper, my discussant asked, with acute perceptiveness, why I had concentrated in the end on grammar—the figure of the *anacoluthon*—and left undeveloped the question of “woman.” My answer was instinctive and immediate: “Because grammar’s easier.” I still hold by this assertion. The question of “woman,” both in Jacques Derrida’s writing and beyond, is difficult and complex. It consists, as I understand it, of two interrelated parts: the first is the question of the relation between “woman” and *women*, that is, between a philosophical or ontological concept of

1. [Anacoluthic, adj., a syntactical inconsistency or incoherence within a sentence, esp. a shift in an unfinished sentence from one syntactic construction to another (e.g. “you really ought—well, do it your own way”); from, n., *anacoluthon*. —Ed.]

2. *Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy*, a conference organized by the Aberystwyth Post-International Group in January 2005. The paper was published a year later in *Research in Phenomenology*’s memorial edition for Jacques Derrida. See Sarah Dillon, “Life After Derrida: Anacoluthia and the Agrammaticality of Following,” *Research in Phenomenology* 36 (2006): 97–114. Selected papers from that conference have been collected in *Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy*, ed. Madeleine Fagan, et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007). The first draft of this paper was presented at *Derrida’s Legacies*, a conference hosted by the Forum for European Philosophy in London, England, 1st March 2008. I would like to thank both the organizers of the conference and Michael O’Rourke for prompting me to return to thinking about the question of “woman” in Derrida.

“woman” and the political and everyday realities of embodied female subjects; the second is the question of the relation between women and men, the question of *sexual difference*. My issue in the earlier paper was with the first aspect of this question—Derrida’s use of “woman” in his writings. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak elaborates in her review essay of Derrida’s *La carte postale* (1981)—“Love Me, Love my Ombre, Elle” (1984)—Derrida uses “woman” as *the* figure of deconstructive undecidability, part of a process of resexualizing phallogocentric discourse that is integral to his deconstruction of Western metaphysics.³ This raises the question, however, of the relation between “woman” and women, and how, if at all, Derrida’s philosophical use of “woman” is any different from the fetishization of “woman” in Western metaphysics. The answer to this question, I now understand, lies in what Derrida repeatedly talks of as the two phases of deconstruction. As I will show in this essay, Derrida’s use of “woman” *does* repeat, in that it merely reverses, the philosophical gesture of phallogocentrism, but this is only a necessary stage in the first phase of deconstruction, which simply reverses the oppositional hierarchies of metaphysics: i.e., previously, the masculine has been privileged philosophically, so now Derrida will philosophically privilege the feminine. Derrida uses “woman” at this stage precisely because of, and for, her oppositional power. However, he does *not* use “woman” in the second phase of the deconstruction of sexual difference in order to rethink (sexual) relationality otherwise than as opposition, for if that relation is no longer one of opposition, “woman” no longer retains any oppositional power. Consequently, Derrida does not use the word “woman” in a context in which he is also, at the same time, dealing with the lived experience of actual women, so to speak. Rather, in this context, he introduces the thought of the “gift,” and the time and movement of “dance,” in order to refigure and displace (sexual) relationality in a way that not only deconstructs the oppositional relationship between man and woman, but also the oppositional relationship between philosophy and politics, i.e., the abstract and the concrete, which has been the grounds for the initial challenge to his use of the figure “woman.”

3. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle,” *Diacritics* 14.4 (1984): 19-36. Hereafter cited in the text as LM.

Derrida's treatment of the question of "woman" occurs in three types of texts: the first are those texts in which he analyzes the question of "woman" in the writing of previous philosophers, most notably, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Lévinas; the second are those texts in which he himself uses the figure of the "woman"—or related concepts, such as the hymen and double invagination—in order to theorize the (feminine) operation of deconstructive undecidability; the third are those texts which themselves occupy an undecidable generic position—"somewhere between speech and writing,"⁴ as the original preface to "Women in the Beehive" (1984) has it—in which Derrida is asked directly about the question of "woman."⁵ In the written interview with Christie V. McDonald, "Choreographies" (1982), Derrida's response to McDonald's first question is a reflection upon the very *genre* of their exchange:

Will I be able to write improvising my responses as I go along? It would be more worthwhile, wouldn't it? Too premeditated an interview would be without interest here. I do not see the particular finality of such an endeavor, its proper end. It would be interminable, or, rather, with respect to these questions—which are much too difficult—I would never have even dared to begin.⁶

4. See Jacques Derrida, "Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida" [1984], in *Men in Feminism*, ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (London: Routledge, 1987), 189. Hereafter cited in the text as WB.

5. The first category of texts includes: *Spurs* (1978) on Nietzsche; "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am" (1984) on Lévinas; and "Geschlecht" (1983) and "Geschlecht II" (1984) on Heidegger. The second includes, perhaps most obviously, texts where Derrida employs terminology associated with the female body, such as hymen in "The Double Session," *Dissemination* (1981), and double invagination in "Living on: Borderlines" (1979), but this category also contains the majority of Derrida's texts in which one finds, more or less explicit or implicit, the feminine operation of deconstructive undecidability. One such example is the deconstruction of the Western metaphysical concept of "friendship" via an analysis of its exclusion of the woman to be found in *Politics of Friendship* (1997), but there are many more, some of which are considered later in this essay.

6. Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, "Choreographies," *Diacritics* 12.2 (1982): 66. Hereafter cited in the text as C.

The genre of the interview allows Derrida to be (im)provisional; it functions as a unique dance; “it should happen only once, neither grow heavy nor ever plunge too deep, above all, it should not lag or trail behind its time” (C 66); its peculiar time and place, as well as its very etymology, allow us, along with Derrida, to “take a glimpse” (C 66) into the question of “woman.”⁷ Reading “Choreographies” and “Women in the Beehive”—the transcription of a seminar—in dialogue with each other prolongs the fleeting moment of that “glimpse” and clarifies how this question is negotiated in Derrida’s writing and thought and how it leads to a queer reinterpretation of (sexual) relationality.

I

In “Choreographies,” Derrida summarizes the critiques of Lévinas and Heidegger in relation to the question of “woman” that he works through in detail in “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am” (1984),⁸ and “Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference” (1983),⁹ respectively. In the first text, he exposes the way in which Lévinas’ argument that sexual difference is secondary to “humanity in general” (C 73) risks restoring “the classical interpretation” which “gives a masculine sexual marking to what is presented either as neutral originariness or, at least, as prior and superior to all sexual markings” (C 73). In the second text, he indicates that Heidegger’s neutralization—or, as Derrida suggests in “Women in the Beehive,” “neuterization” (WB 194)—of *Dasein* also risks participating in exactly the same classical interpretation in that, “to the extent which universality implies neutralization, you can be sure that it’s only a hidden way of confirming the man in his power” (WB 194). Derrida explains that his use of terms such

7. As McDonald glosses for us, “In French, to take a glimpse is to look into the space between things, *entrevoir*, that is, inter-view” (C 66).

8. See Jacques Derrida, “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am” [1984], in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007), 143-190.

9. See Jacques Derrida, “Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference,” trans. Ruben Berezdivin, *Research in Phenomenology* 13 (1983): 65-83.

as *hymen* and *invagination* which, as McDonald carefully puts it, “in their most widely recognized sense pertain to the woman’s body” (C 71), is part of a process of “resexualizing a philosophical or theoretical discourse, which has been too ‘neutralizing’ in this respect” (C 75). This resexualization of philosophical discourse via specific terms such as hymen and invagination is part of a wider operation in relation to “woman” performed across Derrida’s writings. In “Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle,” Spivak traces this operation in order to argue that “‘woman’ on the scene of Derrida’s writing, from being a figure of ‘special interest,’ occupies the place of a general critique of the history of Western thought” (LM 22). She substantiates this claim with reference to a range of Derrida’s texts in which “woman” represents the possibility of a critique of Western phallogocentrism by enabling the very possibility of deconstruction. In *Spurs*, for instance, Spivak notes that “woman is taken, via Nietzsche, as a name for citationality” (LM 22) and thus becomes (as also happens in “The Double Session”) the figure via which Derrida performs a critique of the proper.¹⁰ Moreover, in “To Speculate: On Freud” (1980), when “Derrida uses the concept of semi-mourning (*demi-deuil*) to describe the conduct of the text, once again the abyss-structure that can be named ‘woman’ is invoked” (Spivak, LM 23).

Under the heading of “Sexual Difference,” Geoffrey Bennington provides further examples of this movement in his “Derridabase” (1993), pointing to the intervention of a “female” voice “in dialogues or polylogues such as ‘Restitutions,’ . . . ‘Pas,’ . . . the ‘reading’ of *Droit de regards*, or *Feu la cendre*.”¹¹ He also notes that in *Glas* (1974), “the ‘*déjà*’ (but also the signature and the counter-signature) is associated with the mother” and that, in “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am,” it is in “a dialogue also involving a female voice” (DB 204) that Lévinas is suspected

10. See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978). Hereafter cited in the text as S. *Ibid.*, “The Double Session,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), 173–285. Hereafter cited in the text as DS.

11. Geoffrey Bennington, “Derridabase,” in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), 204. Hereafter cited in the text as DB.

of the phallogocentric consequences of neutralization. It is this movement to which I am responding in “Life After Derrida” (2006), when I comment on “the femininity of Derrida’s idea of fidelity—a following that is also a not following—which is key to his concept of inheritance”¹² in “‘Le Parjure,’ *Perhaps*: Storytelling and Lying,” and to which Nicholas Royle was responding in a discussion recorded in *life.after.theory* (2003), when he notes that the figure of “woman” functions in Derrida’s work as “a kind of anacoluthon.”¹³ I have included all this to demonstrate the full extent to which what Spivak calls “the ‘feminine operation’ of undecidability” (LM 23) is at work in Derrida’s corpus. From the weight of textual evidence, it seems unquestionable that the term “woman” takes (its) place in Derrida’s work alongside other terms, such as “*différance*,” “*parergon*,” “*writing*,” “*the supplement*,” but Spivak goes even further, arguing that “it is by no means one among many Derridean themes” (LM 23). Rather, for Spivak, “it is perhaps the most tenacious name for the limit that situates and undermines the vanguard of every theory seeking to be adequate to its theme” (LM 23). For Spivak, “woman” is a “privileged figure” (LM 24) in Derrida’s writing, a necessary consequence, it seems, of his critique of Western thought as phallogocentrism.

Spivak’s text, however, is marked by an ambivalence that betrays itself at certain moments in her discussion. This ambivalence circulates around the question of the relation between “woman” and *women*, between, one might also say, philosophy and social reality. Spivak first opens this question in her discussion of *La carte postale*, when she asks: “why should we read an elaboration of such a problematic given the urgency of ‘the rest of the world?’” (LM 20), a question which, as she indicates, she returns to in her conclusion. Spivak argues that *La carte postale* can be considered a feminist text, given its sympathetic treatment of love letters, its emphasis on the figure of Freud’s daughter/mother, Sophie, and its critique of Lacan’s phallogocentrism. Repeating the resexualizing gesture of

12. See Sarah Dillon, “Life After Derrida: Anacoluthia and the Agrammaticality of Following,” *Research in Phenomenology* 36 (2006): 104.

13. See *life.after.theory*, eds. Michael Payne and John Schad (London: Continuum, 2003), 6.

Derrida's own discourse, Spivak in fact posits that "the structural project of this book can itself be called invagination" (LM 21). She is all too aware, though, of the critiques of such a description:

The pragmatic style of North American and English criticism (feminist or masculinist) might find such appellations "a kind of word play . . . detached from what we have to struggle with" [Colette Gaudin et al., "Introduction," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 10]. This presupposes a three-part description of reality: practical complexity (what we have to struggle with)—responsible theory (in touch with that complexity)—irresponsibly word-playing theory. In this view, good theory is seen to abstract the principles of the concrete struggle, leading to efficient understanding. (Spivak, LM 21)

Spivak, however, understands Derrida's project "as an undoing of such oppositions" (LM 21). What Derrida's work reveals is the extent to which "even the most abstract-seeming judgements are arrived at by way of, even constituted by, unwittingly value-laden story lines" (LM 21). Derrida's writing exposes the habitual and thus unquestioned narratives—"so practiced that they seem self-evident logical propositions" (LM 21)—that determine the very structures that create "social reality" and that determine the actions of "subjects" functioning in that reality. Accordingly, by drawing attention to the values of such narratives, and by creating counter-narratives—such as the resexualization of philosophical discourse under the name of "woman"—Derrida's writing performs a twofold function: it undoes the division between the philosophical and the social, between, as Spivak calls them, the concrete and the abstract; and it provides alternative grounds for judgements and decisions, alternate philosophical narratives that can determine social structures and actions otherwise.

This, at least, is Spivak's explanation of the relationship between the thought of "woman" and the concrete reality of women in Derrida's writing. But the scene of writing of Spivak's own text betrays an uncertainty on this point. Following her summary of Derrida's treatment of "woman" and the hymen in "The Double Session," there occurs a passage in which the grammar is revealing:

Of course, these deductions are based on a curious view of woman and an implicit identification of (male) pleasure (“sem(e)-ination”) as the signified, however besieged. To see indeterminacy in the figure of women might be the effect of an ethico-legal narrative whose oppressive hegemony still remains largely unquestioned. Yet it must be recognized that the deduction allows Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche and Mallarmé to make woman the mark of the critique of the proper. (Spivak, LM 22)

The power and import of the opening “of course” is unclear—why should this be so evidently the case? In the second sentence, the use of the infinitive form of the verb “to see” removes the necessity for a grammatical subject; it thus remains undecidable *who* is performing this act of seeing, which leaves unquestioned, indeed perpetuates, the oppressive hegemony of a certain ethico-legal narrative. The careful grammatical undecidability of Spivak’s own text alleviates the necessity for her to formulate a direct critique of Derrida—since the subject here could equally be Mallarmé—and his figuration of the woman as “indeterminacy,” a critique that could raise the question how, if at all, this movement in Derrida’s text is any different from the essentializing gesture of Western metaphysics, an essentialism that remains, paradoxically, both necessary to the action of identity politics and insufficient in representing the diverse realities of the subjects on whose behalf such action is taken. That this question might indeed be troubling Spivak’s text is revealed in the anomalous use of the plural “women” in the second sentence of this passage, rather than the singular “woman” which is used consistently in the rest of the text. “The word ‘woman’” (Spivak, LM 23) may well take its place in Derrida’s writing—in a chain of terms such as *différance* and *writing*—, but what is the relation between “the word ‘woman’” and women? Even as Spivak recognizes the feminine operation of undecidability in Derrida’s text, she cannot but ask, if only in a footnote, “does such a ‘generalization’ of woman negate ‘woman in the narrow sense’?” (LM 24, n. 9).¹⁴

14. There are several further moments where Spivak’s ambivalence regarding her account of Derrida and the question of woman betrays itself. In her discussion of “Plato’s Pharmacy,” for instance, she notes that “the

At the beginning of “Love Me,” Spivak promises that her conclusion will “offer some criticism of such a use of the figure of woman” (LM 25). It is to this section that we will now turn:

What we have in *La carte postale*, then, is a spectacle of how a male philosopher trained in the School of Plato and Hegel and Nietzsche and Heidegger acknowledges the importance of sexual difference and tries to articulate the name of woman. He does not deny that he is tied to the tradition. He cannot show his readers womankind made heterogeneous by many worlds and many classes. Although such a philosopher can wish to deconstruct the methodological opposition between empiricism and structuralism [*Grammatology* 162], in fact it is a binary opposition he often seems to honor, with the privilege going to structure. . . . Thus it would be unwise to look in Derrida for a deconstitution of the history of the concept “it-woman”—as opposed to “we-men”—where the line between empiricism and structuralism would shift and waver. Yet we might want to attend to him because the

[bastard] mother’s son is directly related to another name for undecidability: writing. . . . the phallogocentric philosopher systematically resists the possibility that all discourse is dependent upon the producer’s absence, and thus irreducibly illegitimate—a mother’s son” (LM 25)—she adds, but only as a undeveloped parenthetical aside: “(The daughter is not in sight.)” (LM 25). In a more explicit moment of critique, she refuses Derrida the benefit of the doubt in relation to his masculinist treatment of orgasm—“although I know that Derrida might be parodying that Platonism which, identifying orgasm with semination—as in the male—declares in the *Laws* that the law of nature is coupling destined for reproduction, I cannot not think that, like Normal Mailer and his thousand ancestors, he might also be repeating it; and repeating his own critique of Freud, I would withhold the benefit of the doubt: ‘description takes sides when it induces a practice, an ethics, and an institution, therefore a politics assuring the tradition of its truth’” (LM 27)—and draws attention to a lack of “a deconstitution of the sedimentation” (LM 28) of metaphors derived from such terms as “generation” and “reproduction.” At the same time, she is quick to insist that commentary such as this does not constitute a critique of Derrida: “I am not necessarily faulting Derrida here. I am restraining the enthusiasm of readers like the two (woman) intellectuals in France who maintained in pedagogic discussion that Derrida ‘wrote like a woman’” (LM 28).

tradition that he is thus "feminizing," or opening up, has been the most prestigious articulation of the privileging of man. He thus shows us the dangers of borrowing the methodological imperatives of that tradition uncritically. (LM 35)

Thus, for Spivak, Derrida's position in relation to the question of "woman" is delimited by his gender, his training, and the location of his thought firmly within the Western philosophical tradition he, nevertheless, deconstructs. Accordingly, given such (dis)enabling limitations, Derrida should be valued for what he does manage to achieve—a feminizing of phallogocentric discourse—and acquitted for what he cannot: "he cannot show his readers womankind made heterogeneous by many worlds and many classes." Despite his wish to deconstruct the opposition between empiricism and structuralism, Derrida is still (poor helpless male philosopher) bound by it, and thus it would be unwise (unfair, unkind) of us, his readers, to expect from him any sustained critique of the philosophical reduction of women to the word "woman" in which his refigurations partake. In attempting to excuse Derrida here Spivak in fact leaves him exposed and vulnerable, dependent upon the wise generosity of his readers to forgive him his philosophical-political shortcomings. In doing so, she undermines the very case she put forward for him in defense of critics like [Colette] Gaudin, and reinstates the division between the concrete and the abstract, the socio-political and the philosophical, "woman" and women, which she is at such pains (at the start of her essay) to demonstrate that Derrida's writing deconstructs.

Is it Derrida or Spivak who is at fault here? Or, to phrase it differently, which Spivak is right? The one who ends the passage above, or the one who ends "Love Me" with the observation that "we academic women of the First World" can learn from Derrida "that sexuality, 'the woman's role,' is not in simple opposition to 'real politics,' and that a vision that dismisses a man's conduct in love as immaterial to his 'practical' stands would not be able to see the generally warping legacy of masculinism implicit in the . . . polarizations" we find in texts such as Marx's love letters (LM 35). This, she says, "is why Derrida reads great men's love letters and writes about them as he writes about their 'serious' work" (LM 35). In the following section, I will address the question of methodology

alluded to by Spivak in the passage above in order to draw attention to the two phase movement in Derrida's thought, which he refers to in both "Choreographies" and "Women in the Beehive." Here, "woman" does not bear—and is not required to bear—any actual relation to women.¹⁵ Rather, in this respect, Derrida introduces two new concepts—the "gift" and the "dance"—which together function as deconstructive counter-narratives rewriting both the abstract and the concrete realities of sexual difference and heteronormativity.

II

In addition to the question of the relation between "woman" and women, there is a second question that arises in relation to Derrida's use of the figure of "woman," namely, how, if at all, is Derrida's repeated use of "woman" as a figure of undecidability any different, *in its methodology*, to the various other figurations of "woman" that have occurred throughout the history of Western metaphysics, and, one might add, Western literature? At the end of "Women in the Beehive," one of the seminar participants addresses this question directly to Derrida:

This question is related to something you said earlier.
You said that in Western culture, the word "man" means

15. This also accounts for Derrida's insistence on a division between the concepts of "woman," the hymen, and invagination, and their physical counterparts in embodied female subjects. He has insisted on this division in *Spurs*, for instance, where he performs the feminine operation of deconstructive undecidability in relation to truth—"that which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth—*feminine*"—but warns that "this should not, however, be hastily mistaken for a woman's femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other of those essentializing fetishes which might still tantalize the dogmatic philosopher, the impotent artist or the inexperienced seducer who has not yet escaped his foolish hopes of capture" (S 55). In "Choreographies," where Derrida is perfectly aware that terms like "hymen" and "invagination," as McDonald puts it, "pertain to the woman's body" (C 71)—and where he is using them precisely because of this, as part of his resexualization project—"that being said," he qualifies, "hymen' and 'invagination,' at least in the context into which these words have been swept, no longer simply designate figures for the feminine body" (C 75).

"mankind" and the word "woman" means "truth." But in your own writings woman seems to be theorized as a whole list of things mentioned earlier, in the quotation from Gayatri Spivak. And to use one phrase from "The Law of Genre," a "random drift" which affects the masculine genre and threatens to make it other. I guess I'm asking you to explain how woman as man's "random drift" is different from woman as man's "truth." (WB 203)

In his answer, Derrida misses the import of the seminar participant's question, focusing on the difference *in content* between what he and previous philosophers do with "woman," rather than responding to the question of methodology. "This is an abyssal question," he says, "for there is a certain determination of truth which permits one to answer that woman as truth is that which stops the drift, that which interrupts and assures truth" (WB 203).¹⁶ Derrida does not address the question of how his treatment of "woman" differs from the fetishization of "woman" that occurs in Western metaphysics.¹⁷ This is perhaps because he has addressed this question earlier in the seminar—when reference is first made to Spivak's discussion—where he identifies his use of "woman" as only the first strategic phase in a deconstruction of phallogocentrism and the hierarchical opposition of man and woman. At this moment, in answer to the participant's question about "the difference between woman and 'woman' and the deconstruction of subjectivity and subject/object around woman" (WB 194), Derrida does finally address methodology:

Of course, saying that woman is on the side, so to speak, of undecidability and so on, has only the meaning of a strategical phase. In a given situation, which is ours, which is the European phallogocentric structure, the side of the

16. Given that Spivak argues that 'woman' to some extent represents the abyssal in Derrida's writing, Derrida's response—that "this is an abyssal question"—is also interestingly tautological.

17. [Here, one must not forget Derrida's remarkable analysis of (the metaphysics of) "fetishism" in *Glas* (1974), especially his often overlooked queer provocation of a "general fetishism." See Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 206-211. —Ed.]

woman is the side from which you start to dismantle the structure. So you can put undecidability and all of the other concepts which go with it on the side of femininity, writing and so on. But as soon as you have reached the first stage of deconstruction, then the opposition between women and men stops being pertinent. Then you cannot say that woman is another name, or a good trope for writing, undecidability and so on. We need to find some way to progress strategically. Starting with deconstruction of phallogocentrism, and using the feminine force, so to speak, in the move and then—and this would be the second stage or second level—to give up the opposition between men and women. At this second stage “woman” is clearly not the best trope to refer to all those things: undecidability and so on. (WB 194)

Derrida’s reference to phases recalls the section of “Choreographies” where McDonald describes deconstruction as a two-phase process: first, a reversal of the hierarchical binaries of Western metaphysics; second, a forging of a new “concept.” McDonald does not explain what this new concept is forged for, nor what it does, but simply goes on to list such concepts as they appear in Derrida’s writing: *differánce, trace, supplement, pharmakon, hymen, double invagination*. Thus the question she eventually poses to Derrida—“do we have in your view the beginning of a phase two, a ‘new’ concept of woman?” (C 72)—may seem, at first, to represent a misunderstanding of the second phase of deconstruction, until one puts it into dialogue with “Women in the Beehive.” For if, in relation to the question of sexual difference, Derrida privileges one term of the binary—woman—in order to deconstruct the binary in phase one, it might well be assumed he’ll use the same term as the “new concept” of phase two. Thus “woman” would come to have two distinct meanings in his work, as he explains below by analogy with undecidability:

There is one kind of undecidability which is a kind of calculus, a kind of logic, a kind of programming or unprogramming a program, but with a symmetrical relationship to the program. And then there is another undecidability which is totally heterogeneous to the former one, which is totally foreign to the realm of calculus, to the

realm of opposition, to the realm of programming and so on. By analogy, we could say the same about “woman.” There is one meaning to the word “woman” which is caught in the opposition, in the couple, and to this extent you can use the force of woman to reverse, to undermine this first stage of opposition. Once you have succeeded, the word “woman” does not have the same meaning. Perhaps we could not even speak of “woman” anymore. (WB 195)

Derrida does use “woman” in the first phase of deconstruction in a symmetrical relation to the man-woman binary in order to reverse the hierarchy of that binary. In this sense, his use of “woman” is methodologically no different from the procedures of Western metaphysics—it is merely an inversion of those procedures that challenges their content but not their structures. Spivak’s argument holds, then, in that “woman” is used in Derrida’s writing by analogy with the first kind of undecidability which is still necessary within “a given situation in which you have an opposition or a dialectical logic” (WB 194-5). “Woman” is also used, as we have seen in the textual examples above, in Derrida’s writing in the second phase of deconstruction by analogy with the second kind of incalculable undecidability of which Derrida talks above. “Woman” does then, in Derrida’s work, figure as a motif for the refiguration of relationality performed by deconstruction, the thought of difference beyond or otherwise to “difference determined as opposition” (C 72). But, crucially, in relation to the question of *sexual* difference, “woman” *does not function in this way*. Derrida does not, as McDonald seems to be prompting him to do here, use “woman” in the second phase of the deconstruction of *sexual* difference *in particular*. In Derrida’s writing, “woman” is *not* the motif for the relation between man and woman thought otherwise than as opposition. Instead, in this role Derrida puts forward the thought of the gift and the time and movement of the dance. In using such alternative terms, Derrida, at least in relation to the deconstruction of *sexual* difference, does not repeat the methodological gesture of metaphysics, which uses woman merely as a philosophical signifier, but uses alternative concepts which enable us to conceive of actual male and female subjectivities, and the relation between them, otherwise.

III

Nearing the end of his response to McDonald's first question in "Choreographies," and in the context of a discussion of Heidegger, Derrida raises an enigmatic but suggestive question about the relation between the thought of the gift and sexual difference:

The question proceeds, so to speak, from the end; it proceeds from the point where the thought of the gift [*le don*] and that of "appropriation" disturbs without simply reversing the order of ontology, the authority of the question "What is it," the subordination of regional ontologies to one fundamental ontology. . . . From this point, which is not a point, one wonders whether this extremely difficult, perhaps impossible idea of the gift can still maintain an essential relationship to sexual difference. One wonders whether sexual difference, femininity, for example—however irreducible it may be—does not remain derived from and subordinated to either the question of destination or the thought of the gift. (C 70)

In "Women in the Beehive," one of the seminar participants cites this passage and asks Derrida to "unpack" it for them (WB 198). Derrida's response contains the most sustained thinking of the deconstruction of sexual difference that we find, I think, anywhere in his corpus. It is here that he offers that which Spivak is searching for—and does not find—in her reading of *La carte postale*: "an accomplished displacement, whatever that might be," of the "opposition man/woman," rather than a "mere reversal" (LM 29). Let us, then, unpack Derrida's unpacking.

Derrida begins by distinguishing the gift from exchange by questioning the idea of *destination*. The common assumption is that when individuals speak to, or communicate with each other, "that they are identifiable subjects, and that between them there exists an exchange" (WB 198). These subjects would be determined *prior to* the communication, prior to "the messages, the gifts, caresses, desires, objects, etc." (WB 198) that would then pass between them in a movement of exchange. The idea of destination, then, of the existence of predetermined subjects who are givers and receivers, provides the crucial difference between the gift and the exchange.

For, "in as much as a gift has an assignable destination, it is an exchange—therefore, it is *not* a gift" (WB 198):

If there is, from the man to the woman, or from the woman to the man, a destination of whatever kind, of an object, of a discourse, of a letter, of a desire, of *jouissance*, if this thing is identifiable as passing from subject to subject—from a man to a woman, or from a woman to a woman, or a man to a man, etc., etc.— if there is a possible determination of subject—at that moment, there is no longer a gift. (WB 198)

The consequence of this, according to Derrida, is that the possibility of the gift depends on the non-pre-determination of subjects. If subjects are already determined, especially if they are already sexually determined, there can be no possibility of the gift. The randomness and chance of the gift depends upon the absence of this pre-determination of subjects and, consequently, the absence of an oppositional relation between man and woman. For, if subjects are not already sexually determined (classically, as man and woman) then the relation between them (classically, an oppositional one) also remains undetermined. One is therefore able to, perhaps even required to, think the *difference* between subjects beyond the binary opposition man/woman. The classical dual oppositional relation of man and woman forbids the gift as Derrida understands it, precisely because he is using the thought of the gift in order to (re)figure a relation between the sexes that is not one of opposition: "if there is the gift, it can only be on the condition—not of non-sexuality—but of sexual nondetermination, in the sense of opposition" (WB 198). The gift, as a figure of (sexual) relationality, is not a structure that is sexually indifferent—Derrida is not here repeating the neutralizing gesture of Western metaphysics—but one which allows us to think "sexuality completely out of the frame, totally aleatory to what we are familiar with in the term 'sexuality'" (WB 198). In this sense, the gift can figure an "indefinite number of sexes" (WB 198) and sexual relations, heterosexual, homosexual and beyond:

At that point there would be no more sexes . . . there would be one sex for each time. One sex for each gift. A sexual difference for each gift. That can be produced

within the situation of a man and a woman, a man and a man, a woman and a woman, three men and a woman, etc. . . . (WB 199)

Similarly to Heidegger's understanding of *Ereignis*, the gift "gives itself the right to determine" (WB 199)—that is, subjects come to be determined by and in the moment of the gift, that is, by and in the moment of their relationality to each other. That is why, via the gift, sexual relations are "absolutely heterogeneous" (WB 199), since each subject is determined (and determined differently) in each gift moment, thus opening up the possibility for an incalculable array of sexual relations, of sexualities, and of sexually determined subjects.

This understanding of the structure of sexual relationality does not determine *a priori* the nature or content of sexual relations, in the sense that, in each gift moment, that content will be different, and its value will be judged, as Derrida says, by the receiver of the gift (WB 202). Derrida is not proposing here a fixed alternative to oppositional sexual relations in terms of, say, "equality." Rather, what he is saying, and I believe this fits very much with lived experience, is that each time one comes into relation with another, one's gender and sexuality are determined by that moment of relationality, and that determination could be an acceptable or unacceptable one:

There is no value before it has taken place. Once it has taken place, one will see what is the worth. If you are receiver of the gift which makes you "woman," you will see. You will say if it has positive or negative value. It will be your evaluation of the gift. (WB 202)

For Derrida, this thought of the gift functions as a deconstructive narrative that rewrites our "abstract" (pace Spivak) understanding of the relationality between men and women, but also our understanding of how that relationality might happen in "concrete" lived experience. In doing so, the thought of the gift also deconstructs the oppositional difference between the abstract and the concrete itself. The problem in "Women in the Beehive," however, is that the "concrete" examples Derrida gives of the performativity of the gift are not ones which demonstrate its operation in relation to sexual difference, in the relations between men and women, men and men,

women and women, etc. Instead, he gives two textual examples: the first with reference to his own text, “Télépathie” (in *La carte postale*), in which he repeats the thought of the gift he has just elaborated; the second, the example of the performativity of the *Declaration of Independence* in bringing into being the American people. Both texts are examples of “a gesture which, at the limit, produces the receiver, and, at the same time, produces the sender” (WB 200). The only example Derrida offers of the way in which the thought of the gift might work in relation to sexual difference is in an almost throw-away comment at the end of the paragraph:

It is by the gift that the Law is produced. It’s this signature which engenders the sender, the receiver, the signer. It is a performative act . . . of the gift which produces the giver and the receiver, who at that time become determined, determine themselves as such. It happens all the time, when one says “yes” in marriage, for instance. (WB 200)

The thought of the gift allows for an understanding of marriage not as an economic structure of exchange, but as one example of the taking place of a mutually disclosive belonging together by and through which subjects become determined. This act, the “yes” of marriage, is nothing if not *iterable*, and in each *iteration* lies the trajectory of a subject and the power for radical change. As one of the seminar participants neatly summarizes it, in every moment of relationality, “we get a new configuration of subjects, objects, of identities. That is, with each occurrence of the gift . . . one could occur as male or female in a certain configuration of subjects. In every production of this gift situation . . . all of us could appear as something different” (WB 202). For Derrida, the types of (sexual) relationalities figured by the gift are thus “incalculable” (WB 199), a term which recalls and illuminates the “incalculable choreographies” (C 76) to which Derrida refers in the complex final paragraph of “Choreographies.” It is to this interview that I want to return now, in closing, in order to explore the way in which the idea of dancing pursued throughout that text anticipates Derrida’s thought of the gift in “Women in the Beehive” and provides an even more palpable example of its figuration of (sexual) relationality.

IV

In the closing paragraph of “Choreographies,” Derrida responds to McDonald’s final question—“What are our chances of ‘thinking difference’ not so much before sexual difference, as you say, as taking off ‘from’ it? What would you say is our chance and ‘who’ are we sexually?” (C 75)—with a series of questions and speculations which for many years have impressed me with their rhetoric yet defeated my understanding. Placing this complex paragraph in the context of Derrida’s thought of the gift, however, opens up these enigmatic reflections and illuminates exactly what Derrida might be proposing here. The dissymmetry Derrida sees as essential to sexual relations—and which “perhaps goes beyond known or coded marks, beyond the grammar and spelling, shall we say (metaphorically), of sexuality” (C 76)—is a consequence of the randomness and chance of the gift, a characteristic of the incalculable possibilities of relationality that the thought of the gift opens up, rather than the symmetry which might be produced by a predetermined fixing of relationality as opposition or, even, equality. The thought of the gift elaborated above provides the structural answer to the questions Derrida poses here: it describes “a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating” (C 76); it describes a relationship that is not asexual, but “sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes” (C 76); it is the possibility of “the chance” (C 76) of which Derrida dreams. In “Choreographies,” the thought of the gift remains a dream. Derrida has not yet arrived at the deconstruction of sexual difference the gift provides. So, while dreaming of the second phase of deconstruction, he remains rooted in the first phase, that of the resexualization of phallogocentric discourse under the name of “woman” in opposition to the neutralizing and neutering gestures of Western metaphysics. This accounts for the confusing final paragraph of “Choreographies,” since Derrida there is attempting to move into the second phase of deconstruction while at the same time retaining the language and structures of the first.

Thus at the end of “Choreographies,” Derrida still wonders if understanding (sexual) relations otherwise is only a dream which protects us “from an implacable destiny which immures everything for life in the figure 2” (C 76). But Derrida immediately goes on

to interrogate that doubt with an argument that we find repeated, interestingly, in relation to the dream and sexual difference as it is manifested in the texts of the queer poet and writer, H.D. In that context, Claire Buck argues that in H.D.'s quest for an unmediated language and an autonomous subjectivity, "the impossibility of either . . . is in a sense beside the point."¹⁸ "By holding the fantasy open," Buck argues, "H.D. also represents and sustains the desire itself, which in turn represents the possibility of a subjectivity not reducible to the terms of a phallic organization of sexual difference" (HD 54-55). In the same way, Derrida suggests here that the dream of a sexuality beyond binary difference holds open this possibility, even if its actuality remains impossible: "does the dream itself not prove that what is dreamt of must be there in order for it to provide the dream?" (C 76).¹⁹ "Choreographies" does not end with the thought of the dream, though, but with a return to the idea of dance, and the appearance of two key terms which relate inextricably to the thought of the gift: "incalculable" and "exchange."

The idea of dance is at play throughout "Choreographies," from its very opening in which McDonald cites the apocryphal slogan of the 19th-century maverick feminist Emma Goldman, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution" (C 66).²⁰ Dance, like undecidability, functions in two ways. In the second phase of deconstruction, dance, particularly dance as the movement of bodies in space and time, is analogous to the thought of the gift. But, in the first phase, Derrida uses the idea of dance in terms of

18. See Claire Buck, *H.D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 54. Hereafter cited in the text as HD.

19. The possibility of the dream functions here in a similar way to the gift in that both seem to be connected, as one of the "Women in the Beehive" seminar participants notes, with "the conception derived from Heidegger of a kind of limit-notion that might never even exist but points beyond and might also liberate into a kind of non-role-specific diversity of sexualities" (WB 200).

20. For the curious story of the origin of this slogan which is in fact a publisher's paraphrase of a passage on dancing found in Goldman's *Living My Life*, see Alix Kates Shulman, "Dances with Feminists," *Women's Review of Books* 9.3 (1991). Online. Retrieved 5 March 2017: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/goldman/Features/danceswithfeminists.html>

choreo-graphy, by definition, *the written notation of dancing*. This is in line with a strand throughout Derrida's corpus in which dancing becomes a metaphor for the movement of deconstructive reading and writing. Thus, he can describe such texts as "*Pas*," *La vérité en peinture*, "*En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici*," and *Feu la cendre* as "choreographic" (C 76), texts which, in their "polysexual signatures" (C 76), perform a kind of deconstructive dance with phallogocentricism. For Derrida, the deconstructive possibility of a "multiplicity of sexually marked voices" (C 76) is part of the first phase of deconstruction. The idea of the voice, however, cannot stand for the second phase, "this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each 'individual,' whether he be classified as 'man' or as 'woman' according to criteria of usage" (C 76). Rather, it is the second meaning of dance (which, in "Choreographies," anticipates the language and structure of the gift) that allows for this possibility of an incalculable number of sexual determinations.

The metaphor of dance, then, is used to re-think the question of "woman" by suggesting the deconstructive potential of a *dis-placement of time and space* that is not reducible to the topoeconomical concerns with woman's "place"; to "dance otherwise" (C 69) is thus to "challenge a certain idea of the locus [*lieu*] and the place [*place*] (the entire history of the West and of its metaphysics)" (C 69). As Sandra Kemp observes:

However well you may be acquainted with the history of, say, a dance piece (every technique involved in it, the choreographic design), at the time of watching, something else is at stake. This "something else" exists in the moments of the dance as they happen. It doesn't exist before or after, and is not susceptible to existing forms of critical analysis. . . . To take time and space as self-evident phenomena, as so often happens in dance, is to fail to perceive that movement creates its own time and space, that time and space are not containers which movement fills to varying degrees.²¹

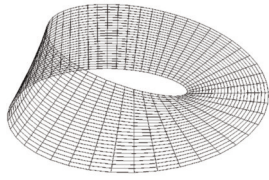
21. See Sandra Kemp, "Conflicting Choreographies: Derrida and Dance," *New Formations* 16 (Spring 1992): 95.

Dance makes explicit the performativity of the gift, the way in which it is neither “conservative” (relying on conventions), nor “subversive” (since “subversion is also a program” [WB 201]), but, in fact, “totally heterogeneous to both subversion and conservation. That is, if it takes place, which is never guaranteed” (Derrida, WB 201). The challenge dancing represents is, and Derrida here explicitly uses the language of the gift, “very rare, if it is not impossible, and presents itself only in the form of the most unforeseeable and most innocent of chances” (C 69). The randomness and chance of the gift is also the randomness and chance of the dance: through both, relationality is conceived as “an incessant daily negotiation—individual or not—sometimes microscopic, sometimes punctuated by a poker-like gamble; always deprived of insurance, whether it be in private life or within institutions” (C 69). In each moment of the gift or the dance, in each moment of relationality, sexual or otherwise, “each man and each woman must commit his or her own singularity, the untranslatable factor of his or her life and death” (C 95).²²

For Derrida, the recognition that “the truth value (that is, Woman as the major allegory of truth in Western discourse) and its correlative, Femininity (the essence or truth of Woman) . . . are the foundations or anchorings of Western rationality (of what I have called ‘phallogocentrism’)” (C 69) permits “the invention of an other inscription, one very old and very new, a displacement of bodies and

22. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this essay to provide a more extended analysis of the significance of dance in relation to refiguring (sexual) relationality in particular, and in relation to contemporary theory in general. With regard to the latter, however, see André Lepecki, ed., *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), in which “each author proposes different ways of thinking on how, and with what political and aesthetic effect, dancing rethinks both itself and the social order” (2), as well as Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy, eds., *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995), and Susan Leigh Foster, ed., *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1996). With regard to the former, see my essay “Time for the Gift of Dance” (2011) on the Hollywood film *Shall We Dance?* (2004), in Ben Davies and Jana Funke, eds., *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 109-31, in which dancing complexly queers the anticipated heteronormative narrative.

places that is quite different" (C 70). The thought of the gift and of dance, as they take place in Derrida's texts in the second phase of the deconstruction of sexual difference, are exemplary of this kind of reinscription, and not, as is often presumed, a mere resexualization of philosophical difference under the name of "woman." Indeed, the thought of the gift and dance, as figures of relationality in which the subjects in relation are determined in and as a result of that relation, also provides a way of understanding "the complicated relationship of a practical politics to the kinds of analysis that we have been considering (specifically the 'deconstructive' analysis implicit in your discussion)" (C 70). At the end of "Choreographies," McDonald returns Derrida to the metaphor of dance in order to introduce her final question to him, regarding the chance (and here again we have the language of the gift) of thinking sexual difference otherwise. Derrida concludes his reply by asking, "what kind of dance would there be, or would there be at all, if the sexes were not exchanged according to rhythms that vary considerably?" (C 76). Dance serves here, as it does throughout "Choreographies," as a figurative analogy of the gift. "In a quite rigorous sense," Derrida argues, just as the thought of the gift is inimical to the idea of exchange, in the dance of the sexes, "exchange alone could not suffice" (C 76). In a mere structure of exchange, the subjects of an oppositional relationality would already be predetermined. Instead, in "Women in the Beehive," Derrida comes to offer the thought of the gift, which satisfies the queer "desire to escape the combinatory itself, to invent incalculable choreographies" (C 76).



Les chats de Derrida¹

Carla Freccero

I have previously suggested that Derridean theoretical practice can be understood to be “always already” queer theory, if queer theory is understood in one of its valences, that is, as an immaterial de-normativization that works at the level of language, thought, and ideology to critique, but in a viral fashion, by replicating terms and re-purposing them so that their operation moves down paths that are overgrown with the bushes of normative philosophical thought.² These paths are inscriptions; they don’t quite open up, but they leave—or are—traces, and can be followed, like the tracks that Derrida is following in *L’Animal que donc je suis*.³ In *Queer/Early/*

1. Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Les chats’ de Charles Baudelaire,” *L’Homme* 2.1 (1962): 5-21. Many people have helped me find threads of my research and of my thought for this essay; thanks go to Michael O’Rourke, Cora Diamond, Maria Frangos, John Freccero, Noreen Giffney, Wlad Godzich, Jody Greene, Rachel Jacoff, Richard Mackskey, Barbara Spackman, Carra Stratton, Helen Tartar, and Andrzej Warminski. I dedicate this essay to my feline companions: Mort, who shadowed my life for a quarter of a century; Trotsky, who accompanied me for only a brief time; Lenin, my beloved companion of fifteen years, and Boychick, who died peacefully in his sleep. Portions of this essay appear as “*Chercher la chatte: Derrida’s Queer Feminine Animality*,” in *French Thinking about Animals*, eds. Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus (Michigan: MSU Press, 2015), 105-120. © 2015 Michigan State University.

2. Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

3. Jacques Derrida, *L’Animal que donc je suis*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 33. References in French are from this edition. *Ibid.* “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Willis, *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (Winter 2002): 383. References in English are from this version. References to “But as for me, who am I (following)?” are from Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Willis (NY: Fordham UP, 2008), 52-118, while references to “And Say the Animal Responded?” are from Cary Wolfe, ed., *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003), 113-28.

Modern I argued that key terms that have emerged from deconstructive gestures include queer, though “queer,” I think, carries with it—as the wind does scent—a faint but specific whiff of sex/sexual identity/sexuality. One way to think about this is to say that after Derrida all theory is “queer,” or rather that Derrida helps us to understand how theory is always already queer, and to affirm this queerness further. I also wanted to find in Derrida’s spectrality a way to queer temporality that takes into account the affective force of fantasy, that is, the way the past lives on as a kind of immaterial materiality through affect, a force that is not something we “see” necessarily, but something we feel. Derrida’s queering of temporality, through the spectrality of returns and to-comes—marked, again, like scent on a trail, track or trace, by the inscriptions of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man—have inspired much of queer theory’s efforts to de-normalize progressive, telos-oriented temporal narratives, whether literary or critical, and to complicate hetero-normative temporalities that seem to carry with them ideologies of “reproductive futurism.”⁴ In my work, this takes the form of arguing for fantasmatic—and figural—historiographies. Such a practice attends to the way topoi—discursive commonplaces—haunt texts across historical eras to address the non-causal, non-linear relation of events and affects, the way history or the past is lived in and through fantasy in the form of ideology. These topoi may take the form of metaphor, metonymy, or theme; they may be direct intertextual allusions or rhetorical echoes. However they make their appearance, their relay between times and places looks more like a haunting—an affective insistence, persistence, a spectral materialization—than a progression, a borrowing, or a coming after. Affects do not obey sequence; they have histories, but they do not respect the historical injunction to move on, to get beyond. Rather, the properties proper to affect, even within the genetic narratives of history, seem better described in the language of psychoanalysis: persistence, repetition, stasis, fading/waning, sudden change. Spectrality, then, allows for thinking not only the out-of-jointness of time but also its affects,

4. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

including the sorrow and mourning that attend the unfinished returns of the past. This too, it seems to me, has been useful to queer theory, marked as the latter is so indelibly by an injunction to mourn, and occasion to do so.⁵

Derrida's later work that moves elsewhere than the human, toward not specters but the non-human living, that is, his work on animals and the living in general, also has the potential to invest an already queer theoretical domain—let's call it "animal theory"—with a meditation on subjectivity that brings with it traditions of western philosophizing on the human and non-human. If a certain way of dis-placing the subject and de-normativizing the norm, and if a certain contribution to the spectralities of history, temporality, and affect are some of what a Derridean legacy can be understood to be, then I think that Derridean thinking on—*about* and *with*—animals can also help a queer theory devoted to the rejection of the humanist subject in favor of other models of being, or becoming, and the ethical relations among them. Animal theory is a queer theory in this respect, that it displaces humanism, de-normativizes subjectivity, and turns us toward not difference but differences, one of the most emphatic of Derrida's lessons having been the impossibility of a reference to "the" animal in favor of singular, differential, abyssal relations (*L'Animal*, 51-53; "The Animal," 398-99). Derrida's deconstruction of the western carno-phallogocentric subject—especially when he writes about the living in general—queers ontology and creates queer ontologies, i.e., relations of desire among the living.⁶ At the very least, Derrida will have been the western philosopher whose introduction of the non-human living into philosophical and ethical consideration has allowed for a meeting of post-humanism with ethology, ecological activism,

5. See Jody Greene, "Introduction: The Work of Friendship," *GLQ* 10.3 (2004): 321-322. See also *L'Animal*, 33 (389) on mourning.

6. For the term carno-phallogocentrism, see Derrida, "Il faut bien manger, ou le calcul du subject," in *Points de suspension: Entretiens*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 294. See also Alice Kuzniar for a meditation on how intimacy with non-human animals queers relations of desire, "I Married My Dog': On Queer Canine Literature," in *Queering the Non/Human*, eds. Noreen Giffney and Myrna Hird (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2008), 205-26.

eco-feminism, and other disciplines queered by their attention to the trivial, beside-the-point, non-eventfulness of minor, daily, “ordinary” histories and stories that are nonetheless part of the afterlives of trauma. As Donna Haraway says of these sorts of histories, “I think we learn to be worldly from grappling with, rather than generalizing from, the ordinary.”⁷

Animal lovers, animal rights philosophers, ethologists, and others delight in Derrida’s staged scene of the encounter with an animal that is the occasion, the starting point, for his exploration of the human and non-human in *L’Animal*. Although Derrida, as he himself writes, has had many animals running through his *oeuvre* (an astonishing number, actually, which he documents in this essay), this is the first appearance of what he refers to as a “real cat”:

Je dois le préciser tout de suite, le chat dont je parle est un chat réel, vraiment, croyez-moi, un petit chat. Ce n’est pas donc une figure du chat. Il n’entre pas dans la chambre en silence pour allégoriser tous les chats de la terre. . . . Le chat dont je parle n’appartient pas à l’immense zoopoétique de Kafka Le chat qui me regarde, et auquel j’ai l’air, mais ne vous y fiez pas, de consacrer une zoothéologie négative, ce n’est pas non plus le chat Murr d’Hoffmann ou de Kofman. . . . Un animal me regarde. Que dois-je penser de cette phrase? Le chat qui me regarde nu, et qui est vraiment un petit chat, ce chat dont je parle, qui est aussi une chatte, ce n’est pas davantage la chatte de Montaigne qui dit pourtant “ma chatte” dans son Apologie de Raimond Sebond. (20-21)

7. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3. Hereafter cited in the text as WSM. I thank Jody Greene for drawing my attention to this thread in Haraway’s thought. Ann Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), also discusses the importance of attending to the afterlife of traumas that could be seen to be uneventful when compared to what are understood to be avowedly historical and public catastrophic events. These are the questions I explore at the end of *Queer/Early/Modern*, not so much to “solve” a problem of temporal accountability as to suggest alternative ways to respond to—and survive—the not strictly eventful afterlife of trauma in a just, queer, fashion.

I must make it clear from the start, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn't the *figure* of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth. . . . The cat I am talking about does not belong to Kafka's vast zoopoetics Nor is the cat that looks at me, and to which I seem—but don't count on it—to be dedicating a negative zootheology, Hoffman's or Kofman's cat Murr. . . . An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence? The cat that looks at me naked and that is *truly a little cat*, this cat I am talking about, which is also a female, isn't Montaigne's either, the one he nevertheless calls "my [pussy]cat" [*ma chatte*] in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. (374-375)

What can a reader possibly make of this claim here to be talking about a "real" cat, a cat who follows Derrida into his bathroom each morning, and/or who is there, across from him in his morning nakedness, observing him, "just to see," observing him and "not hesitating to concentrate its [his] vision" in the direction of his sex (19; 373)? On the one hand, I hear him echo Barbara Smuts's somewhat impatient chastising of Elizabeth Costello (J. M. Coetzee) in her response to *The Lives of Animals* (where it is also, notably, a question of philosophers, poets, and non-human animals):

Why doesn't Elizabeth Costello mention her relations with her cats as an important source of her knowledge about, and attitudes toward, other animals? . . . Whatever her (or Coetzee's) reasons, the lack of reference to real-life relations with animals is a striking gap in the discourse on animal rights contained in Coetzee's text.⁸

In *L'Animal*, then, Derrida, the philosopher, rectifies this error, an error for which this same philosopher indicts the history of western philosophy (31-32; 382-383, and 64; 408), i.e., for not having considered this experience of being seen by an animal, an actual

8. Barbara Smuts, "Reflections," in J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 108.

animal.

At the same time, Derrida positions himself within this philosophical genealogy that is not one, as he has done before, by citing—and then pursuing a digression on—the early modern philosopher, anti-Cartesian *avant la lettre*, Michel de Montaigne, whom he credits with having posed the question of an animal's response, rather than her reaction: "*Montaigne reconnaît à l'animal plus qu'un droit à la communication, au signe, au langage comme signe (cela, Descartes ne le dénierait pas); un pouvoir de répondre*" (21, n. 2); ("Montaigne recognizes in the animal more than a right to communication, to the sign, to language as sign [something Descartes will not deny], namely, *a capacity to respond*" [375, n. 5]). Montaigne, who returns, again and again, in this essay about the animal one is, mentions his cat, feminized (as Derrida's cat will be), and ventures an even more radical supposition concerning her: "*Quand je me joue à ma chatte, qui sait si elle passe son temps de moy plus que je ne fay d'elle?*" ("When I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me?").⁹ Derrida does not stay with his cat, something that elicits a complaint from Haraway: "He did not fall into the trap of making the subaltern speak. . . . Yet he did not seriously consider an alternative form of engagement either, one that risked knowing something more about cats and how to look back, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and therefore also philosophically and also intimately" (WSM 20).

But, as Derrida demonstrates, and at the very moment when he is at his most "ordinary," the articulation of a relation to the other within the inhuman technology of language—however much it is a "grappling with"—cannot avoid a generalizing, whose agent may very well not be human at all.¹⁰ Derrida's cat, remember,

9. Michel de Montaigne, "Apologie de Raymond Sebond," *Essais, livre II* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1969), 119; *ibid.*, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1957), 331. "*Se jouer à*" means more than pastime; it connotes meddling or fooling with.

10. See Cary Wolfe on Derrida's discussion of "our subjection to a radically ahuman technicity or mechanicity of language," in "Flesh and Finitude: Thinking Animals in (Post)Humanist Philosophy," *The Political Animal*, ed. Chris Danta and Dmitris Vardouklakis. Special issue of *Substance* (2008): 1-23. I'm grateful to Cary for sharing this work with me.

is not any of these other cats, not Hoffman's, Kofman's, Rilke's, Montaigne's, Baudelaire's, Buber's, Alice's (Lewis Carroll's)—though it might in fact be a reading of *Alice in Wonderland*, he notes coyly—not La Fontaine's or Tieck's, though all of these cats and more do in fact find their reference in *Autobiogriffures*, and that title, if nothing else, might alert a reader to the sort of cat Derrida has in mind, if not before him.¹¹ The repeated negations Derrida pursues—maybe unconsciously, he playfully notes (23; 376)—should alert a reader, make her suspicious, as the phenomenon of “*dénégation*” or negation must always do (the rhetorical equivalent is *occupatio*), that if this cat is not any of these other cats, if she is, “*vraiment, croyez-moi,*” a real cat, *not* the figure of a cat, then perhaps she is the cat of a figure. And, as a second order of reflection, Derrida is here raising the question of whether it is ever possible to “represent” a “real” cat. In an essay where precisely the problem of the [cat]egory—and the [cat]egorization—of “the” animal is at stake, and where the singularity of the other is also at stake (“*Si je dis ‘c’est un chat réel qui me voit nu, c’est pour marquer son irremplaçable singularité’*” [26]; “If I say ‘it is a real cat’ that sees me naked, it is in order to mark its [his] unsubstitutable singularity” [378]), what can he do but *write in* this conundrum of reference to the place where the question of referentiality must also be at stake?

The second part of *L’Animal*, in fact, repeats this symptom as a reading of Emmanuel Lévinas.¹² Seeing no fewer than eleven exclamation marks in the space of the eight pages of Lévinas’s text, Derrida detects the work of “*dénégation*”: “*Et d’ailleurs, deux d’entre eux suivent un ‘Mais non! mais non!’ qui signe en vérité la vérité d’un ‘mais si, mais si’ au sujet d’un chien qui reconnaît l’autre et donc répond à l’autre*” (159). (“Moreover, two of them follow the

11. Sarah Kofman, *Autobiogriffures: du chat Murr d’Hoffmann* [1976] (Paris: Galilée, 1984). Hereafter cited as A. All translations are mine.

12. The English translation is called “‘But as for me, who am I (following)?’” in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 52–118. Derrida is reading Lévinas, “Polémiques: Nom d’un chien ou le droit naturel,” in *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: A. Michel, 1976), 201–202; *ibid.* “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights,” in Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, ed., *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 47–50.

utterance ‘But no! But no!’ which in truth attests to the truth of a ‘But yes! But yes!’ when it comes to a dog that recognizes the other and thus responds to the other” [115].¹³ He concludes that although Lévinas insists—as Derrida does—on the literality of the dog, its specificity, this singular dog with a name, Bobby (Derrida’s cat, in this essay, remains nameless), “*le texte de Lévinas est à la fois métaphorique, allégorique et théologique, anthropothéologique, donc anthropomorphique, . . . au moment même où Lévinas clame, prétend, claims, en s’exclamant, le contraire*” (160); (“Lévinas’s text is at once metaphorical, allegorical, and theological, anthropotheological, hence anthropomorphic . . . at the very moment when Lévinas proclaims, claims, *prétend*, by exclaiming, the opposite” [116]). Inscribed, then, in a reading of the brother (the other whose theory of ethical fraternity Derrida carries with him) is a key to the undecidabilities of the singular/general animal, of the “real” cat, in the animal that Derrida is and follows. He reminds us, finally, that “*tout animal . . . est d’essence fantastique, fantasmatique, fabuleux, d’une fable qui nous parle, qui nous parle de nous-mêmes*” (95); (“every animal . . . is essentially fantastic, phantasmatic, fabulous, of a fable that speaks to us and speaks to us of ourselves” [66]).

The reference to the “real” also recalls a more famous cat, a cat who is recollected in the moments when Derrida writes, “for example,” a cat: “*par exemple les yeux d’un chat*” (18); “for example the eyes of a cat” (372); “*par exemple un chat*” (28); “for example a cat” (380) (see also 29, 30; 383, etc.), the one on the mat that Tarski, Austin, Searle, and a whole host of philosophers have slung about as though they had it by the tail.¹⁴ Given that this is an

13. Derrida’s own line about the cat is: “*Non, mais non, mon chat, . . . il ne vient pas ici représenter, en ambassadeur, l’immense responsabilité symbolique dont notre culture a depuis toujours chargé la gent féline*” (26). (“No, no, my cat . . . does not appear here as representative, or ambassador, carrying the immense responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race” [378].)

14. Alfred Tarski, “The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages,” *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics: Papers from 1923 to 1938*, trans. J. H. Woodger, ed. J. Corcoran, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 152-278; John R. Searle, “Literal Meaning,” *Erkenntnis* 13 (1978): 207-224; J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979).

example used in philosophy and linguistics to talk about (semantic) truth and reference, an example of “positing” or “asserting,” and that it features prominently in Austin’s discussion of “performatives” and thus also recalls a famously conflictive moment in Derrida’s own past (his “debate” with John Searle in *Limited, Inc*), it seems likely that this *dénégation* is just that—playful or otherwise.¹⁵ Searle, it will be remembered, devoted an essay—“Literal Meaning”—to the sentence “the cat is on the mat,” complete with line drawings of cats on mats in various poses and several time-space universes, including outer space.¹⁶ In spite, then, of what has often been referred to as Derrida’s “ethical turn” and the effort, within this essay and other texts devoted to non-human animals (“Eating Well”; “And Say the Animal Responded?”; “Violence against Animals”), to meet animals in their phenomenality, to track them, as it were, and to respond to them as well, Derrida still and persistently returns to language and inscription, ironizing the effort to move beyond even as he does so.¹⁷ As he reminds his reader, “*La lettre compte, et la question de l’animal*” (25). (“The letter counts, as does the question of the animal” [378].) This is, in part, the reason why he also references the pseudonymous Lewis Carroll, logician Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, author of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*,¹⁸ whose Cheshire Cat and whose kitten also thwart Alice’s efforts to pin down the “question” of the animal, language, response, and the real (23-26; 376-378):

Libre à vous d’entendre ou de recevoir la protestation qui dit,

15. See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

16. John R. Searle, “Literal Meaning,” *Erkenntnis* 13 (1978): 207-224.

17. For some of Derrida’s writings about/on animals, in addition to the texts studied here, see “Il faut bien manger,” in *Points de suspension*, 269-301; “Violences contre les animaux,” in Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Roudinesco, *De quoi demain: dialogue* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 105-127; *ibid.*, “Violence Against Animals,” in *For What Tomorrow—: A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 62-76.

18. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*; and, *Through the Looking-Glass: and What Alice Found There*, ed. Hugh Haughton (London: Penguin, 1998).

je viens de le faire, "vraiment un petit chat," comme la citation, en traduction, du chapitre XI de De l'autre côté du miroir. . . . J'aurais aimé, bien sûr, mais je n'aurais jamais eu le temps de le faire, inscrire tout mon propos dans une lecture de Lewis Carroll. Il n'est pas sûr, d'ailleurs, que je ne le fasse pas, bon gré mal gré, en silence, inconsciemment ou à votre insu. (23)

You are free to understand or receive the emphasis I just made regarding "really a little cat" as a quote from chapter 11 of *Through the Looking Glass*. . . . I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact, you can't be certain that I am not doing that, for better or for worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing. (376)

And yet, there are perhaps another few cats lurking in the background, and in particular a cat belonging to another dear other in Derrida's life, whose articulations haunt his pages like the lost friend in Montaigne. After all, the essay returns again and again to matters of living and dying, alterity, the absolute other, suffering, loss and mourning, to friends, neighbors, the proximate, in words that echo Derrida's writing on mourning and friendship across his many works:

Quels sont les enjeux de ces questions? On n'a pas besoin d'être expert pour prévoir qu'elles engagent une pensée de ce que veut dire vivre, parler, mourir, être et monde comme être-dans-le-monde ou comme être-au-monde, ou être-avec, être-devant, être-derrière, être-après, être et suivre, être suivi ou être suivant, là où je suis, d'une façon ou d'une autre, mais irecusablement, près de ce qu'ils appellent l'animal. (28)

What stakes are raised by these questions? One doesn't need to be an expert to foresee that they involve thinking about what is meant by living, speaking, dying, being and world as in being-in-the-world or being towards the world, or being-with, being-before, being-behind, being-after, being and following, being followed or being following, there where I am, in one way or another, but unimpeachably, near what they call the animal. (380)

And “*deuil pressenti car il y va, me semble-t-il, comme dans toute nomination, de la nouvelle d’une mort à venir selon la survivance du spectre, la longévité du nom qui survit au porteur du nom*” (39); (“A foreshadowing of mourning because it seems to me that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name” [389].)¹⁹

In the title essay of a collection that addresses, *inter alia*, the threats that seem to be posed by deconstruction—then most frequently referred to by the euphemism “theory”—to the U.S. academy, Paul de Man writes:

It is a recurrent strategy of any anxiety to defuse what it considers threatening by magnification or minimization, by attributing to it claims to power of which it is bound to fall short. If a cat is called a tiger it can easily be dismissed as a paper tiger; the question remains however why one was so scared of the cat in the first place. The same tactic works in reverse: calling the cat a mouse and then deriding it for its pretense to be mighty. Rather than being drawn into this polemical whirlpool, it might be better to try to call the cat a cat and to document, however briefly, the contemporary version of the resistance to theory in this country.²⁰

Here, in *this* other deconstructionist’s text (and, as Wlad Godzich points out, deixis is also what is at issue), we find an amusing and late reference to the cat on the mat, in comic proximity to a paronomastic reference to Derrida as the “mouse” being derided.²¹

19. For some of the works on mourning echoed here, see Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires: Pour Paul de Man*. (Paris: Galilée, 1988); *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); *Politiques de l’amitié; suivi de L’oreille de Heidegger* (Paris: Galilée, 1994); and *Spectres de Marx: L’Etat de la dette, le travail du deuil, et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

20. Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 5. Hereafter cited in the text as R.

21. Wlad Godzich, “Foreword: The Tiger on the Paper Mat,” in *Resistance to Theory*, ix-xviii. My reading here owes a debt of gratitude to Godzich’s essay.

In a further oblique reference to a discussion and disagreement between friends—this time Paul and Jacques, rather than Searle and Derrida—de Man names Derrida as the man who, as in Rousseau, gets called a “giant” out of fear, a “tiger,” who, rather than being a “paper tiger,” is really a cat; there, in *Allegories of Reading*, it is also, as Godzich notes, a discussion about “the relation of figural language to denotation” (xiii).²² This playful game of cat and mouse echoes throughout *Resistance to Theory*, as in the overly stretched idiomatic phrase in the following:

Yet, with the critical cat now so far out of the bag that one can no longer ignore its existence, those who refuse the crime of theoretical ruthlessness can no longer hope to gain a good conscience. Neither, of course, can the theorists—but then, they never laid claim to it in the first place.
(R 26)²³

Note, too, the reference to William Blake’s “Tyger, Tyger” in the same essay, “The Resistance to Theory,” that renders undecidable the very question of how papery this tiger really is, not to mention whether the “actual trap” is set for a tiger, a cat, or a mouse:

Faced with the ineluctable necessity to come to a decision, no grammatical or logical analysis can help us out. Just as Keats had to break off his narrative, the reader has to break off his understanding at the very moment when he is most

22. See Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 150, and Jacques Derrida, *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 393. See also Marc Redfield, “De Man, Schiller, and the Politics of Reception,” *Diacritics* 20.3 (Autumn, 1990): 50-70, at 55-56, for a beautiful discussion of this important passage in de Man’s *Allegories*; see also “An Interview with Paul de Man” in *The Resistance to Theory*, 117-118, where de Man talks about his and Derrida’s disagreement around Rousseau at the Baltimore conference.

23. This essay, “The Return to Philology,” 21-26, was originally published in *Times Literary Supplement*, December 10, 1982, where, in the last sentence, the word “theorist” read “terrorist” instead. I thank Andrzej Warminski for drawing my attention to this and to the reference to William Blake in the next quotation.

directly engaged and summoned by the text. One could hardly expect to find solace in this “fearful symmetry” between the author’s and the reader’s plight since, at this point, the symmetry is no longer a formal but an actual trap, and the question no longer “merely” theoretical. (R 16-17)²⁴

I wonder if it is this private and so loving joke between friends that is recalled in the photograph of Derrida with the (not so little and certainly not paper) cub in South Africa?²⁵ (Fig. 1)

De Man, like Derrida, also had a cat. And de Man, too, used cats as examples, usually ironic ones, as we’ve seen in these pages of *The Resistance to Theory*, a set of essays that documents the disturbance created by Derrida and de Man’s work. Through this other—“*ce vivant irremplaçable qui entre un jour dans mon espace, en ce lieu où il a pu me rencontrer, me voir, voir me voir nu*” (26); (“this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it [he] can encounter me, see me, even see me naked” [378-79])—Derrida understands “*l’altérité absolue du voisin ou du prochain*” (28); (“the absolute alterity of the neighbor” [380]) and mortality (the other’s and his own): “*Rien ne pourra jamais lever en moi la certitude qu’il s’agit là d’une existence rebelle à tout concept. Et d’une existence mortelle, car dès lors qu’il a un nom, son nom lui survit déjà. Il signe sa disparition possible. La mienne aussi—*” (26); (“Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it [he] has a name, its [his] name survives it [him]. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also . . .” [379]). Indeed, later on in his address (for the text of *L’Animal* takes the form of an oral address, and bears its traces),

24. “Fearful symmetry” comes from William Blake’s poem, “Tyger Tyger,” in *Songs of Experience* (New York: Dover, 1984), 34, line 4. Perhaps de Man was also thinking of what Nikita Khrushchev was supposed to have said in response to Mao’s dismissal of U.S. imperialism: “The paper tiger has nuclear teeth.” See “What are They Fighting About?” *Time Magazine*, July 12, 1963, www.time.com/magazine/article/0,9171,940292-3,00.html

25. “En Afrique du Sud, dans la réserve de Potchefstroom, 1998, DR,” in *Jacques Derrida*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud (Paris: Éditions de l’Herne, 2004), plate 11.



Fig. 1: Jacques Derrida, “En Afrique du Sud, dans la réserve de Potchefstroom, 1998, DR.”

Derrida talks about how Cérisy is a haunted place, and names some of the disappeared (although not de Man):

Ce château reste, pour moi, depuis le temps, un château de l'amitié hantée. . . . Oui, l'amitié hantée, l'ombre des visages, les silhouettes furtives de certaines présences, les mouvements, les pas, les musiques, les paroles qui s'animent dans ma mémoire, . . . J'ai de plus en plus le goût de cette mémoire à la fois attendrie, joyeuse et mélancolique, une mémoire qui aime à se laisser ainsi envahir par le retour de revenants dont beaucoup sont heureusement vivants et, pour certains d'entre eux, ici présents. . . . (43)

This chateau has remained for me, for so long now, a place of friendship but also of haunting. . . . Indeed friendship that is haunted, shadows of faces, furtive silhouettes of certain presences, movements, footsteps, music, words that come to life in my memory. . . . I enjoy more and more the taste of this memory that is at the same time tender, joyful, and melancholy, a memory, then, that likes to give itself over to the return of ghosts, many of whom are happily still living and, in some cases, present here. . . . (392)

On the one hand, absolute alterity; on the other, singularity, the unstitutability of that other: the friend, the cat.²⁶ Derrida's language in this essay echoes the ethical injunctions of another (absent) friend, Lévinas, and nowhere more so than when pointedly distancing himself from that other philosopher, in the question, "*Comment un animal peut-il vous regarder en face?*" (24) ("How can an animal look you in the face?" [377]), for here he cites the much

26. A propos of the unstitutatable cat, in an interesting moment of ethical agonizing, Derrida asks: "*Comment justifierez-vous jamais le sacrifice de tous les chats du monde au chat que vous nourrissez chez vous tous les jours pendant des années, alors que d'autres chats meurent de faim à chaque instant? Et d'autres hommes?*" *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), 101. ("How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat you feed at home every morning for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant? Not to mention other people?" *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995], 71.) Thanks to the late Helen Tartar for drawing my attention to this passage.

lamented interview when Lévinas, pressed on the question of the face of the other, retreated (albeit ambivalently) from conferring on the non-human animal the full dignity and responsibility of a face.²⁷

And yet, Lévinas, too, devoted pages to an animal, a dog with a name, Bobby, a particular, specific dog, “*nom d’un chien*,” which is also the polite imprecatory substitute for “name of God,” whose disappearance marks the disappearance of all those in the camps who did not, like Lévinas, survive to mark their traces.²⁸ Lévinas’s essay is rife with the linguistic playfulness and punning of Derrida’s, reminding readers of all the ways canine references live and breathe in French; he, too, refers to the Old Testament, to the dogs who collaborated with and conferred dignity upon the chosen people on the night of the death of the first-born in Exodus by failing to bark, thus erasing their traces (200-201; 48).²⁹ Dog is the co-pilot: dog silence is God’s word, God’s voice backward (201; 48). Bobby, that errant dog (wandering Jew?), enters the lives of the “simianized” (“*parler simiesque*” [202]; “monkey talk” [49]) “band of monkeys” (“*bande de singes*” [201; 48]) the Jews have been forced to become—“*êtres enfermés dans leurs espèce; malgré tout leur vocabulaire, êtres sans langage*” (201); (“beings enclosed within their species; despite all their vocabulary, beings without language” [48]), signifiers without a signified. But Bobby, “*chien chéri*” (202); (“cherished dog” [50]), exotically named by those who loved him, leapt and barked gaily upon their return from hard labor each day, and, in so doing, reminded them that they were human (no, rather,

27. See Emmanuel Lévinas, “Interview,” in Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, ed., *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004, repr. 2005), 49-50.

28. Emmanuel Lévinas, “Polémiques: Nom d’un chien ou le droit naturel,” *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: A. Michel, 1976), 201-202; *ibid.*, “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights,” in *Animal Philosophy*, 47-49. For discussions of this essay, see Peter Atterton, “Ethical Cynicism,” in *Animal Philosophy*, 51-61; Karalyn Kendall, “The Face of a Dog: Levinasian Ethics and Human/Dog Coevolution,” in Noreen Giffney and M.J. Hird, ed., *Queering the Non-Human* (Ashgate, 2008): 1-30.

29. On this question of erasing the trace, see Derrida, *L’Animal*, 185; “And Say the Animal Responded,” 136-137.

that they were *men*), and claimed descent from those silent ancestors on the shores of the Nile (202; 50). This animal other, he who does not have the capacity to universalize, nevertheless, writes Lévinas, confers humanity on the human, enters the human prison from the margins and calls to the human from within (202; 50). But does he have a face? This is not Derrida's question, nor the cat's friendship with "man" (which is why, perhaps, it is a cat and not a dog); rather, it is the cat's look, his/her gaze, and the returned look of the "human" that is at issue.

But why this cat (not on a mat, but in the bedroom and the bathroom), following, staring? In a talk at a conference about the autobiographical animal, Derrida mentions Sarah Kofman's *Autobiogriffures* (and here too it is a question of mourning a dead friend, invoked as the reigning muse of cat-scratch philosophy, for Kofman's is the last in the AIDS-quilt-like litany of names that haunt C  risy [43; 392]). Kofman reminds us that there is a veritable lineage of famous cats in history and literature and that they are the "*animaux pr  f  r  s de bien des   crivains, comme s'il y avait une affinit   particuli  re entre le chat et l'  criture, le chat et la culture*" (14); ("the animals preferred by many writers, as though there were a particular affinity between the cat and writing, the cat and culture" [my translation]). In *Autobiogriffures*, Kofman pursues the *griffes*—the *claws* and *marks*—of writing with Hoffman's cat, Murr; from the very first pages, she reminds us of Derrida's once-humanist (though not necessarily) articulation of *archi-  criture*:

Un certain ethnocentrisme "refuse le nom d'  criture    certaines techniques de consignation," admet l'existence de peuples "sans   criture," "sans histoire," auxquels il refuse le nom d'homme. A fortiori ne saurait-on admettre chez l'animal, une certaine disposition    l'  criture, une certaine disposition    acqu  rir une certaine   criture. . . . Si les pattes de mouche du chat   taient des hi  roglyphes? Le chat n'  tait-il pas animal sacr   en Egypte, pays o   Teuth inventa l'  criture?

A certain ethnocentrism "refuses the name of writing to certain techniques of consignment," and admits of the existence of peoples "without writing," "without history," to whom it refuses the name of man. *A fortiori* one would not be able to admit that the animal would have a certain

disposition toward writing, a certain disposition toward acquiring a certain writing . . . [but] what if the scrawls of a cat were hieroglyphs? Was not the cat sacred in Egypt, the country where Thoth invented writing? (A 10-11; my translation; quotations from Derrida's *Grammatologie*)³⁰

The ethnocentrism identified by Derrida in *De La Grammatologie* is also an “anthropocentrism,” as Derrida argues in *L'Animal* and in his response, as animal, to Jacques Lacan, in “Et si l'animal répondait?”:

(. . . *Si la déconstruction du “logocentrisme” a dû . . . se déployer à travers les années en déconstruction du “phallogocentrisme,” puis du “carnophallogocentrisme,” la substitution tout initiale du concept de trace ou de marque aux concepts de parole, de signe ou de signifiant était d'avance destinée, et délibérément, à passer la frontière d'un anthropocentrisme, la limite d'un langage confiné dans le discours et les mots humains. La marque, le gramme, la trace, la différence, concernent différenciellement tous les vivants, tous les rapports du vivant au non-vivant.*) (*L'Animal*, 144)

(. . . whereas the deconstruction of “logocentrism” had, for necessary reasons, to be developed over the years as deconstruction of “phallogocentrism,” then of “carnophallogocentrism,” its very first substitution of the concept of the trace or mark for those of speech, sign, or signifier was destined in advance, and quite deliberately, to cross the frontiers of anthropocentrism, the limits of a language confined to human words and discourse. Mark, gramma, trace, and différence refer differentially to all living things, all the relations between living and nonliving.) (*The Animal*, 104)

Cats write, as the “griffe”—simulacral signature, inscription and trace—suggests. Such an inscription is also an auto-immune system and theft, a mark of violence: “Griffe, instrument d'écriture, mais aussi d'auto-défense, moyen de s'emparer de la propriété d'autrui. Griffe, signe de rapacité et empreinte imitant la signature: un seul terme pour

30. Jacques Derrida, *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).

désigner la violence de l'écriture qui lacère le papier, et celle de l'écrivain" (A 63-64); ("The *griffe* [scratch, simulacral signature, mark], the instrument of writing, but also of self-defense, a way of seizing the property [and the propriety] of others. The *griffe*, sign of rapacity and imprint imitating the signature: a single term to designate the violence, both of the writing that lacerates paper and of the author" [my translation]). In 1976, Kofman reminds us that:

écrire, c'est s'emparer d'un privilège humain, c'est porter un rude coup au narcissisme de l'homme en le détrônant de la royauté de l'univers. Faire écrire un chat, c'est inscrire l'écriture dans la vie même et c'est, d'un seul geste, barrer l'opposition métaphysique de l'instinct et de l'intelligence, dénoncer la problématique cartésienne en se plaçant sur un autre terrain que celui de l'entendement et de la science. C'est faire de l'animal, sur le plan ontologique, l'égal de l'homme, et sur le plan économique, un rival. (A 61)

To write is to seize a human privilege, it is to deal a rude blow to man's narcissism by dethroning him from his place of royalty in the universe. To make a cat write is to inscribe writing in life itself and is, in a single gesture, to cross out the metaphysical opposition between instinct and intelligence, to denounce the Cartesian problematic by placing oneself on a terrain other than that of understanding and of science. It is to make of the animal, on the ontological level, the equal of man, and, on the economic level, a rival. (my translation)

Writing, that inhuman technicity at the heart of the human, in the form of the cat's *griffe* (grafted, as Kofman notes, from Hoffmann's cat's *oeuvre*), "*introduit l'autre dans le même, vient gommer l'autos' et lacérer le bios sous le fouet de Thanatos*" (74); ("introduces the other into the same, gums up the 'autos' and lacerates the 'bios' under the whip of Thanatos [my translation]). It is a writing that lacerates, shreds the book, confounding inside and outside, totality, authorship, and private property: it "*remet l'écriture humaine à sa place: celle d'être seulement un certain type d'écriture*" (77); ("puts human writing in its place as being only one type of writing" [my translation]). In

shredding the books of men, Murr, the cat “*met fin au privilège qu’à l’homme de détenir l’écriture, il met en question son hégémonie*” (81); (“puts an end to the privilege man has to hold on to writing, puts into question his hegemony [my translation]). This struggle between “man” and animal around the trace—its effacement and inscription—is one of the issues Derrida identifies at stake in Lacan’s insistence that the non-human animal does not cover up its tracks, and that were it to do so, it would “make itself the subject of the signifier.”³¹ In his reading of Lacan on, precisely, the link between tracing and tracking and their effacement, the undecidability of the antinomic senses of the word “*dépister*” (to track, to follow a scent or tracks, and to confuse by covering one’s tracks), Derrida reminds the reader that “*la structure de la trace suppose que tracer revienne à effacer une trace (toujours présente-absente) autant qu’à l’imprimer, toutes sortes de pratiques animales, parfois rituelles, associent, par exemple dans la sépulture et le deuil, l’expérience de la trace à celle de l’effacement de la trace*” (185); (“the structure of the trace presupposes that to trace amounts to erasing a trace as much as to imprinting it; all sorts of sometimes ritual animal practices, for example, in burial and mourning, associate the experience of the trace with that of the erasure of the trace” [137]). The point is not whether the animal can or cannot erase or efface its traces, but that the human cannot do so either:

La trace est ineffaçable. Au contraire. Il appartient à une trace de toujours s’effacer et de toujours pouvoir s’effacer. Mais qu’elle s’efface, qu’elle puisse toujours s’effacer, et dès le premier instant de son inscription . . . cela ne signifie pas que quiconque, Dieu, homme ou animal, en soit le sujet maître et puisse disposer du pouvoir de l’effacer. . . . A cet égard l’homme n’a pas plus le pouvoir d’effacer ses traces que ledit “animal.” (186)

The trace cannot be erased. . . . A trace is such that it is always being erased and always able to be erased. . . . But the fact that it can be erased [*qu’elle s’efface*], that it can always be erased or erase itself, and that from the first instant of its inscription . . . does not mean that someone,

30. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 305.

God, human, or animal, can be its master subject and possess the power to erase it. . . . In this regard, the human no more has the *power* to cover its tracks than does the so-called “animal.” (138)

What rejoins Kofman’s description of the cat’s “innocent” lacerations of the human inscription/trace, and raises the question of usurpation, is Derrida’s remark that the distinction between the so-called human and the so-called animal upheld in Lacan’s argument testifies to a “*réinstitution anthropocentrique de la supériorité de l’ordre humain sur l’ordre animal, de la loi sur le vivant*” (186-187); (an “anthropocentric reinstitution of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living” [138]), and that “*cette forme subtile de phallogocentrisme semble témoigner à sa manière de la panique dont parle Freud: réaction blessée non pas au premier traumatisme de l’humanité . . . mais encore au second traumatisme, le darwinien*” (187); (“such a subtle form of phallogocentrism seems in its way to testify to the panic Freud spoke of: the wounded reaction not to humanity’s *first* trauma . . . but rather to its *second* trauma, the Darwinian” [138-139]).

Tracing, tracking, following; inscription, trace: these are the aporetic (and yet not!) paths of Derridean and feline animality, the in- or a-human in the human and nonhuman animal; this following [behind] is another way of saying “I am,” when what “I am” is following the other (*L’Animal*, 82-83; *The Animal*, 54-55). Before the question of being as such, “*de l’esse et du sum, de l’ego sum, il y a la question du suivre, de la persécution ou de la séduction de l’autre*” (94); (“of *esse* and *sum*, of *ego sum*, there is the question of following, of the persecution and seduction of the other” [65]). Derrida says that thinking concerning the animal derives from poetry—the “*animot*” of his text—the animated words of animals. This is what philosophy deprives itself of. What, Derrida asks, is one following in this discourse on the trace of the other, and why is the trace of the other inscribed in this discourse as animal, as “*animot*”? (82-83; 55) To understand this, to follow it, is perhaps to follow the labyrinth of paths through . . . a library, or jungle, like Jorge Luis Borges writing of “The Other Tiger”:

I think of a tiger. The fading light enhances

the vast and painstaking library
 and seems to set the bookshelves at a distance;
 powerful, innocent, bloodstained, and new-made,
 it will move through its jungle and its morning
 and leave its track on the muddy edge
 of a river, unknown, nameless

. . .

Afternoon creeps in my spirit and I keep thinking
 that the tiger I am conjuring in my poem
 is a tiger made of symbols and of shadows,
 a sequence of prosodic measures,
 scraps remembered from encyclopedias,
 and not the deadly tiger, the luckless jewel
 that in the sun or the deceptive moonlight
 follows its paths. . . .

Against the symbolic tiger, I have put
 the real one, whose blood runs hot,

. . .

but still, the act of naming it, of guessing
 what is its nature and its circumstances
 creates a fiction, not a living creature,
 not one of those who wander on the earth.

Let us look for a third tiger. This one
 will be a form in my dream like all the others,
 a system and arrangement of human language,
 and not the flesh-and-bone tiger
 that, out of reach of all mythologies,
 paces the earth. I know all this, but something
 drives me to this ancient and vague adventure,
 unreasonable, and still I keep on looking
 throughout the afternoon for the other tiger,
 the other tiger which is not in this poem.³²

Derrida does not, like Kofman, focus on the cat's claws, the *griffure/griffe* that is the mark of marking, the animal weapon that also inscribes. His fear, naked before his little female cat, is not a

31. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Other Tiger," in *A Borges Reader*, ed. Emir Rodriguez Monegal, et al. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 281-82.

fear of being clawed, lacerated, written on or over by the cat, no, it is a look with which he is concerned, a mouth, too, that he is—for a moment—afraid of:

Le chat m'observe nu de face, en face-à-face, et si je suis nu face aux yeux du chat qui me regarde de pied en cap, dirais-je, juste pour voir, sans se priver de plonger sa vue, pour voir, en vue de voir, en direction du sexe. Pour voir, sans aller y voir, sans y toucher encore, et sans y mordre, bien que cette menace reste au bout des lèvres ou de la langue. (19)

The cat observes me frontally naked, face to face, and if I am naked faced with the cat's eyes looking at me as it were from head to toes, just *to see*, not hesitating to concentrate its vision—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the direction of my sex. *To see*, without going to see, without touching yet, and without biting, although that threat remains on its lips or on the tip of the tongue. (“The Animal,” 373)

Who, then, is this cat that looks, that perhaps, at least in Derrida's imagination, thinks about touching or biting, but doesn't, at least not yet? And when the tiger appears, a tigress, he reminds us, she is a tiger who is looking in a mirror, who is, indeed, transfixed—*prise, capturée*—by the great beauty of her image in the mirror (*The Animal*, 69).

There is something feminine about the cat. She is a female cat, Derrida says, after calling her a (masculine) cat; her gender will appear and disappear over the course of the essay, for when appearing as example, the cat is masculine (the unmarked gender), but in her occasional singularity, she is feminine. Naked, before Derrida, she is sometimes a female cat. The English translation commits the sin Vicki Hearne denounces (along with placing “scare quotes around animal names”) of using “it” rather than “he” or “she” when referring to an animal (something English rather than French can do to indicate the generic animal).³² But, here, it is

32. Vicki Hearne, *Adam's Task: Calling Animals By Name* (New York: Random House, 1986), 169.

precisely a question of the non-generic; there is no animal-as-such. Something about sexual difference and something about kinship are troubled when an animal enters the scene. Echoing a passage from *Politiques de L'Amitié*, Derrida says we must ask ourselves “*ce qui arrive à la fraternité des frères quand un animal entre la scène*” (29); (“what happens to the fraternity of brothers when an animal enters the scene” [“The Animal,” 381]).³³ He notices that, in thinking through his zoo-auto-bio-bibliography, “*ces animaux sont accueillis, . . . à l’ouverture de la différence sexuelle. Plus précisément des différences sexuelles*” (59); (“animals are welcomed . . . on the threshold of sexual difference. More precisely of sexual differences” (404).

The pluralization of sexual differences queers this animal world on the way to an analysis of human masculine shame: here is a sex which is not one, a sexual difference that is not one either, but many, or more than one.³⁴ More than one difference appears as well in the room, for the shame that shows up, stands up, heats up we might say with Derrida, when Derrida is in the room with the cat, is a third term:

C’est d’abord quand un autre se trouve dans la pièce, quand un tiers se trouve dans la chambre ou dans la salle de bains, à moins que le chat lui-même, quel que soit d’ailleurs son sexe, ne soit justement le premiers tiers . . . tout cela devient encore plus aigu si le tiers est une femme. Et le “je” qui vous parle ici

33. “*La phratriarchie peut comprendre les cousins et les soeurs mais, nous le verrons, comprendre peut aussi vouloir dire neutraliser. Comprendre peut commander d’oublier, par exemple, avec la ‘meilleure intention du monde,’ que la soeur ne fournira jamais un exemple docile pour le concept de fraternité Que se passe-t-il quand, pour faire cas de la soeur, on fait de la femme une soeur? et de la soeur un cas du frère?*” *Politiques de l’amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 13; (“the fratriarchy may include cousins and sisters but, as we will see, including may come to mean neutralizing. Including may dictate forgetting, for example, with ‘the best of all intentions,’ that the sister will never provide a docile example for the concept of fraternity What happens when, in taking up the case of the sister, the woman is made a sister? And a sister a case of the brother?”) *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997), viii.

34. I am referring to Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

ose donc se poser, il signe sa présentation de soi à se présenter comme un homme, un vivant du sexe masculin même s'il le fait . . . gardant un sens aigu de la complexité instable . . . soupçonnant même qu'une autobiographie conséquente ne peut ne pas toucher à cette assurance du "je suis un homme," "je suis une femme," je suis une femme qui est aussi un homme.

Or ce moi, ce moi le mâle, croit avoir remarqué que la présence d'une femme dans la pièce allume dans le rapport au chat, au regard nu du chat qui me voit nu, et me voit nu le voir me voir nu, une sorte de feu brillant . . . c'est alors, outre la présence d'une femme, la présence d'une psyché dans la pièce. Nous ne savons plus combien nous sommes, alors, tous et toutes. (86)

The first is when another is in the room, when there is a third party in the bedroom or the bathroom, unless the cat itself, whatever its sex, be that third party. Allow me to make things still more clear: all that becomes all the more acute if the third party is a woman. And the "I" who is speaking to you here dares therefore to posit himself, he signs his self-presentation by presenting himself as a man, a living creature of the masculine sex, even if he does so . . . retaining an acute sense of the unstable complexity . . . even suspecting that an autobiography of any consequence cannot not touch on this assurance of saying "I am a man," "I am a woman," I am a man who is a woman.

Now this self, this male me, believes he has noted that the presence of a woman in the room heats things up in the relation to the cat, vis-à-vis the gaze of the naked cat that sees me naked, and sees me see it seeing me naked, like a shining fire . . . besides the presence of a woman, there is a mirror [*psyché*] in the room. We no longer know how many we are then, all males and females of us. (*The Animal*, 58)

The animal(s) in the room, the animal(s) in the "*psyché*" (or "*cheval*") mirror, generate sexual differences from sexual difference, even as they institute sexual difference through what Derrida calls "hetero-narcissistic" erotic mirroring, a mirroring of the self as other, a mirror stage that defines the moment of desire and identification as a moment of pursuit of the other, se-duction, of "*séduction chasserresse*"

(88) (“seductive pursuit” [60]).³⁴ In his wandering through non-specular animal desire, or rather the non-visual specularity of animalian mirroring (through sound and scent as well as look) that constitutes recognition of the other, an other of the “same” species, Derrida forges a “mirror stage,” which is also, as his play on the mirror as *psyché* is meant to remind us, a psychic formation for animals, and finds out what, in shame, seems peculiar to the male of the human species: the erection, the rhythmic tumescence and detumescence of a standing-up over which the human male has little control, and which he thus cannot dissimulate. This “general phenomenon of erection” is also, he argues, part of the process of hominization, of coming to stand upright on two legs as a difference from other animals (90; 61). There is something in this shame, then, that makes it difficult to meet an animal face-to-face:

C'est en ce lieu du face-à-face que l'animal me regarde, c'est là que j'ai du mal à supporter ce qu'on appelle un animal qui me regarde, s'il me regarde, nu. Que ce mal n'aille pas sans l'annonce de quelque jouissance, c'est encore autre chose, mais on comprend que ce soit aussi la même chose, la chose qui allie en elle désir, jouissance et angoisse. (90)

It is in this place of face-to-face that the animal looks at me; that is where I have difficulty accepting that what one calls an animal looks at me, when it looks at me, naked. That this difficulty [*mal*] does not exclude the announcement of a certain enjoyment [*jouissance*] is another question still, but one will understand that it is also the same thing, that thing that combines within itself desire, *jouissance*, and anguish. (61)

34. Cf. Michael Warner, “Homo-Narcissism: or Heterosexuality,” in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, ed. Joseph Boone et al. (London: Routledge, 1990), 190-206. Derrida’s discussion of “hetero-narcissism” addresses, I think, Warner’s concern that male desire for the (male) other is most often scripted as narcissism, that gender difference is understood, in other words, to be difference *tout court*. Derrida’s notion of “hetero-narcissism” allows for the simultaneous play of desire and identification, sameness and difference, in meeting the gaze of the other.

Later on in the essay, when Derrida reminds us that the comparison of humans to animals has been a way of abjecting Jews and women through the absolute idealization of animals, on the one hand, and their absolute demonization, on the other (93; 64; see also 144; 104), he returns to the question of masculinity's shame and the "*mal*" that is both difficulty and evil. There is a sacrificial scene here, a sacrificial logic that subtends phallic heteronormativity, and which Derrida has described elsewhere, especially in "Eating Well," as "phallogocentrism" and "carno-phallogocentrism":

Le mal voulu, le mal fait à l'animal, l'insulte à l'animal seraient alors le fait du mâle, de l'homme en tant qu' homo, mais aussi en tant que le vir. Le mal de l'animal, c'est le mâle. Le mal vient à l'animal par le mâle. Il serait assez facile de montrer que cette violence faite à l'animal est sinon d'essence du moins à prédominance mâle et, comme la dominance même de la prédominance, guerrière, stratégique, chasseresse, viriloïde . . . c'est le mâle qui s'en prend à l'animal." (144)³⁵

(Evil intended, harm done to the animal, insulting the animal would therefore be a fact of the male, of the human as *homo*, but also as *vir*. The animal's problem [*mal*] is the male. Evil comes to the animal through the male.) It would be relatively simple to show that this violence done to the animal is, if not in essence, then at least predominantly male, and, like the very dominance of that predominance, warlike, strategic, stalking, *viriloid* . . . it is the male that goes after the animal. (104)

The circuitous route that this deconstruction of humanism takes, then, opens a path for queerness by following the ways "man," in erecting himself into (pre)dominance over the animal, recognizes and disavows that his "I am" is first of all an "I am following [behind]," "I am after" the animal, and that the animal, the *animot*—i.e., passion, suffering, passivity, not-being-able-ness ("The

35. See also, for an elaboration of the sacrificial logic entailed in the passage from "penis" to "phallus," Jean-Joseph Goux, "The Phallus: Masculine Identity and the 'Exchange of Women,'" *differences* 4.1 (1992): 40-75.

Animal,” 396)—is what is “disavowed, foreclosed, sacrificed, and humiliated” in himself on his way to becoming “human” (*The Animal*, 113).³⁶

This is a new kind of male human animal who stands before “his” cat, discomfited by the face-to-face encounter, aware of the abyss in the gaze between them, but also aware of the subjectivity of the other face. In a moment that reaches for a revision of oedipal subject-formation (in its admittedly not very sustained critique of the Lacanian “mirror stage”) and, simultaneously, enacts the implications of a queer ethics of inter-subjectivity—queer in its cross-species, hetero-narcissistic erotic mirroring—Derrida asks:

Et puis-je me montrer enfin nu au regard de ce qu'ils appellent du nom d'animal? Devrais-je me montrer nu quand cela me regarde, ce vivant qu'ils appellent du nom commun, général et singulier, de l'animal? Je réfléchis désormais la même question en y introduisant un miroir; j'importe une psyché dans la pièce. Là où quelque scène autobiographique s'aménage, il y faut une psyché, un miroir qui me réfléchisse nu de pied en cap. La mème question deviendrait alors: devrais-je me montrer me ce faisant me voir nu (donc réfléchir mon image dans un miroir) quand cela me regarde, ce vivant, ce chat qui peut être pris dans le même miroir? Y a-t-il du narcissisme animal?

36. Derrida gently chides Elisabeth de Fontenay for her critique of rationalist humanism's discourse on the animal by pointing out that both reason and humanism also narrowly circumscribe “the human” (“The Animal” 145; 105). For an analysis that arrives at similar conclusions, but with specifically feminist vegetarian goals in mind, see Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2000). For analyses of the comparisons between denigrated racial and sexual categories and animals, again in very different traditions of critique, see Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (New York: Mirror Books, 1996), and Joan Dunayer, “Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots,” in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 11-26. Giorgio Agamben, in *The Open*, also argues that it is the humiliated “animal within” against which “the human” defines itself (though Agamben is not attentive to the specificity of the gender of “the human” so erected).

Mais ce chat ne peut-il aussi être, au fond de ses yeux, mon premier miroir? (76-77)

And can I finally show myself naked in the sight of what they call by the name of “animal”? Should I show myself naked when, concerning me, looking at me, is the living creature they call by the common, general, and singular name *the animal*? Henceforth I shall reflect (on) the same question by introducing a mirror. I import a full-length mirror [*une psyché*] into the scene. Wherever some autobiographical play is being enacted there has to be a *psyché*, a mirror that reflects me naked from head to toe. The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is, reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the same mirror? Is there animal narcissism? But cannot this cat also be, deep within her [*sic*] eyes, my primary mirror? (50-51)

The fullest queering, we could say, happens in a moment of mis-translation, a monolingualism of the other perhaps as well, a monolingual humanism (a humonolingualism?) that marks the cat who looks at Derrida. Marks her, to be sure, because Derrida elsewhere designates her as a female cat, “his” female cat, whereas the male cats have all pranced, strolled, or crept through the essay in a neutered English form, the neuter; but also because, in the Lacanian or object relations mirroring this scene recalls, the primary mirror is the (m)other. To make of Derrida a cat’s kitten (Alice’s too, perhaps), is indeed to queer kinship. But Derrida’s desire for “his” cat, his identification with her, does not necessarily belong to such a filial register; it is something other, a queer ontological abyssal relation, a relation to the feminine human and to a non-human other. And to find a mirror [*psyché*] in the other male (other) is also to queer the intersubjective erotics of a hetero-narcissism-in-the-making. In all these cases, with all these sexes and sexual differences at play in a hall of mirrors, queer theory “is” “after” Derrida.

Postscript

Another ethical theorist of the *zoon*, near the end of his followings-after, meditated, perhaps melancholically, on the ends of “man,” and on the relations among the living who share the passionate condition of mortality. To end where I began, to add one more “griffure” to Sarah Kofman’s feline genealogy, I cannot help but wonder whether Derrida’s cats are the interlocutors—no, the mirrors—of a certain other gaze, not this time the gaze of the human-in-the-making, naked like an infant, but that of the philosopher contemplating death. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in a beautiful passage that closes *Tristes Tropiques* (that “sad” place he went to as a Jew fleeing Europe, following the tracks or traces of an earlier denunciator of carno-phallogocentrism, Jean de Léry, who was also fleeing Europe’s religio-racist persecutions), writes, of “our” time between the beginning of the world and its end:

Le monde a commencé sans l'homme et il s'achèvera sans lui... l'homme n'est seul dans l'univers... tant que nous serons là et qu'il existera un monde—cette arche ténue qui nous relie à l'inaccessible demeurera, montrant la voie inverse de celle de notre esclavage et dont, à défaut de la parcourir, la contemplation procure à l'homme l'unique faveur qu'il sache mériter: ... cette faveur que toute société convoite ... chance, vitale pour la vie, de se dépendre et qui consiste ... pendant les brefs intervalles où notre espèce supporte d'interrompre son labeur de ruche, à saisir l'essence de ce qu'elle fut et continue d'être, en deçà de la pensée et au delà de la société: dans la contemplation d'un minéral plus beau que toutes nos oeuvres; dans le parfum, plus savant que nos livres, respiré au creux d'un lis; ou dans le clin d'oeil alourdi de patience, de sérénité et de pardon réciproque, qu'une entente involontaire permet parfois d'échanger avec un chat.³⁷

The world began without man and will end without him

37. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955, repr. 1984), 495-497; *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Atheneum, 1965).

... [M]an is not alone in the universe ... as long as we continue to exist and there is a world, that tenuous arch linking us to the inaccessible will still remain, to show us the opposite course to that leading to enslavement; man may be unable to follow it, but its contemplation affords him the only privilege of which he can make himself worthy ... a privilege coveted by every society ... the possibility, vital for life, of *unbitching*, which consists ... in grasping, during the brief intervals in which our species can bring itself to interrupt its hive-like activity, the essence of what it was and continues to be, below the threshold of thought and over and above society: in the contemplation of a mineral more beautiful than all our creations; in the scent that can be smelt at the heart of a lily and is more imbued with learning than all our books; or in the brief glance, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness, that, through some involuntary understanding, one can sometimes exchange with a cat. (413-415)

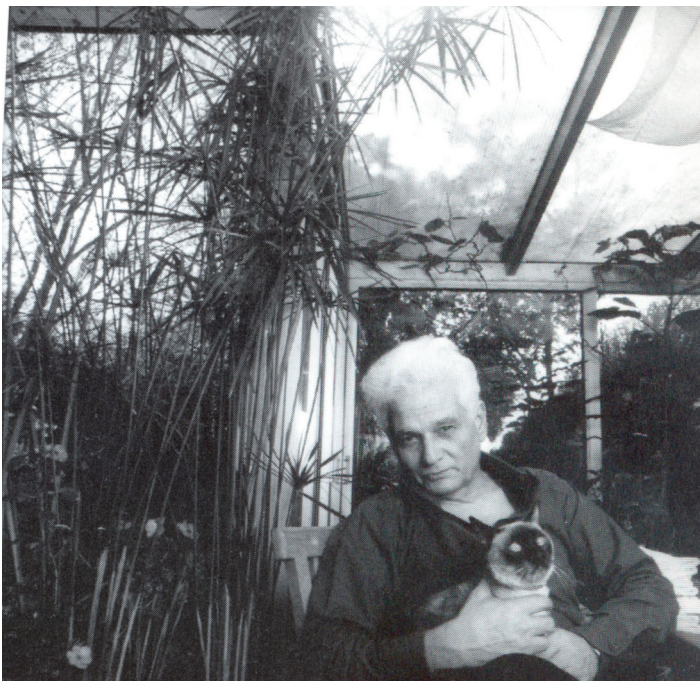


Fig. 2: Derrida and Lucrece.

Derrida's Queer Root(s)¹

Jarrold Hayes

In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida writes, “The trace is not only the disappearance of origin . . . it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally [*en retour*/in retrospect] by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin.”² By asserting the *après-coup* constitution of origins, Derrida therefore implies that searching for, then “finding,” one’s roots consists not in returning to pre-existing origins; rather, the very return posits them *after the fact* as if they existed prior to it.³ At first glance, this key passage for what may be called Derrida’s *deconstruction of origins* (a critical component of the deconstruction of essence since his earliest writings) might seem contrary to the articulation of identity through narrative returns to origins or roots. Indeed, if the notion of roots literalizes identity’s essence as an organic attachment to its origins in a material, geographical site,

1. Another version of this essay was previously published in Jarrold Hayes, *Queer Roots for the Diaspora: Ghosts in the Family Tree* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2016), 181–201. Reprinted here with permission.

2. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 61; Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 90. Hereafter cited as OG. All quotations are from published English translations. Where I have felt the need to alter the translation or include parts of the original, I do so in brackets, and the second page reference is to the French original. Unless otherwise noted, any words from the French original in italics were already included in the published translation.

3. For more on Derrida and the *après-coup*, especially in terms of Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred effect), see Nicholas Royal, “Impossible Uncanniness: Deconstruction and Queer Theory,” in this volume.

then, for Derrida, any metaphysical search for origins is actually a writing of origins as fiction, that is, of *original fictions*. Yet Derrida increasingly wove an autobiographical thread into writings like “Circumfession”⁴ and *Monolingualism of the Other*⁵ with the result that, in spite of his deconstruction of origins, origins keep coming back in the form of narrative returns to his Jewish-Algerian roots. Therefore, Derrida’s later writings (and their deployment of the autobiographical) offer rich pre-texts for unraveling the ties that bind a metaphysics of origins to accounts of *identity as rootedness* as well as a strategy for dealing with a rooted identity that resists such an unraveling.

Of Derrida’s autobiographical texts, “Circumfession”—a sort of footnote running the entire length of Geoffrey Bennington’s “Derridabase,” which, together, constitute their jointly authored *Jacques Derrida* (1991)—perhaps best exemplifies this seemingly contradictory combination of the deconstruction of origins, on the one hand, and their affirmation (that is, an affirmation of origins that ends up queering the very notion of roots), on the other. For here, Derrida lavishes attention not only on his own penis (or root), but also on the circumcision of that penis as a figure for his “own” Jewish-Algerian origins (or roots). Written around his penis, these origins are also doubly circumscribed by seemingly opposing limits, namely, the limits of identity and those of its deconstruction. By focusing on the (homo)erotics that arise when Derrida’s penis enters his writing, this essay brings Derrida’s autobiographical texts into contrast with deconstruction and argues that this contradiction is at the heart of a queering of identity for which deconstruction might be read as an allegory. Once autobiography intrudes into Derrida’s deconstructive writing, deconstruction turns out to have been, in part, about identity all along.

4. Jacques Derrida, “Circumfession,” in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993); *ibid.* “*Circonfession*,” in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991). Hereafter cited as C.

5. See Jacques Derrida, *The Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origins*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998); *ibid.*, *Le monolinguisisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996).

In “Circumfession,” Derrida returns to his “own” Algerian childhood by reading Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (C.E. 397–400). In writing his “own” autobiography through reading/writing the autobiography of another, Derrida is already queering a certain notion of identity, even before we encounter any explicit mention of “homosexuality.” In one passage, Derrida evokes his North African literary forebear as follows: “I have the vision of SA, too, as a little homosexual Jew (from Algiers or New York), he has repressed everything, basically converts himself quite early on into a Christian Don Juan for fear of AIDS” (C 172). Here, through a sort of Berber pre-text, Derrida returns to a pre-Muslim, pre-French Algeria, thereby unconverted Saint Augustine and recasting his Christianization as repression. In yet another passage, this vision of “SA”—the “little homosexual Jew”—is extended to Derrida himself:

[M]y impossible homosexuality, the one I shall always associate with the name of Claude, the male and female cousins of my childhood, they overflow my corpus, the syllable CL, in *Glas* and elsewhere, admitting to a stolen pleasure, for example those grapes from the vineyard of the Arab landowner, one of those rare Algerian bourgeois in El-Biar. . . . [S]ince then I have followed the confessions of theft at the heart of autobiographies, homosexual ventriloquy, the untranslatable debt, Rousseau’s ribbon, SA’s pears . . . (C 159–60)

Derrida’s reading of Saint Augustine, then, occurs as a homosexual encounter that equates reading/writing with queering, both of which are also the means by which the autobiographical subject identifies with his “own” pre-text and becomes (one with) it.

It is no accident that these queerings occur through several *returns*: to an Algerian childhood episode of stealing, for example, and to Derrida’s own previous writings, namely *Glas*, in which, as we shall see, he lavishes much attention on penises and erections. Moreover, by mentioning Rousseau’s theft of a ribbon, he not only inserts himself into a genealogy of autobiographical forebears (from Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, to Rousseau’s, to his own), but he also recalls his own reading of Rousseau’s confessions of masturbating. If Derrida transforms the autobiographies of others into his “own,”

such that queering Saint Augustine is simultaneously a self-queering, then reading Rousseau masturbating is a way of masturbating (with) him.⁶ This practice of reading/writing (as) a sexual act is exemplary of Derrida's "homosexual ventriloquy," which consists of making his pre-texts speak or, perhaps, of throwing his "own" voice to make us believe that it is they who speak instead of him.

Besides these mentions of "homosexuality," Jacques Derrida carries out another, more subtle queering of Derrida in a photograph depicting Bennington standing behind Derrida, who is sitting at a computer (See Fig. 1). The caption to this photograph reads, "Post Card or *tableau vivant* . . . 'a hidden pretext for writing in my own signature behind his back'" (C 11),⁷ thereby asserting a visual link between this photo and the eponymous image of *The Post Card* (1980), an illustration taken from a "13th century *Fortune-telling book (Prognostica Socratis basilei)*" by Matthew Paris (See Fig. 2).⁸ This illustration depicts Plato standing behind Socrates, as if the latter is taking dictation from the former in an inversion of the conventional wisdom regarding which philosopher is transmitting the other's thoughts in writing. It is, no doubt, this inversion between teacher and student—an inversion of the conventional primacy of the spoken word over writing—that first attracted Derrida to this image, and yet he proceeds to push this inversion towards queerer limits by sexualizing the "post card":

. . . I see *Plato* getting an erection in *Socrates'* back and see the insane hubris of his prick, an interminable, disproportionate erection traversing Paris's head like a single idea and then the copyist's chair, before slowly sliding, still warm, under *Socrates'* right leg, in harmony or symphony with the movement of this phallus sheaf [ce faisceau de phallus/this bundle of phalluses], the points, plumes, pens, fingers,

6. See Jacques Derrida, ". . . That Dangerous Supplement. . ." (OG 141-144).

7. The quotation within this quotation is from one of Bennington's passages later in the book. See Jacques Derrida, 316.

8. See Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 61; Derrida, *La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980). Hereafter cited in the text as PC.

[finger]nails and *grattoirs*, the very pencil boxes which address themselves [qui s'adressent/that rise up to one another] in the same direction It plunges under the waves made by the veils around the plump buttocks, you see the rounded double, improbable [invraisemblable] enough, it plunges straight down, rigid, like the nose of a stingray to electrocute the old man All of this, that I do not know or do not yet want to see, also comes back from the bottom of the waters of my memory, a bit as if I had drawn or engraved the scene, from the first day that, in an Algiers *lycée* no doubt, I first heard of those two. (PC 18; 22–23)

By reading the elongated object protruding from beneath Socrates' leg as Plato's penis, Derrida suggests that the latter is fucking the former between the legs. Socrates is thus taking more than dictation, Plato giving more than the spoken word. *Platon prend Socrate, qui lui donne son cul*. Or, we could say, Plato gives it to Socrates, who in turn takes it (between the legs). Yet even the text that *Jacques Derrida* sends us back to (*The Post Card*) sends us back even further to Derrida's Algerian adolescence, as if such a return to his Jewish-Algerian roots was inseparable from his reflections on the possibility of two of his philosophical pre-texts and forebears engaging in intercrural sex.

Derrida's queer reading of the give-and-take between Plato and Socrates in *The Post Card* returns in *Jacques Derrida* to inflect his relation with his translator and commentator, Geoffrey Bennington. By reading the above passage from *The Post Card* into the photograph in *Jacques Derrida*, we could say that Bennington gives it to Derrida, who in turn takes it (up the ass). The photo thus turns Bennington into Derrida's "top" just as Derrida's autobiographical reflections are positioned at the "bottom" of the page. We could also say that, as Derrida's autobiography undergirds Bennington's account of his life's work, the top becomes an allegory of the bottom. Perhaps I, too, become Derrida's top in my reading of his work. Or is it deconstruction itself that is constantly being, not undergirded, but undermined—screwed—by the insertion of the autobiographical (penis)? "Circumfession" is thus not only the text in which Derrida most literally inserts his penis and his autobiography into his writing;

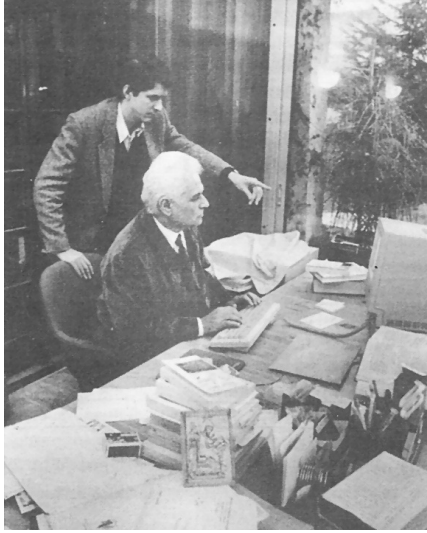


Fig. 1: From *Jacques Derrida* (1991). Note the “post card” in the foreground.



Fig. 2: Image from *The Post Card* (1980).

it is also the text in which the penis of another is inserted into him. To read/write Derrida, to turn him into the pre-text for (in this case, queer) theorizing, is also to penetrate him (that is, sodomize as well as understand him).

If we might also read the particular give-and-take that I have just described as a queering of Derrida's writings on the gift, one text, in particular, seems to give more than others: *Glas*, in which each numbered page consists of two columns (each containing multiple sub-columns or inserts). The one on the right, devoted to Jean Genet, offers the most explicit penises, which should not surprise, given their ubiquity in Genet's writings. The left-hand column is devoted to the Hegelian dialectic and Hegel's reflections on the relationship between Christianity, the family, civil society, and the State. According to Derrida, claims to truth in Hegel's progressive narrative from Judaism to Christianity depend on the notion that Christianity represents the fulfillment or teleology of Judaism (like the synthesis, or *Aufhebung*, of the dialectic) in which the three terms of the lifting up become a kind of Holy Family: "... *Aufhebung* first in the heart [*sein*] of Christianity, then *Aufhebung* of Christianity, of the absolute revealed religion in(to) philosophy [absolute religion raised up or highlighted within philosophy/de la religion absolue **relevée** dans la philosophie] that will have been its truth."⁹

In fact, Derrida's deconstruction of Truth—as Christianity and heterosexuality—depends upon the sexualization of *Aufhebung*:

9. See Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), H70, *ibid.*, *Glas* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1981), H99. Hereafter cited as G. Page numbers from *Glas* are also accompanied by an H or a G to indicate whether quotations are from the Hegel or Genet column. Wherever Leavey and Rand have inserted the original in brackets, I have kept their italicization. Unless otherwise noted, any insertion of the original that is not italicized is my own. In this particular passage, the translators seem to have mistaken the *relevée* of the original with *révélée*. In most cases, they translate *relever* as relieve, in the sense of relieving someone of their duties and responsibilities, as well as putting into relief (as in highlighting). This translation, however, removes the allusions to erections that Derrida makes in his discussions of *Aufhebung* in *Glas*, allusions I have attempted to highlight (**relever**) in my own alterations to his translations. The bold typeface used to do so is my own.

Copulation relieves [highlights/raises up] the difference [Il la **relève**]: *Aufhebung* is very precisely the relation of copulation and the sexual difference.

The relief [la **relève**] in general cannot be understood without sexual copulation, nor sexual copulation in general without the relief [la **relève**].¹⁰ (G H111; 156)

Passages such as these serve to associate the lifting, or raising up, of *Aufhebung* with erection; indeed, Derrida, we might say, turns the *Aufhebung* that is Christianity back against itself to get a rise out of it. In fact, this rise occurs, in part, by turning the Last Supper into the scene¹¹ of a homosexual orgy in which penetration is again sexual as well as epistemological:

Jesus' identifying penetration in his disciples—first John, the beloved disciple; the Father's in Jesus and through him in his disciples—John first; subjective in a first time, then objective, becomes subjective by ingestion. Consum(mat)ing [La consommation] interiorizes, idealizes, relieves [uplifts/**relève**] Provided it names, it engages a discourse, the movement of the tongue [language/la langue] is analogous to the copulation at the Last Supper scene [la Cène].

This whole analogon takes form, stands up, makes sense [tient debout], and lets itself be grasped only under the category of categories. It relieves itself [lifts itself up/se **relève**] all the time. It is an *Aufhebung*. (G H69; 96–97)

Derrida here reverses/inverts Hegel's hetero-dialectical understanding of Christianity, thereby deconstructing the Christianity/Judaism distinction, turning Judaism against Christianity in order to queer the latter. Indeed, if Derrida refers to Hegel's "absolute knowledge" throughout *Glas* as "*Sa*" (*Savoir absolu*), this abbreviation inverts the

10. This passage is a good example of the shortcomings of Leavey and Rand's translation. Only as a noun does *la relève* refer uniquely to relieving (someone of their duties). Yet Derrida is associating *la relève* as feminine article plus noun with the same words as feminine direct-object pronoun plus the third-person-singular form of the verb in the present.

11. *La Cène* (a homophone of the French word for "scene") is French for "the Last Supper."

capitalized abbreviation for Saint Augustine in “Circumfession” (*sA*) much as he turns “*sA*” into an invert and a Jew. Moreover, through both *Sa/sA*’s relation to their homophone *ça* (“the id”), Derrida further sexualizes knowledge as penetration. In Saint Augustine (*sA*), we also see *Sa* as an invert(ed) truth, the truth inverted, inversion as **Truth**.

From *Aufhebung* as erection, Derrida proceeds through the French colloquial for having an erection, *bander* (more accurately, “to get a hard on”), towards multiple parallels with Genet’s penises and Hegel’s erections. The strongest of these parallels is found in Derrida’s own writing on both Genet and Hegel, which takes the form of two bands of text. Indeed, Derrida suggests rather strongly that content shapes the form of *Glas*, which itself becomes a kind of double hard-on: “he **bands erect** double [il **bande** double]” (G G201; 280), “DOUBLE **BAND(S)** . . . **Band** contra **band** [DOUBLE **BANDE** . . . **Bande** contre **bande**]” (G G66; 92). We might then read this *double bande* as not only a visualization of the Hegelian dialectic, but also its queering, since the erection of Christianity as Judaism’s *Aufhebung* is literalized on the page and forced to rub against Genet’s erect penises in a kind of theoretical frottage or dry humping. Moreover, Hegel’s synthesis (Christianity) becomes just another thesis for which Genet’s penises serve as the antithesis in a queering of the Hegelian dialectic.

As if the mechanics of this theoretical maneuver could use more greasing up, Derrida inserts some lubrication through one of Genet’s fetish objects, the tube of Vaseline so lovingly described in *Journal du voleur* [*The Thief’s Journal*].¹² Derrida glorifies this object —“The (French) tongue [or language] then ought to sing, to fete the little tube of vaseline” (G G162; 226)—and sexualizes it even beyond Genet’s own allusions to its potential sexual uses: “And the spit with which the gliding mast would be smeared [s’enduirait] becomes very quickly—the *penis* dipped into a very fluid glue—some vaseline. And even, without forcing [sans avoir à forcer], a tube of mentholated vaseline” (G G143: 200; emphasis added). As if the tube of Vaseline was not sufficient, Derrida even adds a little spit to the mixture, as his pen becomes a penis (as does Plato’s in *The Post Card*). Moreover,

12. See Jean Genet, *Journal du voleur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 20–24.

this pen(is) needs its own lubrication: “[S]o try with the tube of vaseline . . . before the beginning of the book” (G G143–44). And if, in *Glas*, writing is equated with the insertion of a penis (the literal subject of “Circumfession”), by turning the pages of *Glas*, the reader too rubs erection against erection, an act facilitated by the textual lubrication provided by Derrida (and Genet). But the Vaseline does more than provide textual lubrication to ease the turning of pages in *Glas*; it also eases the insertion of Derrida’s “own” penis in the form of *Glas*’s most prominent autobiographical references.

One of these references is a passage over two pages long, in which Derrida describes an Algerian synagogue where the Torah is brought out from behind [derrière] curtains:¹³ “The Torah wears a robe and a crown. Its two rollers [rouleaux] are then parted [écartés] like two legs; the Torah is lifted to arm’s length and the rabbi’s scepter approximately follows the upright text. The **bands** [Les **bandes**] in which it was wrapped had been previously undone” (G G240; 335). Derrida also writes here of the rabbi “raising the two parted columns [élever les deux colonnes écartés],” and states, “Afterwards, they had to roll up the sacred text and wrap [**bander**] it all over again” (G G241; 336). Derrida thus compares the doubly erectile structure of *Glas* to the two rollers of the Torah. Or conversely, we could say that he uses the form of *Glas* to sexualize, or queer, the Torah, and vice versa, since we can read these lines as converting the erect bands into spread legs.

Yet despite the implied homoeroticism of bringing so many penises into play, there is a way in which Derrida’s predilection for the penile in *Glas* is not queer. It is by no means the only text in which he displays an affinity for penises; almost all his writings have something to do with penises, since, with very few exceptions, all the writers he writes about have one. That he would come to focus on his “own” might thus come as no surprise. For a writer who has consistently aspired to a deconstruction of phallogocentrism, and who sounds its death knell in *Glas*—“[g]las du phallogocentrisme” (G G315)—his writings *could* be read as phallogocentric, indeed, as

13. [For more on “derrière,” particularly in relation to puns in *Glas* (G G68), see Christian Hite, “The Gift from (of the) “Behind” (*Derrière*): Intro-extro-duction,” in this volume. —Ed.]

reinforcing the very phallogocentrism he claims to deconstruct. But to do so in the case of *Glas* would be to equate the penis with the phallus (which of course cannot be completely separated from it) and therefore to circumvent a further dislodging of the phallus from its supposed corporeal referent. And yet, by literalizing the phallus in a series of erect penises, which he then rubs against each other in (homo)sexual contact, does Derrida not use a kind of male queering to deflate the phallus and the phallogocentrism that is Christianity? Indeed, bringing penises together in *Glas* brings about a perversely emasculating effect.

We see this effect in the above description of the Torah, which transforms two erections into opened legs, legs opened not to the penetration of heterosexual coitus but to the pointed finger of the scepter used to read a sacred text that cannot be touched by human hands.¹⁴ This sex change occurs in other passages in *Glas* as well, for no sooner does Derrida erect penises (and textual columns), than he begins to cut them down: “If I write two texts at once, you will not be able to castrate me. If I delinearize, I **erect**. But at the same time I divide my act and my desire. I—mark(s) the division, and always escaping you, I simulate unceasingly and take my pleasure nowhere. I castrate myself—I remain(s) myself thus—and I ‘play at coming’ [je ‘joue à jouir’]” (G G65). In his discussion of Genet, Derrida stages a castration that is not one, a “castration” that is undone after rubbing against his association of circumcision with castration in the opposite column:

Circumcision is a determining cut. It permits cutting but, at the same time and in the same stroke [du même coup], remaining attached to the cut. The Jew arranges himself so that the cut part [le coupé] remains attached to the cut. Jewish errance limited by adherence and the counter-cut. The Jew is cutting only in order to treat thus, to contract the cut with itself. . . . With this symbolic castration that Hegelian discourse lightly glides over, Abraham associates endogamy. . . . (G H41)

14. I would like to thank Lawrence R. Schehr for pointing out both the form of the scepter and its role in this passage.

Here Derrida establishes an analogy between the cutting (*couper*) of circumcision (and the castration associated with it) and Abraham's cutting himself off from his original people to wander elsewhere and found a new nation. Jewish identity, cut into the member of the male members of the group, depends on an attachment to circumcision/castration: "It (*Ça*) **bands erect**, castration. [*Ça bande*, la castration.] Infirmity itself bandages itself [sepanse/thinks itself] by **banding erect**" (G G138; 193). Circumcision/castration is thus a kind of *pharmakon* that marks Jewish identity as wounded while healing the very wounds it produces; it is the cut that simultaneously separates Jews from Gentiles and binds (*bande*) Jews together.

Indeed, in "Circumfession," circumcision becomes a source of *jouissance*:

[T]he supreme enjoyment [*jouissance suprême*] for all, first of all for him, me, the nursling, imagine the loved woman herself circumcising (me), as the mother did in the biblical narrative, slowly provoking ejaculation in her mouth just as she swallows the crown of bleeding skin with the sperm as a sign of exultant alliance [*alliance exultante*], her legs open, her breasts between my legs, . . . passing skins from mouth to mouth like a ring . . . (C 217–18; 202–3)

Here the *jouissance* results from heterosexual (yet Oedipal) fellatio, though one that is paradoxically based on the emasculation of a circumcision associated with castration. This curious obsession with bloody fellatio is articulated through a chain of associations, the first being a traditional aspect of the circumcision ceremony: "[S]o many *mohels* for centuries had practiced suction, or *mezizah*, right on the glans, mixing wine and blood with it, until the thing was abolished in Paris in 1843 for reasons of hygiene . . ." (C 69). For Derrida, *mezizah* is also associated with the Biblical story of "Zipporah, the one who repaired the failing of a Moses incapable of circumcising his own son, before telling him, 'You are a husband of blood to me,' she had to eat the still bloody foreskin, I imagine first by sucking it, my first beloved cannibal, initiator at the sublime gate of fellatio" (C 68–69). By characterizing his mother as Zipporah's descendant, Derrida provides a matrilineal alternative to the genealogy inscribed on the Jewish penis, connecting men to their fathers, circumcised

like them before, in a chain leading all the way back to Abraham.¹⁵

Derrida's roots are thus cut into his root, so to speak, which is the site of a sexual pleasure that Daniel Boyarin has called "Jewissance":¹⁶ "[T]he mixture on this incredible [last] supper [scene/cène] of the wine and blood, let people see it how I see it on my sex each time blood is mixed with sperm or the saliva of fellatio, describe my sex throughout thousands of years of Judaism . . ." (C 153; 145). Having one's freshly circumcised penis sucked by the moist lips of the (ancestral) mother connects one to previous penises similarly sucked in a kind of communion (making the Last Supper Jewish—which, of course, as a Passover seder, it was). The recuperation of castration in an Oedipal relation with the mother, though, need not result in a decentering of phallogocentrism, or even masculinity; *castration founds the very masculinity it threatens*, at least in Freudian models of gendered development. And yet, Derrida, I would say, emasculates otherwise, by turning the "penis" into an orifice through another complex chain of significations.

In *Glas*, the reversibility of sex is part of the cutting down of erections: "The golden fleece surrounds the neck, the cunt, the verge [la verge/the penis], the apparition or the appearance of a hole in erection, of a hole and an erection at once, of an erection in the hole or a hole in the erection . . ." (G G66; 93). Like the castration that is not one, this erection that is not one further complicates any association one might make between Derrida's cutting and the castration foundational to Freudian masculinity. Whereas Freudian castration cuts men off (separates them) from women by also cutting the latter (defining them as castrated, as being not-men), Derrida's castration, as will become clear below, carries out a deconstruction of sexual difference. And, of course, further distinguishing Derrida from Freud is the *jouissance* that the former derives from self-castration.

15. See Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 28: "The penis is . . . the place where Jewish genealogy gets marked on the male body. A son is circumcised like his fathers before him."

16. See Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xxiii.

In “Circumfession,” it is circumcision itself that, while cutting the penis, removes an orifice, or graft, that nonetheless remains attached. Derrida, in turn, turns this foreskin (a kind of ring) into a wedding ring (*alliance*, in French), marking the alliance of Jewish men with God and their covenant with him.

In *Glas*, this ring is sexualized and becomes a site of sexual penetration: “The present of the cup [or cut/coupe] that makes copulation possible in the covenant [l’alliance], that present is not given, is not present. It presents itself only in the expectation of another coupling [accouplement] that will come to fulfill, accomplish (*vollenden*) what is announced or broached/breached here” (G H68; 96). This ring is even described through imagery strongly suggesting a sphincter: “The annulus [L’anneau/ring] is too tight [serré]. Let us not give up. What I am trying to write—gl—is . . . what passes [or happens/ce qui se passe], more or less well, through the rhythmic strict-ure of an annulus. Try, one anniversary day [or birth-day], to push a ring around an **erected**, extravagant, stretched style [stylus]” (G G109; 153–54). This eroticization of the foreskin (graft) even inflects Derrida’s relation with Bennington. Although Derrida characterizes the text he offers Bennington as “uncircumcised”—“everything G. can be expecting of me, a supposedly idiomatic, unbroachable, unreadable, uncircumcised piece of writing” (C 194)—the actual content of “Circumfession” (his “own” autobiography) is given to Bennington for incorporation into *Jacques Derrida*. In other words, Derrida gives himself as text in a gift, most literally, of his penis, or perhaps its grafted foreskin. This ring, sacrificed to seal an alliance with God, becomes a wedding ring (*alliance*) offered to Bennington.

One might think that all this cutting and bleeding would be enough to make most men go limp, but the loss of erection—like the loss that is castration—nonetheless keeps what is cut off:

The *erion* [or golden fleece] derides everything said in the name of truth or the phallus, sports [joue] the **erection** in the downy being [l’être à poil] of its writing. Derision does not simply make the **erection** fall; it keeps the **erection erect** but does so by submitting the erection to what it keeps the **erection** from, already, the crack of the proper no(un) [du nom propre]. (G G69; 96–97)

And, according to Derrida, this unbinding (*débander*) of penises challenges the phallus, as opposed to simply upholding it (and/or holding it up). In other words, Derrida erects (*érige*) in *Glas pour débander*, to make his theoretical writing lose the very erections he inserts into it by turning each of them into an “**érection débandée**” (G H165). This cutting down or turning off of erections, moreover, is not merely one example of what deconstruction performs through an insertion of penises—including Derrida’s “own”—into writing; it describes the very act of deconstruction itself. For, as has often been pointed out, etymologically *deconstruction* and *analysis* (to loosen again or untie again) are quite close. From *Glas* we can also say that the action designated by the verb *débander* (which also carries the additional sense of loosening bands or ties) could, like *analysis*, be used to name deconstruction. The cutting down of erections, like the cutting of penises that is circumcision, therefore allegorizes deconstruction. In fact, if Derrida suggests replacing “essence,” or “being,” with with hard-ons—“I propose that one try everywhere to replace the verb *to be* with the verb to **band erect [bander]**” (G G133; 186)—then the term *débander* becomes equivalent to the analysis of “essence,” and, thus, to deconstruction “itself.”

But beyond this dis-placement of the phallogocentric by bringing down erections, deconstruction could also be called a queering through what Derrida calls “homosexual enantiosis” (G H224), a homosexual putting into opposition that understands the two elements of a binary as a sort of homosexual couple: “And if the sexual difference as opposition relieves [**relève**/raises up] difference, the opposition, conceptuality itself, is homosexual. It begins to become such when the sexual differences efface themselves and determine themselves as *the* difference” (G H223; 312). Derrida then allows this homosexual couple to mate: “[T]he copula couples, mates [accouple] the pair, draws closer in the same ligament (**Band**) the thing and the attribute thus becoming party again to *Sein*” (G H67). The copula (that is, the verb *to be*) binds (*bande*) what it couples; by making this erection literal, Derrida unties (*débande*) and undoes the essentialized ties signified through the copula. If his reading of Hegel teases out the heterosexuality of Truth and the dialectic, the going limp that happens once Hegel’s erections touch Genet’s penises results in a queering of all these terms and, in the case of Christianity, a reversal of Hegel’s narrative of religious

progress, a reversal that renders it Jewish. Since Derrida associates the *double bande* with the double bind—and what better definition for the aporia, i.e., the figure of an irresolvable question or problem so favored by Derrida—the *double bande* that is *Glas* (a rubbing together of Genet's penises and Hegel's erections) graphically enacts a (very male, admittedly) queering of the dialectic, one whose deconstruction of binaries is, quite literally, emasculated.

In her essay, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," Judith Butler theorizes, through readings of several texts by Freud and Lacan, the installment of the penis in the imaginary as an erotogenic site. The penis is projected onto a bodily surface made (w)hole via a chain of signification originating in the gaping hole of a toothache:

Freud's discussion began with the line from Wilhelm Busch, "the jaw-tooth's aching hole," a figure that stages a certain collision of figures, a punctured instrument of penetration, an inverted vagina dentata, anus, mouth, orifice in general, the spectre of the penetrating instrument penetrated. Insofar as the tooth, as that which bites, cuts, breaks through, and enters is that which is itself already entered, broken into, it figures an ambivalence that, it seems, becomes the source of pain analogized with the male genitals a few pages later. This figure is immediately likened to other body parts in real or imagined pain, and is then replaced and erased by the prototypical genitals. This wounded instrument of penetration can only suffer under the ideal of its own invulnerability, and Freud attempts to restore its imaginary power by installing it first as prototype and then as originary site of erotogenization.¹⁷

It is through this process, which requires the denial or erasure of the signifying chain leading back from the penis to a gaping hole, that the penis becomes "phallic." Derrida's textual penises, however, which are also at least in part autobiographical, openly acknowledge

17. See Judith Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 61-62. Hereafter cited as LP.

and eroticize their gaping wounds, still fresh with blood. His body is “in pieces,” as Butler might say (LP 83); it conjures up the specters of its wounds.

With so many penises on the pages of Derrida’s writing, one might wonder whether, instead of deconstructing phallogocentrism, as I have suggested, these penises reinforce a phallic from which they cannot be dissociated.¹⁸ While my comments on Derrida’s penises might at first glance seem to contradict feminist critiques of such understandings of castration, it is my hope that they will instead help constitute a response to second-wave feminist Germaine Greer’s call, made nearly forty years ago but arguably still relevant today: “women must humanize the penis, take the steel out of it and make it flesh again.”¹⁹ I hope my comments here contribute to such a feminist writing about the penis, as well as to the already rich engagement with Derrida on the part of a number of feminists.²⁰

Derrida’s penis, then, is haunted, but in *The Post Card*, it also haunts: “P.S. I have again overlooked them with colors, look I made up [maquillé] our couple, do you like it? Doubtless you will not be able to decipher the tattoo on *plato*’s prosthesis, the wooden third leg, the phantom-member that he is warming up under *Socrates*’ ass” (PC 64: 71). Cut off from its biological roots, the “penis” can circulate; by cutting it off, Derrida transforms it into a “dildo.” This dildo, like the numerous penile pre-texts he plays with (Rousseau’s in *Of Grammatology*, Genet’s in *Glas*, Plato’s in *The Post Card*) is an avatar of Derrida’s autobiographical “penis” in “Circumfession,” a

18. See Jane Gallop, “Phallus/Penis: Same Difference,” in *Thinking through the Body* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), 124–32.

19. See Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 315. This call is echoed by Alice Jardine in the late 1980s in “Men in Feminism: Odor di Uomo or Compagnons de Route?” in *Men in Feminism*, eds. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Routledge, 1987), 54–61: “Men still have everything to say about their own sexuality” (60).

20. For more feminist writing on the penis, see Nancy K. Miller, “My Father’s Penis,” in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 143–47. See also Hélène Cixous, *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en Jeune Saint Juif* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), where she literally writes on “Circumfession” by reproducing entire passages of it onto which she writes commentary by hand. Figuratively, then, she is writing on Derrida’s penis.

fictional penis or root that stands in for Derrida's fictional roots. In *Glas*, this prosthetic penis, a "prosthesis that **bands erect [bande]** all alone" (G G139; 194), also stands up to the erection of the Hegelian dialectic: "[E]very thesis is (**bands erect [bande]**) a prosthesis" (G G168; 235). The subtitle of *Monolingualism of the Other*—i.e., *The Prosthesis of Origins*—further associates this dildo with roots. Since in French, the Greek prefix *pros-* becomes *pro-*, the subtitle not only transforms Derrida's "root(s)" into a "dildo"; it also names this deconstructivist understanding of "origins" as a fiction that involves putting (*thesis*) forth (*pro-*), that is, putting them in front (where the penis presumably is on the male body), putting them at the start.

And yet, the *après-coup* construction of origins, with which this essay begins, puts in front only by looking back (through a *return* to origins that is the roots narrative): "I am accessible, legible, visible only in a rearview mirror [rétroviseur]" (G G84; 117). And if what is in front is such an obsession in "Circumfession," *Glas*, *The Post Card*, and *Monolingualism*, Derrida also derives great pleasure from putting it in back, in the/his behind. It is from behind, after all, that Plato sticks his pen(is) into Socrates' "inkwell":

It is too obvious, to use your words as always, that S. does not see P. who sees S., but (and here is the truth of philosophy) only *from the back*. There is only the *back*, seen from the back, in what is written, such is the final word. Everything is played out in *retro*, and *a tergo* At the very most, dipping his pen, or more sensuously one of his fingers, into that which has the office of inkwell (attached, I have cut out for you the calamus [le calame] and the orifice of said inkwell . . .) (PC 48; 55)

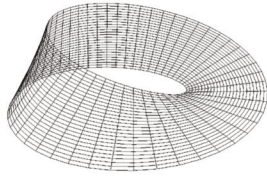
It is only by becoming behind and bottom that Derrida inserts his pro(s)thetic root(s) into his corpus:

[E]verything is always attached *de dos*, *from the back*, written, described from behind. *A tergo*. I am *already* [déjà: also D.J.] (dead) signifies that I am behind [derrière]. Absolutely behind, the *Derrière* that will have never been seen from the front, the *Déjà* that nothing will have preceded, which therefore conceived and gave birth to itself, but as a cadaver or glorious body. To be behind is to

be before all—in a rupture of symmetry. I cut myself off,
I entrench myself—behind—I bleed [je saigne] at the
bottom of my text. (G G84)²¹

A bit like “*Socrates* [who] is having his period” (PC 133), Derrida transforms that centuries old anti-semitic trope of the menstruating Jewish man (itself often associated with the blood of circumcision) into a queer figure for deconstruction. The wound of Jewish identity that heals nonetheless keeps on bleeding as a sign of the covenant (*alliance*) that ruptures the ring of the an(nul)us. By taking it (up the ass, offered up as a sacrifice), Derrida gives us what is potentially the most explicit definition for what it might mean to use *queer* as a verb. And if *queer* is often considered to be that which challenges identity, Derrida’s articulation of deconstruction *as a queering* nonetheless retains a sexualized identity whose root(s) is/are the site of a “Jewissance,” the pleasure of a deconstructivist analysis that unties, questions, and cuts down (*débande*) the very identity it erects.

21. All brackets in this passage are Leavey and Rand’s.



Deco-pervo-struction

Éamonn Dunne

Nelly, do you never dream queer dreams?

—EMILY BRONTË¹

I dream of a writing that would be niether philosophy nor literature.

—JACQUES DERRIDA²

What would happen if I were to call Jacques Derrida a “pervert”? What would it mean for a reader to pick up this book and to read a chapter which argued that he was, that his thinking and writings on hospitality, forgiveness, the gift, iterability, borderlines, postcards, promises, and so on, were perverted, the work of a pervert? If I am to be honest, *straight about it*, I would say that Derrida’s work is entirely the most perverse collection of writings I know, an immense assemblage of the most punning, insightful, playful, and rigorously perverse writings that it has been my pleasure to come (and always-yet-to-come) across. But I will not say it here. I will defer that to one of his more distinguished (and tenured) detractors. Here, then, is what Terry Eagleton has to say of Derrida’s engagement with what he calls “Marxism without Marxism” following the publication of Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx*:

There is an exasperating kind of believer who holds what he does until he meets someone else who holds the same.

1. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* [1847], in *Three Novels by the Brontë Sisters* (Claremont, CA: Coyote Canyon Press, 2011), 385.

2. Jacques Derrida, “‘This Strange Institution Called Literature’: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 73. Hereafter cited in the text as SIC.

At this point, confronted with the bugbear of an “orthodoxy,” he starts nervously to retract, or at least to qualify. There is more than a touch of this adolescent perversity in Derrida, who like many a postmodernist appears to feel (it is a matter of sensibility rather than reasoned conviction) that the dominant is *ipso facto* demonic and the marginal precious *per se*.³

The perception of Derrida laid out here—that of a puerile pervert conscious not to rush into intellectual solidarity with his peers lest he be engulfed in some kind of inauthentic Heideggerian *das Man* or Nietzschean herd—is rather suggestive, if we begin to consider Derrida’s work through the invented and reinvented terminologies designed to both incite and describe the disruptive and protean *event of reading*: terms like “trace,” “destinerrance,” “*différance*,” “dissemination,” “adestination,” “hymenography,” “*parergon*,” and so on. But I find it hard to believe that anyone familiar with Derrida’s very particular use of these terms would want to argue that they are nothing more than strategies of “retraction” and/or

3. See Terry Eagleton, “Marxism without Marxism,” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Spectres of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 86. Hereafter cited as MWM. By way of a response to Eagleton’s sardonic reading of *Spectres*, and the usage he makes of the word “perversity” in it, Derrida announces a rather thinly disguised affinity for this psychological-characterological depiction: “after all,” says Derrida, “[what] does Eagleton have against adolescent perversity? Is he militating for a return to normalcy before all things? For normalization? Is his model revolutionary the normal adult, cured of all perversity? Of what other sorts of perversity as well? Once one has set to castigating one form of perversity, it is never hard to extend the list. . . . Even if one reader took an interest in me, it would be necessary to discuss him too in terms of adolescent perversity.” See Jacques Derrida, “Marx & Sons,” in *Ghostly Demarcations*, 228. *The fact is* (if this kind of apodictic formulation can ever really apply to our topic) there is quite a lot of talk of “perversity” in Derrida’s book. Whether consciously or not, much of his writing here is precisely about the perverse “nature” of various speech acts, how they never cut a *straight path* through anything, how they invent and discover, evolve and dissolve, turn and return etc. Apart from the label of “postmodernist,” which he vehemently denies, Derrida is luminously humorous about the possibility of this perversity in his work: “it makes [him] smile” (228).

“qualification,” designed to undo the possibility of a deeply held, or even “orthodox,” view. Nor do I “believe” that a conscientious reader of such a prodigious *oeuvre* would be inclined to argue, with Eagleton, that “deconstruction is a sexy form of common-or-garden scepticism” (MWM 87).

And yet, strangely enough, I do not read an entirely negative analysis of Derrida in what Eagleton is saying here either. In fact, I see in it a chance, an opening, an infinitesimal crack, for an impossible reading. I see in it the opportunity for a kind of reading of Derrida that many of his readers may not be prepared to take, a reading open to seeing what is happening [*ce qui arrive*] across his writings, across, that is, his entirely idiosyncratic and peculiar spectropoetics.⁴ This impossible reading, I hold, can *perhaps* only take place in the event that the reader is open in the most radically inconceivable manner, *impossibly*, to the risk of an unfaithful following. Such a reader would have to be a kind of “*anacolyte*,” tracing the shimmying counter-path of the “*contre-pied*”: “To follow the *contre-pied* is,” as Derrida writes, “to follow tracks in the wrong direction.”⁵ The paradox of following something or

4. “I often say that deconstruction is what happens [*ce qui arrive*].” Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 64. Hereafter cited as ATS

5. See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), 73. I am reminded of an astonishing paper on the “*contre-pied*” presented by Nicholas Royle at the Counter-Institutions conference in Portsmouth, July 2006, subsequently published as “Jacques Derrida’s Language (Bin Laden on the Telephone),” in Nicholas Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009): “How would you translate *contre-pied*? Samuel Weber gives ‘fake-out.’ *Contre-pied*: literally, *counter-foot*; a foot against or in place of. *Contre-temps* of the *contre-pied*: when does this trick, fake-out, or wrong-footing take place? Derrida loves a good *contre-pied*. But his delight, unfortunately, is short-lived. [*‘Hélas! la jubilation n’aura pas duré’* (138)]. More literally, ‘Alas, the jubilation will not have lasted.’ His deployment of the future anterior is perhaps significant, suggesting a strange counter-time, delight or jubilation out of joint” (96-97). The term “*anacolyte*,” which I used in the preceding sentence, recalls Derrida’s daring comparison of the *anacoluthon* and the *acolyte* as an *anacolytic* figure: “In this role of the substitute, which is both necessary and contingent, essential and secondary, the *acolyte* is an accomplice, a second, a suppleant who accompanies, but

someone in the wrong direction would be a kind of axiomatics of the apostate, a kind of faithfulness to what happens beyond the pale or pathway of received opinion. Such a reading would be faithfully unfaithful to the text by becoming more than a response to the law of the text.

Permit me to make my hypothesis clear. Something odd happens whenever the topic of “perversion” is brought up. The moment one mentions the word “pervert,” even “perversion” or “perversity,” all sorts of alarm bells go off, and perhaps rightly so, since it is a particularly virulent mode of injurious speech. In fact, as I will maintain below, once the word is uttered or written, the possibility of being anything other than *controversial* (a wonderful register that, since Derrida’s work is nothing if not *contro-versial*) is sidelined, gone, impossible to regain. Using this word can get you into all sorts of trouble. As Horace puts it in *Ars Poetica*, and with something similar in mind perhaps, “*Nescit vox missa reverti.*” (“A word once uttered is irrevocable.”)⁶ And therein lies the question of how to be responsible for or to this dangerous word?

As a noun or verb—and it hovers uncannily between the two—“pervert” prevents one from settling on a “proper” meaning. We never quite know whether we are encountering a performative or constative utterance, or whether that utterance can ever be safely positioned, as traditional speech act theorists would have us believe, between “use” or “mention.” For example, when I refer to Derrida as a “pervert,” via Eagleton, I am relying on that somewhat cowardly and irresponsible rhetorical ruse known as *paraleipsis*, in which something is said or suggested obliquely in order to make an insinuation or cast an aspersion. The figure is usually identified by a disclaimer, as in “I wouldn’t exactly call such-and-such a drunk, but he does like a drink.” In this case, however, the disclaimer is that I

without accompanying altogether, in any event, at a certain distance. . . . There is no need to mobilize all the resources of semantics or etymology in order to associate the figure of the acolyte, which accompanies, with its negative, the anacoluthon, which does not accompany.” See “Le Parjure, Perhaps: Storytelling and Lying (‘abrupt breaches of syntax’),” in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002), 161-202.

6. Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (Loeb Classical Library), trans. H. R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1929), 390.

have not *used* this slanderous term, but merely *quoted* it: “pervert.” The performative force of the term is thus deflated, or diminished, becoming a pale reflection of what it once was, dried out, hollowed, whitened. It is, to recall J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*, “etiolated”: its illocutionary force translated, shifted from one point to another, so that its initial impact becomes denuded, the quotation marks acting like a prophylactic device preventing the performative from becoming felicitous.⁷ It is, in other words, a kind of secondary non-serious act of mentioning—not using—like literature or joking. But I *am* being serious. I agree with Eagleton. I *believe* in Derrida’s perversity. This, for the time being, you will have to take on faith—as if you could have it any other way!

The *OED* gives us a whole host of meanings for the word “pervert”; although we must remember here that “a dictionary of words can never give a definition, it only gives examples.”⁸ And these examples, of course, only draw us further away from the very thing they are trying to pin down: the univocal. Moreover, the word “pervert” enacts the very condition of its wandering semantics, etymologically. Its etymon is from the Latin *pervertere*, meaning “to turn the wrong way.” As a noun, a “pervert” is:

1. “A person who has forsaken a doctrine or system regarded as true for one thought false”;
2. “A person whose sexual behavior or inclinations are regarded as abnormal and unacceptable.” (An appended note reads, “The use of the term *pervert* to refer to a homosexual person is now considered highly offensive.”)

As a verb, “pervert” describes, transitively, “to interfere with,” “to thwart,” “to impede,” as in “to pervert the course of justice,” an indictable offense in most Western democracies. Worryingly for our purposes here, “to pervert” means “to turn aside from the correct meaning, use or purpose; to misapply, misconstrue,

7. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed., ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975), 22. Hereafter cited in the text as HTW.

8. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), 23.

distort”; “to deflect, divert from a regular course”; “to turn aside from right opinion or action; to lead astray; to exercise a harmful influence on; to misguide; to corrupt”; “to turn away from a religious belief regarded as true, to one held to be false.” Its antonym is therefore “to convert.” But, of course, “convert” antithetically calls up a trace of its other. In short, you cannot have a “convert” without a “pervert”; they are inextricably bound.

There is a strange, almost fantastical, neologism in *The Post Card* that has necessitated our discussion of the semantic range of this term. There Derrida speaks, or better still, one of his many characters speaks, of something called the “perverformative”: “Here is the master of the perverformative,” they say.⁹ What, given the etymological and semantic scope of the word “pervert,” could that possibly mean? For Austin, a performative utterance is classically

9. See Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 136. For the only essay I know of where this term has been given sustained critical attention, see Werner Hamacher, “Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx*,” in *Ghostly Demarcations*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 168-212. Here Hamacher argues via Derrida for a “promessianic” openness to a futurity which is twofold. In doing so he insinuates the kind of ethical awareness necessary for a thinking beyond the institution through the institution: “The democratic and furthermore communist promise thus announces, in absolute formality and absolute singularity, performatively – *biformatively* – two futures irreducible and irreconcilable to one another: an unlimited universal rule and a singularity free of every imaginable rule. It is the promise of a coming democracy only by being this double and aporetic promise; a performative only by being this *biformative*. But this singular universal promise is aporetic in yet another respect. As the promise of a future which is universal, it must be the promise of a just future of all pasts; but it cannot be the promise of the future of *all* pasts without also being a restrictive promise from a particular generation of *limited* pasts and hence without being itself merely a past promise, a wraith and an echo, the revenant of promise, broken over and over or betrayed or fatal. Pluriformative and reformativative, the revolutionary performative of the absolute messianic promise is also a *perverformative* that turns against itself and in each of its traits tends to erase itself—and not for any empirical or contingent reason which might have been avoided or eliminated, but from a structural necessity which not a single promise can escape, in particular not the promise of singularity” (196).

given in the first-person singular present indicative active manner: “I do” (uttered at a wedding ceremony); “I name” (uttered when christening a ship); “I give and bequeath my watch to my brother” (as in a will); “I bet you \$5.00”; etc. (HTW 5). Saying these things, “in the appropriate circumstances,” is not to describe a state of affairs, it is to do something with words. In saying, “I bet you \$5.00 it will rain tomorrow,” I am implicating my interlocutor in such a way that s/he will have to do something in return: “Yes, I accept your bet,” or “No, I don’t accept that.” Thus speech acts enact in-turn or incite reaction. They necessitate a response. Even a “non-response,” it is important to remember, is a response, since such speech acts are binding beyond the utterances, or even the intentions, of their speakers, as Austin knew only too well.

In one of the most important moments in *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin makes this very point by giving the example of the false promise. First quoting Hippolytus, “my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not,” Austin argues that the utterance itself—regardless of “spiritual shackle”—is efficacious and ethically binding:

[O]ne who says “promising is not merely a matter of uttering words! It is an inward and spiritual act!” is apt to appear as a solid moralist standing out against a generation of superficial theorizers: we see him as he sees himself, surveying the invisible depths of ethical space, with all the distinction of a specialist in the *sui generis*. Yet. . . . [a]ccuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*. (HTW 10)

For Austin, regardless of whatever inward spiritual act instigated or informed my utterance, my words have acted; they have had some significance for which I alone am to be held responsible. My word is my bond means precisely that: I must take responsibility for what I have said regardless of whether or not I meant to say what I said.¹⁰

10. For implications of this (impossible) responsibility, see J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001), 31-33. “On one hand, Austin is willing, in spite of what he says, to assert unqualifiedly that our word is our bond. This would mean that it would be difficult to

This mode of thinking is unsettling to say the least, since it means that whenever I use a word like “queer” or “pervert,” I am to be held responsible for the entire historicity of force belying that utterance. “This view of performativity,” as Judith Butler suggests, “implies that discourse has a history that not only precedes but conditions its contemporary usages, and that this history effectively decenters the presentist view of the subject as the exclusive origin or owner of what is said. What it also means is that the terms to which we do, nevertheless, lay claim, the terms through which we insist on politicizing identity and desire, often demand a turn *against* this constitutive history.”¹¹ Such a (perverse) *turn* against the terms one uses to define oneself is a risk that can never—and will never—be overcome. The paradox is that this historicity of force will both inform and impede my usage. The problem with the phrase “my word is my bond” is thus that *it is never my word*, at least not in the sense that I can predictably account for its range of meanings, or for the effects it will have when uttered. Moreover, when I say that Eagleton calls Derrida a “pervert,” I cannot hide behind this citation either. That citation has become my citation. My word, though it

discriminate between the monkey’s ‘go’ and my ‘I promise’ [Austin’s examples], since it is the sound that matters, not the intention. It would put Austin where he does not want to be, that is, with Paul de Man, who sees language, especially performative language, as something that operates mechanically, regardless of what the speaker thinks, feels, or intends, usually against his intentions. ‘The inhuman,’ said de Man, ‘is not some kind of mystery, or some kind of secret; the inhuman is: linguistic structures, the play of linguistic tensions, linguistic events that occur, possibilities which are inherent in language—independent of any intent or any drive or any wish or any desire we might have.’ This conclusion is just what Austin resists, with all his force, though it is the insight toward which his discovery of ‘performative utterances’ was ineluctably leading him.’ But by his own admission he has said it, regardless of what he intended, and he must take responsibility for what he has said.

11. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London: Routledge, 1993), 227. Emphasis in original. Butler also notes here that “the political deconstruction of ‘queer’ ought not to paralyze the use of such terms, but, ideally, to extend its range, to make us consider at what expense and for what purposes the terms are used, and through what relations of power such categories have been wrought” (229). The word itself would need to be queered.

is not my word, has become my bond.

Here's an example from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which I will claim (and that's a performative-testamentary speech act, too) is exemplary of what Derrida calls the "performativity." In a comic moment from Joyce's opus, Leopold Bloom decides to "throw away" his copy of *The Freeman's Journal* in order to get rid of Bantam Lyons, whom he inadvertently meets outside a chemist shop on Westland Row. When Lyons asks to see the paper so he can read what horses are running at Ascot later that day, Bloom replies: "You can keep it. . . . I was just going to throw it away."¹² Lyons leers and thrusts the newspaper back at Bloom. "I'll risk it, he said. Here, thanks." The result of Bloom's attempt to rid himself of the ensuing conversation as quickly as possible results in a hilariously misappropriated speech act. Lyons, as we see later in the novel, has interpreted Bloom's offer as a tip about a horse running in the Gold Cup race by the name of "Throwaway." This, oddly, will have dire consequences for Bloom later on when he meets the so-called "Citizen" and his cohorts in Barney Kiernan's pub, where he is suspected of winning money on the race and is called "a dark horse" himself. With added comic effect, Joyce follows Bloom's initial brief and unintentionally performative conversation with Bantam Lyons outside the chemist with Bloom (unaware of what he has just said and done) expressing disgust for those prone to gambling and throwing money away on frivolous pursuits.

Joyce's joke—i.e., that this "bet" is both a false bet and a bet nonetheless, and that Bloom will be held responsible for what he has said, though he has not really said it—points to all the ways performatives are perverse, overdetermined, dehiscent, that is, performativity. It also points to the multitudinous ways in which we are not fully responsible for what we say, if that responsibility assumes a fully aware and intentionally unified ego. For Derrida, like Joyce, *no such thing exists*. The so-called felicitous performative, uttered in appropriate circumstances, is impossible. Or as Jonathan Culler puts it: "Meaning is context-bound, context is boundless."¹³

12. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 85.

13. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 67

And it is this boundlessness that traps us, always, but it also leads to the discovery of an *aporia* between chance and necessity. This *aporia*, lest we forget, is yet another figure for the *pathway*, *dead-end*, or *impasse*. Such *aporias* are never a simple negative eschatology, for, as Derrida writes, “aporicity evokes, rather than prohibits, more precisely, promises *through* its prohibition, an other thinking, an other text, the future of another promise.”¹⁴ This other heading, or other way, is what Derrida hyperbolically brings to light each time he speaks of “iterability,” which is rooted in the Sanskrit *itara*, meaning “other.” Iterability, the excessiveness of context, is an awareness in language of the inassimilable otherness of the other; it is a way of getting to know what cannot be known, of seeing how language promises beyond itself, how it makes us all perverts.¹⁵

On another level, we might say that this episode in Joyce relays us to a thinking about language that encourages us to question the way language not only works mechanically, as a characterological bond, making us who we “are,” producing the “subject” as an actant, but also how it exceeds and precedes us by promising a perverse *commitment to others*. That performatives are structured by a double affirmation—an *a priori* “yes”-saying—already introduces perversion

14. See Jacques Derrida, *Memoires: for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 133. Hereafter cited in the text as M.

15. See *Limited Inc*: “If conventions are, in fact, never entirely adequate,” asks Derrida, “if the opposition of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ will always be lacking in rigour and purity; if language can always ‘normally’ become its own ‘abnormal’ object, does this not derive from the structural iterability of the mark?” (82). Iterability, then, can be read as the perverse structural necessity of every mark. See also J. Hillis Miller, “Performativity as Performance/Performativity as Speech Act: Derrida’s Special Theory of Performativity,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.2 (Spring 2007): 219-235: “Iterability means that those parasitical or etiolated performatives, writing in a poem, acting on the stage, uttering a soliloquy, or making a joke, and so on, that Austin wants to ‘exclude,’ in a resolute anathema, cannot be excluded. No such thing as a fully ‘serious’ performative utterance exists, as a unique, one-time-only event in the present. The possibility of the ‘abnormal’ is an intrinsic part of the ‘normal.’ Iterability . . . disqualifies the requirement that a felicitous performative depends on the self-consciousness of the ego and its ‘intentions,’ the ‘I’ who says, ‘I promise’ and means to keep that promise” (230).

into the performative: “A yes never comes alone, and we never say this word alone” (Derrida SIC, 288). Uttering a performative—saying “I do,” or even “I condemn” or “I hate”—is a way of already saying “yes” [*oui*] to the event, and its indestructible pervertibility. This is the affirmative promise of the promise, its perverse excess. Or as Derrida writes: “It is within the very structure of the act of promising that this excess comes to inscribe a kind of irremediable disturbance or perversion. This perversion, which is also a trap, no doubt unsettles the language of the promise, the performative as promise; but it also renders it possible—indestructible” (M 94).

With this in mind, we can tentatively answer our question: What does Derrida mean when he writes of “the master of the perperformative”? There is no such thing, nor can there ever be. All those linguistic fundamentalists or spiritual moralists who believe, proprietorially, that they can tell you in “plain saying” what happens in a given context, what will become of your utterance, what it means to say that [*vouloir-dire*], should note the impossibility of ever saturating a single context, of ever being able to purge the non-serious (*oratio obliqua*), abnormal, or marginal from any speech act. Indeed, the very structure of the linguistic, for Derrida, is premised on an unfulfillable promise:

This general structure is such that one cannot imagine a language that is not in a certain way caught up in the space of the promise. Before I even decide what I am going to say, I promise to speak to you, I respond to the promise to speak, I respond. I respond to you as soon as I speak and consequently I commit myself or pledge myself. This is what would lead me to say that precisely I do not master this language, because even if I wanted to do something other than promise, I would promise. I do not master it because it is older than me; language is there before me and, at that moment I commit myself in it, I say yes to it and to you in a certain manner.¹⁶

There is, therefore, no outside to this response or responsibility. As

16. Jacques Derrida, “Passages—From Traumatism to Promise,” in *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 384. Hereafter cited in the text as P.

Derrida continues, “As soon as I speak, I am in it” (P 384). Being responsible to what I say is not something I can choose, nor is it something I can master. Rather, I am mastered by it. And yet I am (impossibly) responsible for it.

What does this mean for queer theory? Eve Sedgwick has written about her experience as a queer reader thusly:

I knew I would have to struggle to wrest from [texts] sustaining news of the world, ideas, myself, and (in various senses) my kind. The reading practice founded on such basic demands and institutions had necessarily to run *against the grain* of the most patent available formulae for young people’s reading and life—*against the grain*, often, of the most accessible voices even in the texts themselves. At any rate, *becoming a perverse reader* was never a matter of my condescension to texts, rather of the surplus charge of my trust in them to remain powerful. . . . And this doesn’t seem an unusual way for ardent reading to function in relation to queer experience.¹⁷

As previously noted, any discussion of the “perverse” is inextricably imbricated with notions of the correct *path*, or *way*. Like those voyou in *Rogues*, and as the etymologies imply, speaking of the “pervert” evokes a terminology of *the street*: “The word voyou has an essential relation with the *voie*, the way, with the urban roadways [*voirie*], the roadways of the city or the *polis*, and thus with the street [*rue*], the waywardness [*dévoisement*] of the voyou consisting in making ill use of the street, in corrupting the street or loitering in the streets, in ‘roaming the streets,’ as we say in a strangely transitive formulation.”¹⁸ But what is the necessity, or tendency, that causes one to *run against the grain* of popular protocol—and its ways—as

17. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 4. Emphasis added. Hereafter cited in the text as T.

18. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), 65. See also Catherine Malabou and Jacques Derrida, *Counterpath: Travelling with Jacques Derrida*, trans. David Wills (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), where one could be forgiven for thinking that Derrida has never ceased discussing deconstruction as a thinking of the way, the path, and the (a)destination.

Sedgwick says? What kind of responsibility to the text does she envisage when she refers to herself precisely as a “perverse”—if not a rogue—reader?

A perverse reader, if we can hypothetically believe in such a figure, after Derrida, would be a reader in a perpetual state of becoming. “*Becoming a perverse reader*,” as Sedgwick says, would mean that such a reader will have been a reader-to-come, a reader for whom, to whom and because of whom, the eventness of the event would remain infinitely open. A reader like this—for whom the text remains open, beyond a horizon of accountability, i.e., open to the promise for something other to come—would be queer, indeed. Such a reader would feel the need for a responsibility to a higher law (an other law) of textuality, “a responsibility that is not deaf to the injunction of thought” (Derrida P, 272). If a queer experience of the text is, as Sedgwick claims, “a visceral near-identification with the writing . . . at the level of sentence structure, metrical pattern, [and] rhyme” (T 4), then it would be a kind of philologist’s art, a Nietzschean slow reading, requiring infinite patience and hospitality. Derrida has spoken of this strangely visceral attachment to the law of the text in *A Taste for the Secret*, i.e., his “ineradicable respect” for a demanding, slow reading and its unforeseeable consequences:

Those models of philological, micrological, I’d say even grammatico-logical demands, for me, have never lost their authority. The rest came along to complicate matters, but it is as if a certain grammar had been given forever. . . . It is like a language you can denounce only in your own language, which is that *same language*. Even when I give the impression of transgressing, putting into question, displacing, it is always under their authority, with a sense of responsibility in the face of a certain philological morality, before a certain ethics of reading or of writing. In short: before the law. (ATS 43; emphasis in original).¹⁹

It is not a matter of approaching the text with a critical apparatus, but rather how that apparatus unfolds as the reading is taking place:

19. See also Jacques Derrida, “Before the Law,” in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 181-220.

“there is always already deconstruction at work *in* works,” Derrida has emphasized; “Deconstruction cannot be applied, after the fact and from outside, as a technical instrument of modernity. Texts deconstruct *themselves* by themselves, it is enough to recall it or recall them to oneself” (M 123; emphasis in original). And, of course, there is a punning insistence in that final word “oneself,” since in the event of deconstructive reading the oneself is multiplied, becoming more than oneself, beyond oneself, other to one-self.

Shall we, therefore, speak of the perverse-reader-to-come (the *pervoreader* or *pervogogue*) as an open futurity of “philological morality,” as Derrida says, in the sense that there is always more going on in any reading than meets the eye, than any critical apparatus can even begin to suggest? That which remains, we might say, the *remainder*, the *marginal*, the *infelicitous*, the *non-serious*, the *unconscious*, i.e., what Austin, in spite of himself, lets in through the back door, is what any reading worthy of the name promises. We go on, weakly, before the law of a “philological morality,” when we succumb non-passively to the promise of something other to-come. Impossibly. The very conditionality of this promise, as Derrida reminds us time and again, is that it may not arrive. Not that it will not arrive (for we can never know for sure) but that it promises to come. If a promise is to be a promise and not just a calculation, it must have within it the perverse possibility that it will not be kept.

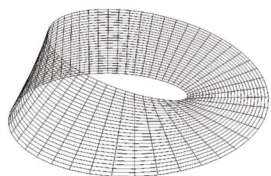
Whatever a queer reading might be, if there can ever be such a thing, then it would be a *perverse promise*, a kind of bet for something better to come, about which we can never know for sure. Perverse readings would be promises of something other to come, ways of noticing things that seem to be marginal or oblique, that stray from the proper path. They would have to remain faithfully unfaithful to the kind of singularity that haunts each event of reading beyond oneself. Hence, the paradox of queer. Queer is what perverts, what is coming or to-come. There is, therefore, no “us” in queer, no “my kind” (*contra* Sedgwick), no “community” of queer readers, no *quer*. There are only others, wholly others. The promise of a queer theory to-come is threatened at its heart by the possibility not only that it may never arrive, but that it may be a false promise, that it is necessarily perverted. But this is also its chance.

I conclude, then, with Derrida’s own promise of what this

might mean:

If I were sure that a promise was good and could not turn into something bad, then it would not be a promise. A promise has to be threatened by the possibility of being broken, of betraying itself, consciously or unconsciously. If there's no possibility of being perverted, if the good is not pervertible, then it's not good. For a promise to be possible, it must be haunted or threatened by the possibility of being broken or of being bad. Speech act theorists are serious people: they would say that if I promise to be at an appointment, if I don't mean it, if I'm lying, if I already know that I won't make it to the appointment, that I won't do everything I can to be there, then it's not a promise. A promise must be serious, it must correspond to a serious intention, at least when I say, "I'll be at the appointment tomorrow" in the form of a promise not a forecast. There are two ways of saying "tomorrow I'll be there": there is the forecast, "tomorrow morning I'll have breakfast," and there is "I'll be with you tomorrow morning for breakfast," which is something else. A promise must be serious to be a real promise according to speech act theorists; in other words, it must bind me to do everything I can to keep my promise, and it must be a promise of something good. I'd argue that if such a promise is not intrinsically pervertible, that is to say, threatened by the possibility of not being serious or sincere, or of being broken, then it's not a promise. A promise that cannot be broken, isn't a promise: it's a forecast, a prediction. The possibility of betrayal or perversion must be at the heart of the commitment to a promise and the distinction between promise and threat can never be assured. What I'm maintaining is not a matter of abstract speculation.²⁰

20. Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossibility of Saying the Event," trans. Gila Walker, *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Winter 2007): 456.



A Man for All Seasons: Derrida-cum-“Queer Theory” or the Limits of “Performativity”¹

Alexander García Düttmann

Is it perverse, a distorting reversal of how things should be, to start writing without quite knowing whether the subject is a relevant one, or even if there is a subject to be dealt with in the first place? The opening lines of Robert Bolt’s play, *A Man for All Seasons*, are spoken by the Common Man and read thusly: “It is perverse! To start a play made up of Kings and Cardinals in speaking costumes and intellectuals with embroidered mouths, with me.”² To be sure, if one suspects the kings, cardinals, and intellectuals, not to mention the queens, who presume that deconstruction can contribute to “queer theory,” to be wearing little more than “speaking costumes,” one risks placing oneself in the position of the common man, at least when seen from the perspective that frames the speech of “embroidered mouths.” When the “I” appears at the end of the line —“with me”—the words fall flat. And yet, it would seem that a minimal conviction is required to speak meaningfully about a subject, encapsulating not a sense of the agreeable, or of practical competence, but of *truth*, of that which lies beyond personal interest and pragmatism, which, in the words of the play’s main character, is the interest of the “merest plumber” (MS 70). And if at this point already the notion of meaningfulness were to be contested, one could also put it differently and say that, unless one assumes that

1. [A version of this essay appears in *Postcolonial Studies* 12.3 (2009): 277-287. Reprinted here with permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd. —Ed.]
2. Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (London: Methuen, 1995), 1. Hereafter cited in the text as MS.

“queer theory” and a deconstructive approach to it amount to something, one had better keep one’s mouth shut.

But then it is in the name of *conviction*—of that “sense of selfhood” Bolt wishes to develop without resorting to “magic” (MS xiii)—that one must, perhaps, try to speak about “Derrida” and “queer theory”—in order, that is, to turn against those who place the value of theory in what they call “queering,” an act or an activity designed to *undermine* or to *ignore* the possibility of remaining true to oneself. For one cannot remain true to oneself only for the time being and in anticipation of further change.

In “Critically Queer,” a chapter of her book *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler describes the appropriation of the injurious term “queer” as the subversive “queering” of a “prior usage,” as an attempt to use the term against the grain of prevailing norms and their negative effect, itself a form of “queering” (“the shaming taboo which ‘queers’”).³ This militant inversion (which is said to reveal something about the distortions at the origin of “presentism”—of a law or a logic that dissimulates its own “historicity” [CQ 227] and draws its “force” and its “authority” from this dissimulation) is inseparable from a dismantling of the subject and appears to leave no room for conviction. Indeed, it identifies “will” and “choice” with the “magic of the name” (CQ 228). Butler’s argument is not based on the immanent determinism of the substance but on a version of the quasi-transcendental function Derrida attributes to iterability, or, in the words of Butler, on “performativity” as “a relation of being implicated in that which one opposes” (CQ 241). Does this mean that a move against a “critical” idea of “queer theory” demands a move against deconstruction as well? In this case, it would make sense to speak of “Derrida and queer theory,” even though the aim here would be to *oppose* deconstruction’s contribution to the development of such theory. The trivial assumption would be that the proper name of the philosopher stands for a thought powerful enough to warrant the construal of concepts in domains other than philosophy, and that the queer theorist’s appeal to deconstruction is

3. Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 226 and 228. Hereafter cited in the text as CQ.

not entirely misguided. Of course, opposing “Derrida and queer theory” in the manner proposed would not amount to yet another appropriation of the term “queer,” but rather *mark the limits* of co-implication, or of “performativity” itself. Perhaps the resources for such opposition could even be found in aspects of deconstruction overseen or neglected by the queer theorist.

So, can “Derrida” be called a man for all seasons because deconstruction irrigates as many fields, old and new, as can be cultivated during a particular time of the intellectual calendar, “queer theory” being but one example of such fruitfulness of spirit? If one were to answer this question in the affirmative, one would still have to establish how “seasonal” deconstruction itself is in the end, and whether its contribution to the demarcation and development of a field of study called “queer theory” is based only on a selective reading of Derrida. And what if a queer theorist wanted to argue that, being a man for all seasons—a philosopher whose versatility attests to the richness of his thought—, there is indeed something genuinely “queer” about “Derrida,” something unrestricted by, say, the rule of “binary oppositions” and thus close to—the truth? Would this be an example of a “queering” of “Derrida,” if not an “outing”? Would “Derrida” even appear to be the role model of all “queering,” back to back with Butler, a backroom boy of “queer theory”? Or is “Derrida,” on the contrary, a man for all seasons in the sense of Bolt’s play: i.e., a philosopher on whom one can rely because, truthful to himself, to the “behind” of deconstruction, which is not a *Hinterwelt* but this world here, and not afraid of standing for his convictions, he underlines the relevance of some sort of *absolute*—the “undeconstructible”—that cannot be reduced to “historicity” or “performativity”? What kind of queer theorist would be able to embrace such a man? A theorist of “performativity,” queer or not, could interpret the accumulation of questions in this very paragraph as an “enactment” of Butler’s “critical” queer theory, for the first section of “Critically Queer,” which fills a page and a half of the book, contains, on a quick count, no less than fifteen interrogative clauses, some of them running over several lines. (This predilection for constantly raising questions, for “querying,” however, stands in sharp contrast to the assertive style of much of the text. The passage on the possibility of saying “I,” for example, takes its cue from Althusser’s theory of interpellation [CQ 225], yet

does not engage in a discussion of arguments or counterarguments. Maybe the proliferation of question marks springs from an argument that tends to proceed by way of assertions? But these assertions call on a number of philosophers and theorists for their own backing. In “queer theory,” it seems, much of the “theory” is derivative, drawing on ideas developed elsewhere—in the instance of Butler, by the likes of Nietzsche, Foucault, Althusser and, of course, Derrida. Or would a queer theorist, especially if he is a young thing, claim that the ideas of “theory,” to which he appeals, come into their own in “queer theory” only?) Perhaps the most pressing issue, then, is to determine what it is that makes *theory* into a “queer” affair, always in view of “Derrida’s” joining the party, or being spotted among the hosts.

* * *

When one looks for a definition of the word “queer” in Butler’s text, not only does one not find much in the way of a clarification, but one discovers that the word is used less and less frequently as the chapter progresses. About midway through, it disappears almost completely and is replaced by the word “homosexual.” It remains unclear whether the author wishes to suggest that both terms can and should be used as synonyms, or whether the shift is due to an implicit criticism of the new usage of the term, or whether “queerness” is to be understood as a species to be included within “homosexuality,” even though its show-stopping appearance could affect the very definition of the generic name. While at the start of “Critically Queer,” the word “queer” is said to “appeal to a younger generation who want to resist the more institutionalized and reformist politics sometimes signified by ‘lesbian and gay’” (CQ 228)—it thereby refers to the contention that there can be “sexual difference *within* homosexuality” (CQ 240) and, presumably, within heterosexuality, too—, later on, in the same chapter, a parallelism is construed between “gender” and “feminism,” on one hand, and “sexuality” and “queer theory,” on the other (CQ 240), as if Butler wished to indicate that “sexuality” or, more exactly, the “politics” of “sexual difference” in (hetero- and) homosexuality, constitutes the very object of a theory termed “queer.” It should be noted that immediately after giving the only explicit and “positive” definition of “queerness” her chapter provides, Butler casts a doubt on the

resistance of the “younger generation” to the institution of “lesbian and gay” sexual politics and the ensuing transformation of the revolutionary impulse into a strategy of reformism, by stressing that, in the early nineties, “queerness” remained a “predominantly white movement” and represented “a false unity of women and men” (CQ 228). Hence, to be “critically queer” means, for Butler, to engage in a form of self-criticism—the older “gay and lesbian” generation turns against itself in the form of a “younger generation”—*and* to be critical in the face of the discriminatory and dissimulating effects of “queer” critique itself—the “younger generation” also turns against itself, perhaps even initiating “a resurgence of both feminist and anti-racist mobilization within gay and lesbian politics” (CQ 228), thereby truly inheriting the legacy of the preceding emancipatory movements. In a way, Butler situates herself on both sides of this critical divide, flagging a willingness to give up the term “queer” itself (CQ 229) in order to resist succumbing to the “magic of the name.” The “critically queer” agent, then, assumes the necessity and confronts the contingency of exclusions. But unless emancipatory movements shed their respective specificity and become one unified movement of liberation, a residue will keep alerting the critical agent formally known as “queer” to the urgency of throwing yet another name into the political struggle which must somehow remain linked to a sexual difference *shared*, in whatever form, by *both* the generation of queerness *and* the gay and lesbian generation. The problem here is similar to the one encountered in “identity politics.”⁴ If the critical import of an emancipatory movement does not suffice to supply a criterion that allows one to distinguish a “gay identity” from other identities, then those who vindicate such an identity need to have recourse to a particular understanding, interpretation, construction of sexuality, perhaps even to some idea of sexuality “itself.”⁵ So, what about sexuality, queer, gay, lesbian, in Derrida’s work?

Sooner rather than later, the gay or queer detective will

4. [See, e.g., Carolyn D’Cruz, *Identity Politics in Deconstruction: Calculating with the Incalculable* (New York: Routledge, 2016). —Ed.]

5. On this point, see Alexander García Düttmann, *At Odds With AIDS*, trans. C. Curtis and P. Gilgen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 56 f.

have come across the passage in *The Post Card* where “Derrida” alludes to a discussion on the lawn of Balliol College, which took place in June of 1977. The words enclosed in brackets are likely to catch the private’s eye: “A (very handsome) young male student thought he could provoke me and also, I believe, seduce me a bit by asking why I did not commit suicide.”⁶ “Derrida,” it seems, has no other choice but to commit suicide or to dress up as a girl, to paraphrase the Catalan writer, Francesc Pujols.⁷ Having thus been put on the right track, and supposing he is patient enough to browse through the following one hundred pages, the gay or queer detective will hardly be able to ask for more evidence than the two sentences written down on the 7th of October of the same year. On the page, the sentences are separated by a blank: “I will be on the floor, lying on my back / *Ne laisse pas traîner cette bande* [Don’t leave this tape around.]” (PC 129 [118]). Doubtless, in the immediate context of this postcard, the gay or queer detective will have little choice but to translate the word *bande* with “tape”: the second sentence demands for a tape not to be left to its own devices, as it were, lying around, abandoned, allowed to wander off. And yet, having read Derrida’s previous book, *Glas*, not only will the first postcard entry remind the detective of an expression in a novel by Jean Genet which fascinates and “seduces” Derrida (“girls blond as boys”),⁸ but s/he will be very much aware of the attention Derrida pays to the words *bander* and *bande* in the writer’s wake, to the binding, squeezing, pressing, tightening force that, in French, permits the verb to be used in the

6. Jacques Derrida, *La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), 19; *ibid.*, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1987), 15. Hereafter cited in the text as PC. The English translation does not render the fact that this is a male student. All translations of quotes from Derrida’s texts are mine; references to existing English translations are given within brackets—AGD.

7. “*No tinc més remei que suïcidat-me o vestir-me de dona.*” See Francesc Pujols, *La tardor barcelonina [Autumn in Barcelona]* (Barcelona: Edicions de la Tempestad, 2005), 29.

8. See Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974), 96; *ibid.*, *Glas*, trans. J.P. Leavey Jr. and R. Rand (Lincoln: Nebraska, 1986), 83. Hereafter cited in the text as G.

sense of “having an erection” (G 30 [20]).⁹ “Derrida” is on his back, then, and, in a scene of reciprocal seduction, asks the other not to waste his hard-on. “Don’t go home with your hard-on / It will only drive you insane.” Is “Derrida” entering queer territory, yet? Perhaps. But has he entered the territory of “queer theory”? This could only be so if, for example, the other’s erection is connected to the “logic” of “*antherection*,” a neologism Derrida invents in *Glas* to combine castration and fertility in language, or to name the simultaneous enabling and disabling of an erection (G 157 [138]). But wouldn’t such a queer erection stretch the limits of queer theory beyond a sexuality to which the term “queer” could even be applied meaningfully? Wouldn’t it make all sexuality “queer,” in a way, and either dissolve the specificity of queer theory into a more general theory of sexual difference, or else dissolve the very object of theory, and hence “theory” itself, queer or otherwise?

Having let “Derrida” in—and, as a consequence, reached a limit of queer theory—the theorist can still choose a third and last option before vanishing. S/he can, if s/he feels generous, declare the members of the queer generation to be the avant-garde of sexuality, or sexual difference: “*We’re here, we’re queer, so get fuckin’ used to it.*” However, if by opposing hetero- and homosexuality, sexuality can be curtailed, and sexual difference reified, if, in other words, an avant-garde is needed to counter the violence inflicted upon “queerness” by the reformism of “gays and lesbians” and the more obvious conservatism of heterosexuals, the “logic of *antherection*,” which the queer agent or activist wishes to exploit in favor of a transgression of “binary oppositions,” demonstrates precisely that there can be no transgression without a regression that cuts through the intention to liberate sexuality from its constraints, or that each binding and unbinding is hopelessly caught within a double-bind. The turn to deconstruction, then, leaves the queer theorist with that “impossible homosexuality,” invoked by Derrida in “Circumfession,” never sure whether he is touching grapes or balls, the balls of the cousin with a queer name, Claude, or the bunch of grapes snapped by Augustinus, the young devil, and planted in the pants of the

9. [For more on the wordplay in *Glas* around the words *bander* and *bande*, see Jarrod Hayes, “Derrida’s Queer Root(s),” in this volume. —Ed.]

thief's lover.¹⁰ Queer theorists will have to decide, again and again, whether this undecidability becomes a source of mourning and melancholy for them, or, on the contrary, of unexpected pleasures that are to be had under the terrible threat of loss and severance, not exactly a gay and queer prospect, or, perhaps, all the more so: for if, according to deconstruction, the possibility of the possible is to be sought in the *impossible*, i.e., if the possible requires the impossible to prove itself and to be possible in the first place, then does Derrida's invocation of an "impossible homosexuality" not advocate for an ultra-"queerness"—so utterly queer that it can almost not be called queer any longer?

Indeed, Derrida always seems to be going one step too far to keep the queer theorist happy. "Queerness" can't catch up with theory, philosophy, thinking, since the appeal to "ultra-queerness," and the insistence on a double-bind, blur the distinctions on which the queer agent depends, between one subject and the other, one object and the other, one theory and the other. In the case of the appeal to "ultra-queerness," it does not really matter whether the move is made in the direction of an "impossible homosexuality," or towards a level of *generality* that can be detected in both the idea of a sexuality that has not yet solidified into a dual relationship, and the concept of writing "from behind."

To overcome the difficulties which the various forms of "ultra-queerness" present them, queer theorists might attempt to identify with a part larger than the whole, and install themselves in "ultra-queerness" itself. But in so doing they would merely fall prey to the illusion that such a part could still be distinguished from the whole which it transcends.

As far as sexuality is concerned, Derrida develops, or rather outlines in very broad sketches, the idea of a "sexuality" that would need to be grasped conceptually *before* the solidification of difference into "duality" occurs, in an essay on sexual and ontological difference

10. See Jacques Derrida, "Circonfession," in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 150; *ibid.*, "Circumfession," trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993), 159. Here, Derrida himself refers to the "episode of the grape cluster" he mentions in *Glas*. See Derrida, *Glas*, 211 [188].

in Heidegger.¹¹ Yet if any terminological specificity is to be retained, this sexual difference is no more “queer” than it is homo- or heterosexual. The concept of writing “from behind”—the idea of originary traces structuring experience itself and therefore barred from sight—can be traced to *Glas*, and is also at the center of the first part of *The Post Card*. A text on writing—which runs down a column inserted within the right-hand column of the book on Hegel and Genet—features a clear allusion to “sexuality,” even though its scope exceeds all narrow views on the question of sexual difference: “Everything is always started from behind, written and unwritten in the back. *A tergo*. I am *already* (dead) means that I am *behind*. Absolutely behind, this ‘behind’ will never have been seen from the front and this ‘already’ will not have been preceded by anything, having itself conceived and given birth to itself, but as a corpse or a glorious body. To be behind is to be before everything else and hence to break with symmetry” (G 97 [84]).¹² There is a sort of statement in *The Post Card* that resonates with this extract from *Glas*. It comes after a parenthesis which points towards “*le vrai de la philosophie*,” what is true about philosophy and true about a postcard depicting Plato as he stands *behind* Socrates who himself appears to be writing: “This is the last word: in what is written, all is in the *back* and everything is seen from behind” (PC 55 [48]). It is true that Derrida does not miss the opportunity here to suggest that Plato is

11. See Jacques Derrida, “*Geschlecht*—différence sexuelle, différence ontologique,” in *Psyché* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 402 & 414; *ibid.*, “*Geschlecht*—Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference,” in *Between The Blinds. A Derrida Reader*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 387 f. & 401. Regarding sexual difference, Derrida stands opposed to philosophers like Alain Badiou, who begins by positing the irreducibility of “duality” in matters of love and sexuality. For Badiou, “queer theory” can only be yet another example, albeit a prominent one, of the “bio-materialism” based on the equation “existence = individual = body,” or the doctrine that there are only languages and bodies, and no truths. See Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes [Logics of the Worlds]* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 10 f.

12. This passage is partially quoted by Jean-Luc Nancy in an essay on the “back” and the “behind” of deconstruction. See Jean-Luc Nancy, “Borborygmes,” in *La pensée dérobée* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 55; *ibid.*, “Borborygmi,” in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 121 & 331 f.

fucking Socrates (PC 35 [30]);¹³ but he does so only to interpret the postcard mentioned as an allegory of the “initial catastrophe” (PC 25 [20]) that makes it difficult to find any guidance, or orientation, in thought by settling on what comes first and what second. One is too far ahead because one is too far behind, coming and going between two extremes of “ultra-queerness,” the past and future of something too queer and not queer enough to be truly queer. Derrida’s point, if he has one, is about the *disturbance* that any attempt to introduce *distinctions* in view of creating some *order*, must take into account. There is nothing specifically “queer” about this.

Surely, after reading *The Post Card*, it can be tempting to say that Derrida’s relation to philosophy is, like Deleuze’s, one of “buggery,” of taking a philosopher from behind to make him scream and beg for more, or to make him a child in an act of “immaculate conception.”¹⁴ At the same time, though, it remains undecidable, or indiscernible, who, exactly, is behind the “buggery,” behind the behind, in the backroom, and whether there is anybody there at all. No “queer” theorist can claim the privileged position for herself.

Perhaps one must conclude from this brief inquiry into “Derrida’s” place in queer theory that there is no such “theory”; that theory or philosophy or thinking have no choice but to go the extra mile—traditionally towards the Idea, Concept, Transcendentality, or Being—where queer theorists can’t afford to go without renouncing their own “identity,” or “name,” long before they have had a chance to put it into circulation and to the test; and that the impossibility of a “queer theory” explains, on one hand, why queer theorists tend to borrow their ideas from theories existing already, and, on the other, why, as Butler recognizes without thematizing it, queer theory is, in fact, a queer “politics,” a *manner of turning*, with a particular interest in mind, ideas coming from elsewhere *against* other ideas. But has a queer theorist as such ever been capable of penetrating “Derrida” and getting him pregnant? Not that “Derrida” hasn’t asked for it . . . It comes as no surprise then that the double task

13. The translation does not render the allusion to sexual intercourse in the expression “*s’envoyer*.”

14. See Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* (Paris: Minuit, 1990), 15; *ibid.*, *Negotiations*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), 6.

Butler assigns to the queer theorist reveals itself to be rather modest, though not undemanding: a historical or [Foucauldian] genealogical investigation into both the “formation of homosexualities” and the “deformative and misappropriative power that the term [‘queer’] currently enjoys” (CQ 229). While a number of discoveries may be had from such a course of studies, which treat “queerness” as an object rather than a subject of theory, the creation of a conceptual and theoretical framework for carrying out the queer theorist’s double task is more the result of an amalgamation of existing ideas than proof of an inventive genius, at least if Butler’s essay can serve as a reference here.

But can one be content with replacing “queer theory” with “queer politics”? When Butler unearths her theoretical resources, she ends up merging the idea of a constitution of the subject through *interpellation* with the Derridean idea of *iterability* as a movement of both idealization and alteration. The argument that ideality requires a *repetition* that shows itself to be inseparable from an altering interruption, leads Butler to conceive the “I,” instituted by way of a previous interpellation, as being simultaneously more powerful than the I *and* exposed to uncontrollable change: “The ‘I’ is thus a citation of the place of the ‘I’ in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates: it is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak” (CQ 226). To the extent that the ideal “I”—the I which is relatively independent of the I or “the life it animates”—offers a certain stability, engendering even a “presentist” illusion, the theorist must count on it as a “discursive rallying point” (CQ 230), if s/he wants to become a queer agent. This fatal necessity is also the reason why the theorist, once s/he becomes a queer agent, must continuously be reminiscent of the “historicity” and the “contingency” of the “I” to which s/he lays claim. In short, to be queer means, by definition, to be “critically queer.” Of course, this is not much more than a variation on the general insight underlying Butler’s line of thought, namely, that to be an “I” means to be an I. So, if, as Butler suggests, the “presentist” illusion culminates in the “view of the subject as the exclusive origin or owner of what is said,” then the role of the I whose life is animated by the “I” seems to consist in animating the “I”’s life in turn, or to bring to the fore that the “I” has a life, too,

and is more than merely an “I.” Butler deploys the “I” and the I against the “I” and the I. When the ideality of the “I” assists the theorist in becoming a “queer” agent, it is deployed against the vagaries of the I; conversely, the I is deployed against the “presentist” illusion engendered by the ideality of the “I” when its mobility assists queer agents in their critical endeavors. To be queer therefore means to be able to switch between an “I” and an I in order to direct one I *against* the other. Again, this definition is not much more than the application of the more general definition of the I. There is nothing at all queer, then, about the fact that it is precisely here that an affinity between “Derrida” and “critical” queer theory begins to emerge. For just as deconstruction often keeps playing off one side of things against the other, incompatible or incommensurable side, constant confrontation seems to be at the origin of queer theory as Butler understands it. “Life,” it would seem, is never to be found where one looks for it, neither in the “I,” nor in the I.

Returning, at this stage, to the play, *A Man for All Seasons*, two lines spoken by the main character, Thomas More, could be quoted to illustrate the point further. “An oath is made of words! It may be possible to take it” (MS 78), More affirms, against the advocates of intended meaning, the linguistic “presentists.” But against the detractors of “presentism,” who encourage More to “say the words of the oath” and yet “think otherwise,” he affirms that, “when a man takes an oath, he’s holding his own self in his own hands” (MS 87). What is striking, from the angle of this rebuke, is that in “Critically Queer,” Butler has a lot to say about the “I” and comparatively little about the I on which, as has become clear, queer theory must rely, too. The self to which the character in the play appeals, the “man for all seasons,” is not an “I,” nor a “discursive rallying point,” nor a “necessary error of identity” (CQ 229), dissimulated and deployed in a political struggle out of some necessity. And the appeal itself is not, in More’s own words, “a complicated gesture learnt from books” ((MS 57), which betrays the ability to attend. The distinction to be made in this context is one between an opposition that shows itself as inherently strategic and an altogether different kind of opposition, one rooted in *conviction*, rather than self-interest: “I will not give in, because I oppose it—I do—not my pride, not my spleen, nor any other of my appetites but I do—I!” (MS 77). This, perhaps, is where Derrida parts company

with the queer theorist of Butlerian descent or inspiration. For the notion of justice as “undeconstructible,” which he introduces in his discussion of law, conveys a sense of urgency to the “impossible” negotiation between what is relentlessly submitted to deconstruction and what remains in essence undeconstructible,¹⁵ which is, to all appearances, lacking from “Critically Queer.” Butler knows only of an I in need of the support of an “I” haunted by bad faith; as a consequence, critical queer theory invokes an I that is virtually absent from it.

The play, *A Man for All Seasons*, presents a situation so extreme that, were More to make his conviction into an object of rebellious affirmation, or give it up entirely, to save his life and spare his family the ordeal of having to flee the country, he would inevitably destroy what is at stake—if not the very fact that something *is* at stake—and surrender to compromise, corruption, and the hardening of the “thoughts of the heart” (MS 100). Here, the I must bow neither to its precariousness, nor to dogmatism, not even temporarily. As extreme as the situation in the play is, it is not artificial; the radical nature of the *choice* forced upon More has the virtue of disclosing that, for as long as something is still at stake, the idea of a self equipped with a sense of things that matter, and an understanding that not everything can matter equally, must not be renounced and should not be confused with the imposition of a conventional and conformist fabrication.

And yet, does such an interpretation of the play not overlook its most blatant feature, namely, that it is *performed*, that its words are placed within quotation marks, as it were, regardless of whether one considers such an alteration to be the “determined modification of a general citationality,” or not?¹⁶ Can one even be convinced by the display of conviction of a *dramatis persona* without taking into account that it must be the play itself which

15. See Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 35 & 61; *ibid.*, “Force of Law,” trans. M. Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243 & 257.

16. Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Limited Inc.* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 44; *ibid.*, “Signature Event Context,” trans. J. Mehlman and S. Weber, in *Limited Inc.*, ed. G. Graff (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), 17.

demands to be convincing here, to be taken seriously, and that, as the art historian Michael Fried famously claims, *conviction*, at its deepest, is sustained by an instantaneous “presentness” at odds with theater?¹⁷

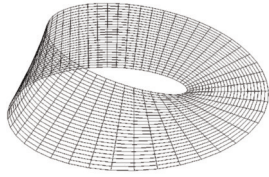
Perhaps the obliqueness signaled by the quotation marks could be regarded as a reminder of the impossibility, for the viewer, of ever seeing the object which the self is making—as if, under less extreme circumstances than in *A Man for All Seasons*, conviction had a much more fluid aspect. Inasmuch as the self is moved to engage in something beyond the prospect of a final gain, a lasting reward, a resulting fulfillment, and that the reality of its existence depends on such a commitment, it is making an object invisible to the eye, for “God’s remembrance,” to use a rather enigmatic expression Walter Benjamin employs, whereby God should not be represented as an instance of punishment and compensation, of erasure and elevation. “One might,” Benjamin writes in “The Task of the Translator,” “speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be unforgotten, that predicate would imply not a falsehood but merely a claim unfulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it *is* fulfilled: God’s remembrance.”¹⁸ While many, unconvinced, will find this reference too comforting and reassuring to be true, asking how an existential and a logical claim can be equated, the ones who refuse to recognize a ruining subterfuge in the talk of “God’s remembrance” will see it as an expression of the fact that life and existence, too, are answerable for claims which overshoot “historicity,” if any “historical” behavior is to be conceived of meaningfully, not just as an arbitrary projection of meaning.

Those whom Derrida does not convince say that his having an impact in some quarters of philosophy and a number of related and unrelated disciplines, such as “queer theory,” reveals nothing, or only that he is not to be trusted. Those, however, who *are*

17. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 167.

18. Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. H. Zohn, in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1*, ed. M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 254.

convinced, among them, one assumes, the “critical queer theorist” suspicious of, or oblivious to, *conviction*, are incited to engage in a new making of an object that will have to remain devoid of an appropriate and appropriating predicate.



“Practical Deconstruction”: A Note on Some Notes by Judith Butler¹

Martin McQuillan

Ah, tell them all! I shall hate you far more if you remain silent, and do not proclaim this to all.

—SOPHOCLES²

Desire is theoretical, but as such is tortured by a contradiction that makes it practical.

—JACQUES DERRIDA³

One of the stakes suggested by the juxtaposition of queer theory and deconstruction is that of genealogy and the family. Are queer theory and deconstruction related? Are they close relatives, brother and sister perhaps or are they involved in some sort of murderous Oedipal clinch? We are preparing to speak of such things here. What relation does either deconstruction or queer theory have to the named super-ego “Jacques Derrida”? In what way do they come after him, in filiation perhaps as the son or daughter follows the father? Or is this question of the “after” more a matter of family resemblance in that queer theory and deconstruction take after

1. [A version of this essay appears in *Deconstruction without Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2012), 137-150. © Martin McQuillan, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2012, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Used here with permission. It was first presented as a keynote at “Deconstruction and Queer Theory after Derrida,” University College Dublin, 2007. —Ed.]

2. Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 86-87. Hereafter cited in the text as A.

3. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 120a. Hereafter cited as G.

Derrida? For some, the coupling will be a case of queer bedfellows, but let’s take the relation as axiomatic and “normative,” if only for the moment. Certainly, one of the issues which concerns me in such a conjunction between queer theory and deconstruction is that queer theory ought to know where it comes from. I do not say this in order to ultimately suggest that either deconstruction knows where it comes from, or that Derrida is the father of queer theory, along with everything else; queer theory being just another illegitimate child from the errant dissemination of his writing—an after-effect. Rather, it is to propose that queer theory, if there is such a thing and it is one, might learn a lot about itself by taking on board some of the reading practices familiar to deconstruction after Jacques Derrida. In particular, I wish to look at Judith Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim*, published in 2000 and originally presented as the Wellek Lectures at UC Irvine in 1988 and as the Gauss Seminars at Princeton in 1998 (these locations have particular significance within the institutional genealogy of deconstruction-in-America which firmly locates this text at the cross-roads of what we are calling today “queer theory and deconstruction”).⁴ Now, my particular issue with Butler’s book is the way in which, while clearly coming after Derrida in every possible sense of that phrase, it expeditiously relegates Derrida to three footnotes of various lengths. This seems odd to me, if not downright queer, especially in light of the treatment of Derrida in her first book on French Hegel,⁵ and I would like to pick at these footnotes for a while before returning to what else might be at stake in the partnership between queer theory and deconstruction.

Oedipus Wrecks

Now, before I continue, it is probably necessary to put down some disclaimers. First, I like Judith Butler both as a scholar and a person

4. Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Hereafter cited as AC.

5. [See Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999). —Ed.]

and I am, of course, enormously sympathetic to her intellectual projects and find myself in agreement with the vast majority (if not all) of her political positions. So, I do not propose to take issue with Butler for any sort of conservative or antagonistic reasons, neither philosophically nor politically. I would side resolutely with Butler against all of the unscrupulous and personal attacks she has received from both right and left in recent years. Secondly, I have strong reservations about accounting for Butler's text in the way that I am about to because it may be read by some as privileging Derrida over Butler, Father over daughter, philosophy over anything else. This may be an unfortunate side effect of the reading I am about to attempt and it is not without political consequences or risks. However, I find Butler's marginalization of Derrida in this most high profile and canonical of locations (indeed in Derrida's front room as it were) so wantonly perverse that I am willing to take this risk and to see where it will lead us in our attempt to understand what might be involved in the "after" of the temporal conjunction between queer theory and deconstruction. It may ultimately be a pointless and self-defeating exercise to indicate the difficulties I have with Butler over the priority accorded to Derrida, but at this moment I feel as if I want to get queer theory's skeletons as well as everything else out of the closet. Let us consider this, then, a family disagreement.

The argument of Butler's book on *Antigone* is one I find both stimulating and am in sympathy with: she asks at a time in the west when "kinship has become fragile, porous, and expansive" (AC 22) and simultaneously under intense mediatic and partisan scrutiny from policy makers and opinion setters of every stripe, "whether there can be kinship . . . without the support and mediation of the state, and whether there can be the state without the family as its support and mediation" (AC 5). She makes the material consequences of her study explicit in the third lecture when she ties her account of *Antigone* and kinship to the specific issue of single-sex parenting and its location within both American political discourse and the "theoretical" justification of reactionary positions on "gay adoption" by Jacques-Alain Miller and other Lacanian psychoanalysts (AC 69-70). It is particularly in relation to this attempt to push her thought beyond the representational matrix of philosophical discourse to meet the emerging materialities of our

present conditions that I feel a bond of kinship with Butler in this book. It seems to me that this sort of “practical deconstruction” is precisely the direction that responsible philosophy should be taking after Derrida. However, that is another story. To return to the text in hand, Butler’s attempt to think kinship otherwise, leads her to suggest that the problem with a Lacanian (and critical theory’s post-Lacanian) appreciation of the symbolic place of the Father and the universality of the Oedipal schema is that it emerges from within Lacan’s turn to Lévi-Strauss’ *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, which in structuralist fashion places the incest prohibition at the determining center of sexual difference and subsequent kinship relations.⁶ For Lacan, says Butler, Oedipus is that which presents itself as true everywhere even though as a function of the Symbolic it is necessarily contingent and incommensurate within any individual. The problem being that Oedipus may not be universal but that when it appears it exercises the function of universalization and as a universal without the necessity for empirical grounding it cannot be challenged by any singular exception which would in fact be its ruin. Thus, asks Butler, does granting that Oedipus is not universal matter if, by the same pattern of thought, it remains universal in effect and consequence? That is to say, Lacanian psychoanalysis, for Butler, remains an onto-theology of the most profound kind, which ushers God out one door only to welcome him in through another. This idea of the Symbolic position of the Father is based on an elaboration of the Symbolic in an early seminar in which Lacan leans on Lévi-Strauss and essentially borrows the structuralist symbolic schema of the incest prohibition as the model for the Symbolic in general. The practical consequence of this for Jacques-Alain Miller is that children who live in families without the hetero-normative pairing of Father and Mother face a lifetime of analysis ahead of them.

 Tempted as I am to pursue Butler’s argument a while longer if only to do justice to the text of Lacan (which she is shy of quoting), I will pause here to pick-up the first of her footnotes to

6. [Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1947), trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). —Ed.]

Derrida. Having offered us this deconstruction of the Symbolic in Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, which some of us will be familiar with as a reread of Derrida's early readings of Lévi-Strauss in *Of Grammatology* and *Margins of Philosophy*,⁷ she states "For a cursory but shrewd critique of the nature/culture distinction in relation to the incest taboo, which proves to be at once foundational and unthinkable, see Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play' in *Writing and Difference*" (AC 87, n.17). Derrida does elaborate on this at considerable length in the *Grammatology* and it seems somewhat disingenuous to repeat one of Derrida's most famous deconstructions and then to reference it as a "cursory" critique, but I will move on from here because even though this elision is symptomatic of a more general repression it is the least of Butler's difficulties with respect to Derrida in this text. Having set up the problem of Antigone as an issue of contemporary relevance and having established the meat of her argument, namely, arguing that even if the incest taboo is a contingent social norm then that does not necessitate hetero-patriarchal normativity as its structural consequence, Butler turns to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Lacan's seventh seminar on "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis" as a thinking of Antigone anterior to the state and kinship. Within a few pages of the treatment of Hegel we run into a note on *Glas*. It appears in the context of a commentary on Antigone's defiant act of burying Polynices in relation to the law and the relation of the unconscious to law. The note runs as follows:

Derrida points out that Hegel generalizes too quickly from the specific situation of Antigone's family to the more general "law" she is said to represent and to defend. After all, she can hardly be representing the living and intact family, and it is unclear what structures of kinship she represents. Derrida writes, "And what if the orphanage were a structure of the unconscious? Antigone's parents are not some parents among others. She is the daughter of Oedipus and, according to most of the versions from which

7. [See, especially, Jacques Derrida, "The Violence of the Letter: From Lévi-Strauss to Rousseau," in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 101-140. —Ed.]

all the tragedians take their inspiration, of Jocasta, of her incestuous grandmother. Hegel never speaks of this generation moreover [*de plus*], as if it were foreign to the elementary structures of kinship.” Although in what follows, he seems to concur with Hegel on the desire-less status of her relation to her brother, he may be writing ironically, since he both negates the desire but then also calls it an impossible desire, affirming it as a desire of sorts: “Like Hegel, we have been fascinated by Antigone, by this unbelievable relationship, this powerful liaison without desire, this immense, impossible desire that could not live, capable only of overturning, paralyzing, or exceeding any system and history, of interrupting the life of the concept, of cutting of its breath.” See Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 165-66. (AC 89-90, n. 4)

It is important for Butler’s argument to establish that philosophy (in the form of Hegel and Derrida) rules out the possibility of incest and deems the Antigone-Polynices relationship to be “desire-less” because in this way Antigone’s act is a conscious one rather than a matter of the unconscious which is the insight that allows Butler to insert herself into the canonical genealogy of Antigone watchers. Her claim on Antigone is that the desire for her brother can never finally be arrested in an unacknowledged equivocation between Polynices and Oedipus and so she is “living the equivocations that unravel the purity and universality of those structuralist rules” and in her desire “the symbolic itself produced a crisis for its own intelligibility” (AC 18). However, to suggest that this misrepresents Derrida’s reading of Hegel would surely be an understatement.

For reasons that I hope will become obvious I would like now to quickly take the remaining footnote from the third lecture where, in the context of the uncontrollable incoherence of the term “brother” in relation to Oedipus/Polyneices, Butler writes:

Like Lacan, Derrida appears to accept the singularity of Antigone’s relationship to her brother, one that Hegel describes, as we have already seen, as a relationship without desire. Although Derrida does not read the play, *Antigone*, in *Glas*, he does read the figure of Antigone in Hegel, working within the terms of that reading to show how

Antigone comes to mark the radical outside to Hegel's own systematic thinking and Hegel's own "fascination by a figure inadmissible within the system" (G 151). Although I agree that neither the figure nor the play of Antigone cannot be readily assimilated into either the framework of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* or *The Philosophy of Right*, and is curiously applauded in the *Aesthetics* as "the most magnificent and appeasing work of art," it would be a mistake to take her persistent unreadability within the Hegelian perspective as a sign of her final or necessary unreadability. (AC 96, n.18)

So, this is to say that Derrida, in part, agrees with both Hegel and Lacan. At this point, wary readers familiar with the work of deconstruction might begin to hear alarm bells knelling around this account of *Glas*. Participants in Butler's seminar would be forgiven for imagining that Derrida's reading of Hegel's reading of *Antigone* constituted only a passing reference in *Glas*. Indeed, seminar participants who did not have access to the footnotes would in fact have no mention of Derrida's text at all. Butler dismisses it here as a "mistake" without further justification beyond her own need for Antigone to be in some way readable and certainly without any reading of her own. Further, the gist of Butler's own title suggests that she is reclaiming Antigone for both feminism and queer theory from the misrepresentations of philosophy and psychoanalysis. If we were being charitable to Butler, we could put this down to an act of amnesia whereby she seems to have forgotten that the entire left hand column of *Glas* could be taken as a reading of Hegel's Antigone, the politics of kinship, the symbolic family, and its relation to the incest prohibition. It is all there in considerable and explicit detail; this is no "cursory" critique. The first 142 pages of the left hand column provide a long unpacking of the onto-theology of the Family in the Hegelian schema through a series of hesitations and interruptions which, according to a familiar Derridean strategy, leave him yet to begin his reading of Hegel some 140 pages into his text. This discussion of the Family might be taken, in a certain sense, to have only ever been preparation for the introduction of Antigone. It is here on the top of page 142 that he writes, "Since the Hegel text remains to be read, I re-form here its ellipse around two foci: (the) burial (place), the liaison between

brother and sister. So Antigone will organize the scene and guide us in this abrupt passage” (G 142). What follows continuously until page 200 is a reading of Hegel’s *Antigone*, which in turn sets up an encounter with Marx and Engels on the Holy Family and the question of the incommensurability between the symbolic position of the Holy Family and any real family. This is to say, Derrida offers us a version of *Antigone* which is considerably longer than that offered by Lacan and Hegel (across three books) combined. What is significant here is not that Derrida has a substantial reading of *Antigone* which Butler ignores; this in itself is of no consideration. Rather, what is of interest is that Butler is avowedly aware of Derrida’s account of *Antigone* and that in fact Derrida’s text pre-empted Butler’s argument in almost every respect and turn in 1974. This renders problematic Butler’s claim that Lévi-Strauss-Lacan’s “structuralist kinship [is] the curse that is upon contemporary critical theory as it tries to approach the question of sexual normativity, sociality, and the status of the law” (AC 66) and that her own text points to “a future kinship that exceeds structuralist totality, [to] a post-structuralism of kinship” (AC 66). I think it fair to say that she manages this, but only by representing 26-year-old arguments first formulated by Derrida.

Glasnotes

Glas is one of Derrida’s queerer texts. The right-hand column is a full-frontal deconstruction of the texts of Jean Genet played out in all its permissive aberrations and promiscuous errancy, containing more puns on the penis and erections than one would have thought possible even in French. This acts as a counterfoil to the hypocritical heteronormativity of the Hegel column, which in turn is interrupted by barely commented upon lengthy quotation from Hegel’s own correspondence, which demonstrates the diremption between his own personal life and his idealist philosophical system. The “two” columns (the rigorous Hegel and the erect Genet) perform the double braid of Derrida’s work, one disarticulating a closed philosophical system, the other riding on the waves of a literary text, which is itself, according to Derrida here, a “practical deconstruction of the transcendental effect” (G 15b). Even the title is a queer

reference to Georges Bataille's lyric, "The glas":

In my voluptuous bell [*cloche*]
 death's bronze dances
 the clapper of a prick sounds
 a long libidinal swing. (G 220)

It is not surprising that *Glas* remains Derrida's unread masterpiece. It is unreadable in any conventional sense as figures and themes bounce off one column to another between the prim Hegel and the wanton Genet, occasionally broken by the interruption of a third column of Derridean commentary, quotation, and extensive marginalia. It is not a book in an easy sense. It is clearly a labyrinth complex enough to undo a commentator as sophisticated as Butler, who it is probably fair to say has simply not read the 60 pages on Antigone. If she has read them then there is a remarkable case of theoretical amnesia at work here.

Let me offer you a necessarily truncated account of Derrida's "post-structuralism of kinship," although no one in France in 1974 would have used such a term. Derrida's reading of Hegel in *Glas* is an attempt to deconstruct the closed philosophical system of speculative idealism by alighting upon the importance of the seemingly marginal trope of the Family and its contradictions within Hegel's text, not as a guiding thread through Hegel himself, but as an experience of an unavoidable but impractical circularity in the Hegelian system. He states early on, "The family is a *party* to the system of the spirit: the family is both a part and the whole of the system" (G 20). The family for Hegel is the first moment of *Sittlichkeit* [ethical duty] and the family "forms its still most natural instance and accomplishes itself by destroying itself in three stages: marriage, patrimony, education" (G 20). On one hand, the family for Hegel is "a most narrowly particular moment" which determines both history and the history of spirit, but as a finite moment "the family is never passed through more than once" (G 21). Yet at the same time, as a controlling figure of hetero-phallo-logocentrism, this finite moment figures the infinite totality of Hegel's system. The dilemma here for Derrida, as it is for Butler in her account of Lacan, is that given the universal projection of the familial schema "one needs to ascertain that the finite family in question is not infinite

already, in which case what the alleged metaphor would come to figure would be already in the metaphor” (G 21). That is to say, a deconstruction such as this must distinguish between identifying the symbolic universality of the family and running the risk of rendering the family universally symbolic by default.

Given that the family is a determining instance for the history of spirit, the family is announced for Hegel “between the animal moment and the spiritual moment of life, death in the natural life, natural death as the spirit’s life” (G 25). Now, this is not without consequences. First, it involves a dialectical paradox in that a natural living being develops without freedom because its self-mobility is finite, it does nothing but develop its seed and does not go outside of itself or have a relation to the outside and the absolute other. Thus, any self-mobility is the result of something other than the self. Accordingly, the natural living being must divide itself in two, but says Derrida reading Hegel, “since the division is not absolute, the animal has no absolute relation to itself. Or to the other. Neither self nor other. That is why there is no natural family, no father/son relation in nature” (G 28-29). Now, radically dividing itself, the human individual is conscious of itself as the other and no longer having (as a result of this division) its natural movement in itself, the human constitutes itself through its culture [*Bildung*] and its symbolic formation. Thus, the human is its own product, its own formation, or son, conceived or descended from its own germ. In this way, having interrupted natural pressures, the human gives itself law [is *auto-nomous*]. However, the human here can only ever be a particular and finite example of the infinite relation of spirit which relates to itself infinitely as its own resource. Thus, the human father/son relation is only a finite example of the infinite father/son relation which is the absolute rebound between the *Aufhebung* of the finite spirit and that of infinite spirit, which cannot be an example itself because it is infinite. Hence, Hegel’s system becomes jammed by this exemplary rhetoric in which it is necessary to determine what the finite is as the route to the infinite. The value and reason of the finite example is posited only by it presenting a passage to the infinite, while rhetorically speaking it cannot ground itself on its own as an example because as a finite example it can be substituted for other particular examples classed according to the general law. In this sense, Paul de Man would call the Family an

aberration in Hegel, in that it is one possible term amongst many which elevates itself above the chain of substitutions to establish itself in a transcendental way, controlling the play of all the other examples. This, in truth, is the classic strategy of phallogocentrism and as such might be a far more archaic and intractable problem than the one contemporary critical theory is said to inherit from Lévi-Strauss.

This is all a prelude to Antigone entering the scene, so let me pick up the pace a little. Of course, the claim by Butler that Derrida would be deaf to the possible incestuous desire between Antigone and Polynices simply does not ring true for anyone who follows Derrida's writing with any care. Accordingly, if we turn to page 147 of the English *Glas*, we can begin to discern Derrida's interest in Antigone and why he believes her to be inassimilable within the Hegelian system, although as early as page 145 Derrida has openly asked, "Where does Antigone's desire lead?" (G 145). In Derrida's words, "Hegel examines the elementary structures of kinship" (G 147), but does so selectively and without justification: husband/wife, parents/children, brother/sister and because the last two annul sexual desire they are obviously subordinated to the first. In this way, because the relation between husband and wife does not involve a suppression of the natural sexual urge, it is the most immediate, while the other two relations involve a sort of mediation and limit. Hence, the family goes outside of itself to culture and law to establish itself, just as we saw with the formation of the human-self above. In fact, the parent/child relation is particularly limited because against dialectical expectation there is a cultural (symbolic) prohibition on the return of natural desire to its seminal source. Thus, the brother/sister relation stands in Hegel's schema as superior and singular because it involves no such carrying away of the right of the germ to return to its source. Brother and sister do not desire one another and they cannot be at war. This would seem to be a unique relation within the Hegelian universe and thus explains his particular interest in Antigone. Derrida comments that, since consciousness is what desires in Hegel's other family relations "given the generality of the struggle for recognition in the relationship between consciousness, one would be tempted to conclude from this that at bottom *there is no* brother/sister bond, there is no brother or sister" (G 149), which would make sense given that such a

non-desiring, non-combative, non-dialectical relation ought to be impossible within the Hegelian schema.

Hence, the brother and sister are a unique example within a universal system based on repetition and accordingly will give Derrida occasion to pause. Antigone, or the brother/sister relation, is the finite example which cannot pass to the infinite and, for this reason, says Derrida, it is “what the greater logic cannot assimilate” (G 150). Antigone is what the system vomits up (G 150, 162). However, in an importantly complex way it is also subsequently that which stands in a transcendental position to the schema. It is in the *Aesthetics* that Hegel most uncharacteristically remarks that, “of all the masterpieces of the classical world—and I know nearly all of them and you should and can—the *Antigone* seems to me from this viewpoint to be the most magnificent and appeasing (*befriedigendste*) work of art” (qtd. in G 150). In this confessional first-person aside (and Hegel doesn’t do first-person very often), he underlines the importance of Antigone to him. For Derrida, what cannot be admitted to the system, except by way of appeasement, nonetheless plays “a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal role rather, the abyss playing an almost transcendental role . . . an element excluded from the system that assures the system’s space of possibility” (G 150-162). At this point Derrida interrupts his text with several pages of letters from Hegel which tell of the various ways in which he treated his own sister badly. Meanwhile, in the Genet column, we are told that just as “paternity is a legal fiction,” as Joyce would have it, there is no proper mother either. The family does not derive its legitimacy from a pure genealogy from the Mother; rather, because she sits at the bottom of the symbolic order she is “a thief and a beggar” who “appropriates everything” because “she has nothing that is properly hers.” It is not possible to follow both columns at once but I mention these two deviations to make the point that Derrida’s deconstruction of Hegel’s Antigone in fact goes considerably further than Butler is prepared to do in her post-structuralism of kinship. Indeed, Derrida will later say that “there is also no purely human family” (G 170), because the family is always exceeded by the Divine and the animal.

To return to the right hand column, two important points to note about the sister. First, although through the sister femininity reaches the highest presentiment of the ethical essence, it does not

reach consciousness (this is inadmissible for Hegel). Second, the absence of a sexual relationship between siblings is not the nondesire of “the without [*sans*] of a nonsexual relationship, [but rather] desire suspended in the sexual difference” between brother and sister. That is to say, for Hegel, the sister engages a positive but nonnatural relationship of recognition in which she depends on him in her for self (G 163). In other words, this non-dialectical relationship is also ultimately dialectical. So, while the greater logic suspends any choice between the symbolic sister and the empiric sister, the brother/sister relation remains a finite moment which spirit must pass through. And it is precisely around this question of brother/sister desire that Derrida is at his most unforgiving of Hegel, because while Butler asks in 2000, after George Steiner—“what would happen if psychoanalysis were to take Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure?”—Derrida’s point, in 1974, is that Hegel has done just that, transforming “into structural and paradigmatic legality an empiric situation described in a particular text of the history of tragedies. . . . And that for the needs of a cause—or of a sister—that is obscure” (G 165). Derrida says elsewhere that we have not yet left the age of Hegel; there are aspects of queer theory, some of the more wide-eyed appreciations of *Antigone’s Claim*, for example, that seemingly have not yet recognized they’re in the age of Hegel.

Let me cut to the chase and too quickly foreclose my presentation of Derrida’s text, for it is really little more than that. In response to the question where should queer theory be after Jacques Derrida as it tries in Butler’s words “to approach the question of sexual normativity, sociality, and the status of the law,” then, in light of the above, one might respond that where deconstruction takes queer theory is towards an awareness of the simultaneous allure and hopelessness of the dialectic. For Derrida, it is not a question of opposing the dialectic (for that would be the most dialectic of gestures). Rather deconstruction seeks to think about “a dialecticity of dialectics that is itself fundamentally not dialectic,” as Derrida puts it in an interview with Maurizio Ferraris.⁸ Derrida attempts to

8. See Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 32. Hereafter cited in the text as TS.

show that within any dialectical situation there remains an element which does not allow itself to be integrated into the systematicity of the dialectic, but which presents non-oppositional difference that exceeds the dialectic which is itself always oppositional. This is what Derrida means by the *supplement* and as such is an inaugural gesture for deconstruction. This supplement, *pharmakon*, or vomit does not allow itself to be dialecticized and as that which not being dialectical is necessarily then recuperated by the dialectic that it relaunches. “Thus the dialectic consists,” says Derrida, “precisely in dialecticizing the non-dialectizable” (TS 32). This scenario is not recognizable as the dialectic in any easy sense of synthesis, totalization, identification and transcendence. Rather this non-dialectical dialecticity of the dialectic is a form of synthesis without synthesis, or what Derrida frequently terms “ex-appropriation,” which is both an essentially anti-dialectical concept and the necessary condition of dialectics as such. In his reading of Hegel, this scenario is played out in the figure of the desire of the sister; it is, contrary to Butler’s cursory footnote, the whole point of the left hand column of *Glas*. It is a subtle and difficult point to follow, and Butler seems to miss it altogether, but the point about Antigone is not to make feminism or queer theory a dialectical phallogocentric hierarchy by allowing the father/brother Oedipus to enjoy his mastery by losing it in subjugation to the subject Antigone sister/daughter. Rather, within the context of the infinite recuperative resources of the dialectic, “difference” itself and “sexual difference” in particular is far too general and indeterminate a concept to effect a deconstruction that would make any difference. As in the case of Derrida’s Antigone, it is necessary to follow the determining process of sexual difference within given conceptual orders, and to thus distinguish between difference as diversity (a moment of indifferent, external difference without opposition, i.e., a moment of identity) and difference as opposition (which is also a moment of identity).⁹ The point for Derrida is not that there is or is not desire between Antigone and Polynices, but that “just as there is not a sexual difference in general, but a dialectical process of sexual difference that passes, for example,

9. I refer the interested reader to what Derrida has to say extensively and explicitly about this in the left-hand column of *Glas*, 168-169.

from diversity to opposition, there is not first a *desire in general* that, from diversity to opposition, *determines itself*. . . as desire" (G 167-168). What this means for Hegel is that ethical duty [*Sittlichkeit*] is not the result of an absolute conferment of male consciousness but is rather the consequence of a non-absolute dialectic, which constructs sexual difference according to an opposition of two laws, feminine and masculine, neither of which can posit itself alone in (it)self and for (it)self.

While Butler represses Derrida in order to attempt a sort of dialectic between Hegel and Lacan, it is the dialectic itself which is for Derrida the very structure of repression. As he lays it out quite clearly in *Glas*:

In other words: what about the incest prohibition? . . . Can a certain scansion of reading make appear therein, at least by way of hypothesis, the trait that binds together the double concatenation and the interdiction of incest? What relation is there between monogamy, the incest prohibition, and the apparition of the value of objectivity (activity, virility, differentiation, reason, freedom, and so on) that forms the value of opposition in general? A slight syncope presses the question: *what indeed does the relation with the object have to do with the incest prohibition?* (G 191-192; emphasis added)

What indeed! I am doing very little work here beyond allowing Derrida's text to speak for itself, but it should be clear by now, if it was not already, that Butler has not followed Derrida's reading of Antigone to this point. Rather her footnote attempts to determine Derrida's attitude to Antigone's desire based on the single line, in which "he may be writing ironically." Rather, it is the cause of Derrida's entire deconstruction of the dialectical system. After a few pages of explaining the complex route of *Sittlichkeit* through marriage from the family to the political sphere, he concludes that repression cannot be said to be *a priori* good or bad, because it is the very dialectical structure by which such an opposition is formed. The situation of the incest prohibition is equally a question of the dialectic. The prohibition *breaks with nature* and it is for this reason, dialectically speaking, that it conforms all the more *with* nature. Marriage between blood-relations (ruled as *unnatural* by Hegel) is

opposed in the greater logic to marriage which is an ethical action of freedom as the passage of *Sittlichkeit* from the family to the public sphere, which in so far as it submits natural pressures to symbolic law is *also* opposed to nature. “Dialectics of nature,” writes Derrida, “it produces the incest prohibition in breaking with itself, but this rupture with (it)self is in its nature, in the nature of nature” (G 200). This an issue for Hegel which determinedly revolves around the brother/sister relationship; which is to say, contra both of Butler’s footnotes, not only does Derrida not describe the Antigone-Polynicese relationship as one without desire, but neither in fact does Hegel.

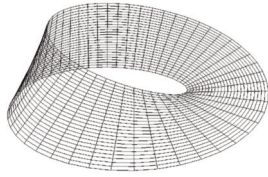
Redux

Judith Butler is eager, quite rightly, not to allow Antigone to stand as a representative figure of any single metaphysical truth. Rather, she mobilizes Antigone as “an allegory for the crisis of kinship” (AC 24). Perhaps, in Butler’s repression of Derrida in *Antigone’s Claim*, we have an allegory of the crisis of kinship between deconstruction and queer theory. I’m not sure this is a case of a daughter returning to murder the father, or even that Butler has that big an Oedipal attachment to Derrida. I’m certainly not prepared to fit this whole debate into the symbolic positions it does so much to unsettle. In fact, such a gesture would be a demonstration of Derrida’s most cogent contribution to the demasking of psychoanalysis here, when he says that “there is no operation-less unconscious” than Oedipus because the Oedipus complex depends on law which commands actual action and real opposition. For Hegel, Oedipus’s crime is banal because he did not know what he was doing and therefore cannot be a matter of ethical consciousness and thus an expression or perversity of spirit. This is not to say Oedipus is innocent: “the crime is unconscious and that is why it remains whole and irreversible” (G 171) as the action of two laws of sexual difference in opposition. Rather, the pure crime, the one most corresponding to ethical consciousness is that of Antigone, who in Butler’s words “not only did it, but she has the nerve to *say* she did it” (AC 34). Similarly, Butler not only represses Derrida, she is blatant enough to say that she is doing it. Perhaps, regardless of whether the repression

comes from intention or the unconscious, the effect of repression is still the same. Let us call it, after Paul de Man, a moment of blindness in this text on Oedipus. It is a moment in which the opposition between the knowing self of the footnotes and the actuality the self does not know (which determines everything about this text), between the conscious and the unconscious, queer theory and deconstruction, operates to both present and relieve a culpability which does not wash away. The textual operation has after-effects.

I am not going to be melodramatic and call this text the scene of a crime, even if the old saw, “talent borrows but genius steals,” might be applicable to Butler. Rather, I suspect Butler simply did not read beyond the page references that index Antigone in the John Leavey *Glossary*.¹⁰ This is unfortunate because she might have saved herself a lot of work. Ultimately, I have little inclination other than to laugh at this student error, although it is one that certain queer theorists have been repeating ever since. You cannot repress the non-dialectable as a way of perverting the dialectic; that is the most (straightforwardly) dialectical thing possible. The trouble with Butler’s “queer theory” in this book is not that it is deconstructive but that it is not deconstructive enough, but keep that to yourselves, I wouldn’t want any scandal attaching itself to the family.

10. [See John P. Leavey, Jr., *Glossary* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1986). —Ed.]



Performing Friendship

Linnell Secomb

The refrain that returns and repeats throughout *Politics of Friendship* —“O my friends, there is no friend”—signals the ambiguities and paradoxes of this text, and of the concepts of friendship and politics that it engages.¹ Addressed to friends, but proclaiming the absence of the friend, the declaration immediately creates a quandary—a puzzle, which Derrida accentuates and extends with each reiteration of the phrase. Tracing its appearance in Cicero, Montaigne, Nietzsche, Blanchot and others, and its unverifiable attribution to Aristotle, Derrida rearticulates the significances and nuances of the address. Through this repeated recitation, Derrida performs a sociality, or a politics, based on a friendship without friendship, a relation without relation. This reiteration of a citation without (verifiable) origin, this unworking of friendship and relation, which reveals the absence of friendship and relation, and, at the same time, the possibility of friendship and relation, recalls the concepts of iteration, citation, and performativity that are so central to a certain conception of “the queer.”

Derrida’s influence on Judith Butler’s articulation of queer performativity has already been carefully delineated.² Butler reinterprets Derrida’s critique of Austin, redirecting the performativity

1. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 1. Hereafter cited in the text as PF.

2. See Jonathan Culler, “Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative,” *Poetics Today* 21.3 (2000). Hereafter cited as PL. [See also Alexander García Düttmann, “A Man for All Seasons: Derrida-cum-‘Queer Theory’ or The Limits of ‘Performativity,’” in this volume. —Ed.]

of language to an embodied performativity that, through repeated enactments of non-originary gestures, movements, and expressions, creates the sensation of “identity.”³ Amalgamating Nietzsche’s refusal of essential identity—“there is no doer behind the deed”—with Austin’s/Derrida’s analysis of linguistic performativity—in which language enacts that to which it refers—, Butler proposes that we too enact, or bring about, a subjectivity through a repeated, habituated, citational performativity.⁴

In this essay, I suggest that Derrida not only provides the resources for a queering of subjectivity, but also for a queering of friendship, relation, and sociality. Derrida, via Butler, provides the resources for thinking “the subject” as a *doing*, or *becoming*, rather than a *being*. Similarly, I suggest, he provides the resources for thinking friendship not as an established and definable type of intimacy, benevolence, and/or love, but as a future-oriented process or enactment—a promise and performance of possibility. This possibility, or this promise, however, emerges from and reiterates a paradox central to both friendship and politics—namely, that a future-friendly politics open to alterity iterates a friendship limited to the fraternal and a politics of citizenship that excludes the non-citizen. Thus the promise of friendship and politics involves a movement that attempts to perform this history queerly otherwise.

Re-iterating Friendship

Outlining the context of his seminars on the friend, on which *The Politics of Friendship* is based, Derrida speaks of both his own re-iteration of the concept of the friend and also of its many returns throughout the history of philosophy:

Each session [of Derrida’s seminars on friendship] opened with these words from Montaigne, quoting a remark attributed to Aristotle: “O my friends, there is no friend.”

3. [For more on Derrida’s relationship to J. L. Austin, see Éamonn Dunne, “Deco-pervo-struction,” in this volume. —Ed.]

4. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Week after week, its voices, tones, modes and strategies were tried on, to see if its interpretation could then be sparked, or if the scenography could be set in motion around itself. This work, taking its time, replays, *represents*, only the first session. This representation thus repeats less a first act than a sort of preview. It is no doubt anything but a primal scene, although the figure of the friend, so regularly coming back on stage with the features of the brother—who is critically at stake in this analysis—seems spontaneously to belong to a familial, fraternalist, and thus androcentric configuration of politics. (PF vii-viii)

Derrida thus announces two themes that are central to his analysis of friendship—the figure of the *brother* in both friendship and politics, and the movement of *repetition*. This second theme of repetition is evident in the way that *Politics of Friendship* re-plays and re-presents Derrida's own seminars. More significantly, the seminars (and the book) are structured around a *citation* from Montaigne, who in turn attributes it to Aristotle—though the validity of this attribution is itself questionable—so that this very exclamation can be considered an “orphaned quotation” (PF xi). There is, therefore, no originary or primal location or meaning, but instead a figure of “the friend,” which repeatedly returns under the guise of the brother. While the deconstruction of fraternal friendship that Derrida undertakes has been the focus of considerable commentary, the enactment and analysis of *iteration* that Derrida performs in *Politics of Friendship* has received less recognition. Yet this performative iteration is central to the text and its concerns.

Derrida acknowledges from the outset that “O my friends, there is no friend” is a “cited quotation . . . attributed, [but] only attributed, by a sort of rumor or public opinion . . . to Aristotle” (PF 2). The lack of an identifiable, essential origin or foundation already signals the perplexities associated with this exclamation. It lacks a verifiable author, a definitive parentage or heritage. Appearing in Cicero, Montaigne, Nietzsche, Blanchot and Derrida, but never under their own signatures, as they each reference an earlier archaic source, the exclamation lacks the authority of an “author,” “origin,” or “creator.” Even before the paradox of its seeming contradiction—addressed to *friends*, but negating *the friend*—the enigma of its

bereaved lineage already reveals a loss or melancholy permeating the utterance.

And yet, while its origins are obscure, there remains an attribution to Aristotle and a long line of philosophical citations, so that Derrida suggests: “Like a renounced filiation, an origin thus nicknamed seems, in truth, to lose itself in the infinite anonymity of the mists of time” (PF 2). Thus, it is not simply a matter that there is “no assignable author,” but that even our retrospective referrals remains uncertain, undecidable, and perhaps, we may add, chimerical.

Although Derrida comments in passing on this originary ambiguity, it is the paradoxes within the text itself, so to speak, that attract his most sustained analysis. But the obscurity of origin cannot be dissociated from the ambiguity of the text. Indeed, the doubtful ancestry of the utterance subverts any straight-ahead chronological temporality through which a definitive origin could be identifiable, creating a certain uncanny mourning for a “loss” that remains unrecognizable. Similarly, Derrida argues that the paradoxical formulation, “O my friends, there is not friend,” disjoins time and anticipates the death of the friend, so that friendship is, in this way, always already haunted by the loss of the other.

Derrida traces a recurrent distinction between “ordinary” friendships—based on profit and pleasure—and so-called “perfect” or “exemplary” friendships—based on virtue—in the texts of Aristotle, Cicero, and Montaigne. “O my friends, there is no friend” may therefore be read as marking less a paradox than a distinction between the many ordinary friends addressed by the exclamation, and the lack of exemplary, virtuous friendship. With a reference to Montaigne, who himself cites Cicero and Aristotle, Derrida writes:

Before naming Aristotle, Montaigne had massively quoted Cicero. . . . Occasionally he had drawn the Ciceronian treatise within the genius of his paraphrases, precisely around this “O my friends.” The “sovereign and master-friendship” had then to be distinguished from “friendship common and customary, in relation to which you must employ the saying which Aristotle often repeated.” (PF 2)

This *distinction* between two types of friendship—which, for Cicero,

is a distinction between “true and perfect” *vs.* “vulgar and mediocre” friendship (quoted in Derrida, PF 2)—also suggests, for Derrida, a difference in number. Although there may be *many* “ordinary” or “customary” friendships, “perfect” friendships are *few* in number—O my (many) friends, there are no (or very few exemplary) friends. This issue of number is significant not only for friendship itself, but also for the “democratic” form of politics on which it is modelled. For if one must be selective about friends—there being insufficient time to befriend *all* or even *many*—, so, too, the friendly democratic community must choose and select who will—and will not—be admitted into this friendship or citizenship. “There is no belonging or friendly community,” Derrida points out, “without election and without selection” (PF 21).

These “perfect” friends, limited in number, are exemplary, for Cicero, in that they provide a passage beyond death, namely, a remembrance that will enable the name of the dead friend to live on through the testimony of the surviving friend. Friendship is, as we have already noted, haunted by this anticipated death and by this life beyond death. By promising distinction and recognition after death, friendship, in a sense, subverts death through the continuing life of the friend: “It engraves the renown in a ray of light and prints the citation of the friend in a convertability of life and death, of presence and absence, and promises it to the testamental *revenge* . . . of [no] more life” (Derrida, PF 3).

As Derrida notes, for Cicero, the exemplary friend provides this hope of on-going acclaim after death because the perfect friend replicates the self. The friend is *like*—or *the same as*—the self, i.e., “our own ideal image” (quoted in Derrida, PF 4). Cicero’s use of the word *exemplar*, as Derrida explains, indicates the significance of both similarity and of citation and duplication in the concept of the perfect friend: “Cicero uses the word *exemplar*, which means portrait but also, as *exemplum*, the duplicate, the reproduction, the copy as well as the original, the type, the model” (PF 4). The importance of these many aspects of citation to the concept of friendship is thus already starting to emerge. Since the very origin of “O my friends” remains obscure, the exclamation always appears in philosophical literature as a citation of a prior citation: an always-already reiterated apostrophe that recurs repeatedly by reference to an earlier instance. Derrida, perhaps more than any other, foregrounds this re-iteration,

by quoting Montaigne, who quotes Cicero and attributes the origin to Aristotle. It's as if each return of the call—"O my friends"—reflects a further facet of the paradox, marking, first, the difference between "ordinary" and "virtuous" friendship, and, subsequently, the distinction between plural friends and the singular friend. This transition already gestures to one of the effects of iteration, namely, that each repetition transforms the utterance, even if only slightly, so that a transformation in significance is enacted. Thus there has been a slippage already from common to many friends, and from the exemplary to the singular friend, until, finally, even Cicero's exemplary friend, as Derrida reveals somewhat perversely, is already a copy (an "ideal image") of the self, such that the relation between origin(al) and copy, model and reproduction, is already in play from the earliest articulations of the concept of "the friend." As Derrida writes: "The two meanings (the single original and the multipliable copy) cohabit here; they are—or seem to be—the same, and that is the whole story, the very condition of survival" (PF 4). However, this is by no means the only way in which citation is at the heart of friendship and its philosophical deployment.

The friend, for Cicero, is the "ideal double," "the same as self but improved" (PF 4). Thus, the narcissistic wish intrinsic to friendship involves a "self" both duplicated or iterated in the friend, and surviving through the friend. "Survival," as Derrida notes, is "hoped for, illuminated in advance, if not assured, for this Narcissus who dreams of immortality" (PF 4). Friendship, from the outset, anticipates death, for the surviving friend is supposed to continue to remember, honor, and grieve the dead by creating a "post mortem discourse": an "epitaph or oration, [a] citation of the dead person, the renown of the name after the death of what it names" (PF 5). This anticipation of a citation of the dead friend by the living friend is central to Ciceronian friendship—the surviving friend citing the dead friend through duplication as well as through funeral oration. Ciceronian friendship is thus a reiteration, a citation of self through the replicant friend who speaks the name of the dead after death.

This (narcissistic) anticipation of the post mortem citation adds yet another facet to the exclamation "O my friends," namely, the "strange temporality" (PF 5) which introduces into the present that which may occur in the future. This *temporality of anticipation* brings not only death within life—the future into the present—but

also the re-iteration of the friend within the seemingly original self. This self is already, in a sense, a citation of the other. Or to put this differently and in Derrida's words: "I live in the present speaking of myself in the mouths of my friends. I already hear them speaking on the edge of my tomb. The Ciceronian variety of friendship would be the possibility of quoting myself in exemplary fashion, by signing the funeral oration in advance" (PF 5). There is here, Derrida notes, a "premeditation of friendship": an anticipation that engages "work on the citation, and on the citation of an apostrophe" (PF 5). Once again, the themes of quotation and repetition are foregrounded by Derrida's analysis: friendship relies on a future citation by which the "self" is already addressed and (de)constituted in the present.

This "strange temporality," or *contretemps*, of friendship—which is the time of surviving, mourning, and weeping for the friend in advance and in anticipation of death—also arises via a movement from temporality to omnitemporality. Friendship, Derrida suggests, requires time in order to establish the constant stability and duration of amity. Even though friendship is associated with a faith beyond the chronology of constancy, it is through the very duration of constancy that time opens up the quasi-eternity of faith. There are, Derrida notes, "two times as incompatible as they are indissociable: firm and stable constancy on one hand and, on the other, beginning again, renewal, the indefinite repetition of the inaugural instant, always anew, once again, the new in re-iteration" (PF 14). Thus the temporality of constancy transmogrifies into the untimeliness of faith via re-iteration. Derrida identifies the assertion of a temporality of constancy in Aristotle; yet, here too he reveals "beyond the letter of Aristotle's text," a slippage from this chronological temporality to the a-chronic region of faith: "Engagement in friendship takes time, it gives time, for it carries beyond the present moment and keeps memory as much as it anticipates . . . faith . . . dominating time by eluding it, taking and giving time in *contretemps*, opens the [very] experience of time. . . . There is no reliable friendship without this faith . . . without the confirmed steadfastness of this repeated act of faith" (PF 14-15).

This movement from temporality to omnitemporality is supplemented by a renewal—or a re-invention—that disrupts and interrupts time, creating a break, disjoining time. As Derrida notes: "the reliable in friendship supposes a re-invention, a re-engagement

of freedom. . . . This is another way of negating time in time, this time in the form of discontinuity, through the reinvention of the event” (PF 21). This slippage from constancy to faith, and from temporality to omnitemporality, is augmented by a further iteration, or temporal shattering, that so thoroughly disjoins time as to suggest another inflection of “O my friends, there is no friend.” While the ambiguous heritage of the exclamation “O my friends” suggests a temporal distortion, as the passage of time obscures or obliterates the original utterance, this very ambiguity allows a passing through and between the temporal, omnitemporal, and atemporal, resisting any definitive location in either the present or the future. The ambiguity of origin is thereby echoed or iterated in the temporal ambiguity of sense. Furthermore, the disjointed temporality of the exclamation is enacted through a repetition, or re-iteration, of constancy that, over time, transforms and becomes the timelessness of faith. Thus, while there may be no friend presently, the very passing of time delivers a kind of constancy and, through renewal and re-iteration, a faith beyond time, the (im)possible promise of friendship in the future.

These re-iterations of the exclamation do not yet appear to relate to Derrida’s other central theme in *Politics of Friendship*, namely, the “fraternity” of friendship and its consequences for the “democracy” on which it is modelled. Yet, the theme of re-iteration and the theme of fraternal friendship are not dissociable: the very movement from fraternal friendship to democracy-to-come cannot, I will argue, be separated from the resignifying play of iteration.

Democratic Friendship

A central argument of *The Politics of Friendship* is that democracy, like friendship, is founded on a paradox related to the question of number. As the early philosophers already acknowledged, while there may be *many* friendships founded on pleasure or profit, there are very *few* exemplary friends. Derrida extrapolates from this early anxiety about numeration to the broader paradox of the relation between the many friends who by reason of their multitude become less intimately friendly and the few close and intimate friends who, by their exclusivity, shut out or expel others, which is itself so very unfriendly. “O my friends, there is no friend” thus points both to

the numerous friends who, because of their number, can only be superficial friends (hardly friends at all), as well as to the few friends who, by excluding all the others, seem to negate the very notion of friendship beyond the small in number.⁵

Derrida's main concern in *Politics of Friendship* is to show a similar paradox at the heart of democracy. While democracy hopes to extend equality and liberty to all, the democratic nation-state, at the same time, limits this "all" to the fraternity of the recognized brother-citizens of the state (DD 18-19). This parallel between the friend and democracy is already clear in the first chapter of *Politics of Friendship*, where Derrida writes:

There is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy without the "community of friends" . . . without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal. These two laws are irreducible one to the other. Tragically irreconcilable and forever wounding. The wound itself opens with the necessity of having to count one's friends, to count the others, in the economy of one's own, there were every other is altogether other.
(PF 22)

Re-iteration and re-presentation are at work in this transition from the paradox of friendship to the paradox of democracy. Indeed, the very paradox of democracy reiterates the paradox of friendship. It models itself on—or copies—the paradoxical structure of friendship. The wound of friendship, the unfriendliness of limiting friendship to just a few, proliferates into the wound of democracy, namely, the undemocratic exclusion of the non-citizen from the equality, freedom, and fraternity of democracy. Democracy not only repeats but accentuates this wounding paradox. And yet, both friendship and democracy transform in the repeated re-enactments of friendly democratic relations.

Enriching Friendship

5. See Alex Thomson, *Deconstruction and Democracy* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 18-19. Hereafter cited in the text as DD.

Having repeatedly reconsidered the major themes and theorists of friendship throughout *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida concludes by focusing on Maurice Blanchot. Pondering Blanchot's apparently positive reference to the Greek model of friendship in his eulogy for Michel Foucault, Derrida elaborates both Blanchot's earlier rejection of that Greek heritage and, simultaneously, his perhaps unavoidable reception and repetition of it—even if “enriched,” remodelled, or reformulated. Following passages reflecting again on Nietzsche's notion of friendship (where Derrida suggests that, for Nietzsche, since neither woman nor man is yet capable of friendship, there are only allusions to a possible future friendship, a promised and/or anticipated friendship [PF 283]), Derrida returns to the “canonical meditations on friendship.” “Let us backtrack for a moment,” Derrida writes, allowing himself an opportunity to reiterate his argument: “We have attempted to show that the Graeco-Roman model, which seems to be governed by the value of reciprocity, by homological, immanentist, finitist—and rather politist—concord, bears within itself, nevertheless, potentially, the power to become infinite and dissymmetrical” (PF 290). Montaigne, thus, inherits and breaks with reciprocity by speaking of his friend La Boétie as one who “infinitely surpasses me” (quoted in Derrida, PF 291).

Derrida identifies a similar—perhaps more pronounced—rupture and repetition in Blanchot. Blanchot appears, at first, to break completely with canonical friendship. “Amity” is not, for Blanchot, to be found in reciprocity and commonality, but rather in difference. “Friendship,” for Blanchot, is “a relation without dependence.” It implies “the recognition of a common strangeness.” It involves “even in the greatest familiarity, an infinite distance, this fundamental separation from out of which that which separates becomes relation” (quoted in Derrida, PF 294). With reference to *On Friendship*, as well as to *The Writing of Disaster*, Derrida notes that Blanchot disrupts canonical friendship: the language of these texts “seems ‘impossible’ or untenable with regard to the common sense of friendship” (PF 296). Breaking with tradition, Blanchot suggests that “friendship” is neither reciprocal, nor founded in the generosity of the gift. “Friendship,” he writes, “is not a gift, or a promise; it is not generic generosity. Rather, this incommensurable relation of one to the other is the outside drawing near in its separateness and inaccessibility” (quoted in Derrida, PF 297). While

Derrida has written elsewhere of the “gift” beyond an economy of exchange that requires reciprocity,⁶ here he concedes that Blanchot, in refusing friendship as “generic generosity,” avoids the risk of once again framing amity in relation to “naturalization, the generosity of genre, race, *gens*, the family or the nation; and return, more precisely with the features of fraternity” (PF 297)

And yet, despite this break, Blanchot, as Derrida points out, nevertheless returns to, repeats, and even praises Greek *philia*. Blanchot goes so far as to quote the (Aristotelian) exclamation “O my friends, there is no friend.” Derrida, though, suggests that this reiteration must involve a resignification: “The ‘there is no friend’ can and must become laden with the newest and most rebellious of significations: there is no longer a friend in the sense of what the entire tradition has taught us” (PF 299). Derrida quickly adds, however, that despite this reformulation the heritage is affirmed—though also enriched and, through this enrichment, transformed. Blanchot’s return to Greek *philia*, in other words, confirms that: “no actual rupture is possible, determinable, even advisable, even from the greatest distancing, and that the history we are referring to is not articulated in this way” (PF 299). This observation sheds light on Derrida’s own investigation of the history of the concept of friendship. He, too, returns to the canonical texts, rehearsing and replaying their insights while also uncovering an obscured counter-discourse. While friendship is represented as a reciprocal relation between “equals” (and thus between the “similar” and the “same”), there is also, paradoxically, a recognition of dissimilarity (for the friend “infinitely surpassed me”) and non-reciprocity (for friendship endures beyond and anticipates death, which is the time when the friend cannot respond to or reciprocate the gestures of amity). Thus there is no “rupture,” but rather, through citation and reiteration, a gradual drawing out of this paradox, and of the difference, distance, and futural orientation of friendship.

With Blanchot, however, there is perhaps an even greater contradiction. Having (apparently) repudiated the Greek heritage,

6. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). [See also, Sarah Dillon, “Derrida and the Question of ‘Woman,’” in this volume. —Ed.]

Blanchot nevertheless invokes Greek *philia* in his eulogy to Michel Foucault. He ends his tribute to Foucault thusly:

Philia, which, for the Greeks and even Romans, remains the model of what is excellent in human relations (with the enigmatic character it receives from opposite imperatives, at once pure reciprocity and unrequited generosity), can be received as a heritage always capable of being enriched. . . . In bearing witness to a work demanding study (unprejudiced reading) rather than praise, I believe I am remaining faithful, however awkwardly, to the intellectual friendship that [Foucault's] death, so painful to me, today allows me to declare to him, as I recall the words attributed by Diogenes Laertus to Aristotle: "O my friends, there is no friend."⁷ (Blanchot, 1987, 109)

For Derrida, Blanchot is at once *citing* this heritage and *disowning* it, or, perhaps more accurately, inheriting it so as to transform it. This legacy is adopted and adapted—i.e., "enriched"—by invoking that which it itself has excluded: "The Greek model of *philia* could never be 'enriched' otherwise than with that which it has violently and essentially attempted to exclude" (PF 300). Indeed, Derrida points to a necessity in this friendship that requires Blanchot to adopt or at least cite a tradition he had already rejected. In declaring his regard for Foucault—and especially for his work—Blanchot recognizes the significance of Greek friendship for Foucault, who had dedicated himself to working on the Greek "care of the self" and had insisted, in a late interview, on the importance of friendship and love rather than sex between men.⁸

Derrida hints at the enigmatic connotations of the (Aristotelian) apostrophe in this context: in declaring his friendship, Blanchot employs a citation that negates friendship—"there is no

7. See Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him," in *Foucault/Blanchot*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 109. Hereafter cited in the text as MF.

8. See, for example, Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol 1)*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998), 135-141.

friend”—which “neutralizes the declaration of friendship, pluralizes the address (O friends) and leaves the Greek model to put itself, by itself, into question” (PF 301). Ironically, the intellectual friendship is pledged by recalling “less the friend than the saying attributed to Aristotle, which says there is no friend” (PF 301). Thus, the very declaration of friendship is left hanging, Derrida suggests, in an “intemporal time which is suited to mourning” (PF 301), invoking Blanchot’s reflections on death as impossible and suggesting that the impossible is operating here too in relation to friendship. As Derrida writes: “this friendship could not have been declared during the lifetime of the friend,” adding that “when death is declared during the lifetime of friends, it avows, fundamentally the same thing; it avows the death thanks to which the chance to declare itself comes at last, never failing to come” (PF 302).

Blanchot, Derrida reminds us, both inherits and refuses the culture and heritage of the friend. Befriending Foucault, he cites the Greek model and duly remembers Foucault and his work. Yet, he avoids duplicating either the tradition or the friend: on one hand, he explicitly wishes to “enrich” and thereby transform the “tradition,” while, on the other, though recognizing the brilliance of Foucault’s work, he nevertheless expresses his disagreement by saying to his friend, in fact, there is no (Greek, exemplary) “friend.”

Although Derrida does not refer to the opening pages of Blanchot’s address to his dead friend, it reveals much about the alterity and difference of (this) posthumous friendship. As Blanchot begins:

A few personal words. Let me say first of all that I had no personal relations with Michel Foucault. I never met him, except one time, in the courtyard of the Sorbonne, during the events of May ’68, perhaps in June or July (but I was told later that he wasn’t there), when I addressed a few words to him, he himself unaware of who was speaking to him. . . . It’s true that during these extraordinary events I often asked: but why isn’t Foucault here? Thus granting him his power of attraction and underscoring the empty place he should have been occupying. (MF 63)

Preceding his extended commentary on Foucault’s work, Blanchot describes this non-encounter with Foucault. They met; he spoke to

him; he wasn't recognized. Yet Foucault was not there. His absence felt like a vacancy, a gap, a space left empty. It's as though Blanchot was already mourning Foucault's absence; as though Foucault was already dead ahead of time. The intensity of this non-encounter suggests the power of mourning; the dream of a meeting negated by the reality of an absence.

This anecdote of a failed encounter, a missed opportunity, a desired lack is followed at the conclusion by the promise of a friendship: not a Greek friendship (whether Platonic or Aristotelian, companionable or homoerotic) but an "intellectual" amity; not a canonical, fraternal, homosocial friendship, but a friendship of strangers; even an amity of those who never met and now never will, death having ensured the strange, untimely, separateness and inaccessibility of this wholly other friendship.

If Blanchot evokes *philia* in honor of his friend, he also "enriches" its relation with the outside—renouncing both reciprocity and generosity in favor of incommensurability and alterity.

Performative Friendship

The Politics of Friendship is framed around a canonical exclamation that is performative. "O my friends" is an utterance which brings into being that to which it refers. The interpellation "O my friends" turns those addressed into the friends of the speaker or writer. All the readers of *Politics of Friendship* addressed by this apostrophe become the friends of this book that hails them. Just as the words, "I do," bring about a marriage rather than just describe it,⁹ so the apostrophe, "O my friends," enacts rather than describes friendship.

The words that follow this apostrophe, i.e., "there is no friend," may seem, at first, to be a constative claim about a certain state of affairs. Following the performative apostrophe of amity, they seem to make a truth claim rebutting its performative gesture. But as Jonathan Culler has demonstrated, the distinction between "performative" and "constative" is not stable; indeed, constatives

9. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

may be understood as performatives of a certain sort. Although sentences beginning “I promise” or “I declare” seem to be clearly performatives (in saying, “I promise you friendship,” I bring about our friendship, or I reassure you of our friendship), the sentence, “I am your friend,” even though it has the form of a constative statement, involves an implicit performative—namely, the *promise* of friendship. All statements, Culler concludes, following Austin, involve an implicit performative. “There is no friend,” then, to paraphrase Culler, “could be seen as the elliptical version of [I hereby affirm that there is no friend] a performative utterance that accomplishes the act of affirming to which it refers” (PL 505).

Derrida refers to the performativity of friendship in his analysis of Blanchot’s eulogy. Having recalled Blanchot’s analysis of death as the impossible, and likened it to friendship as a similar (im)possibility, he concludes that Blanchot’s very eulogy has “shown (performatively) by the fact attested here, that this friendship could not have been declared during the lifetime of the friend” (PF 302). The declaration of friendship *after death* performs the impossibility of friendship *in life*, or, rather, friendship in life already announces or anticipates the death of the friend. Friendship beyond reciprocity and generosity—beyond sameness and exchange—is therefore an incommensurable and strange(r) friendship only possible after death.

While each and every call of friendship and announcement of, or negation of, “the friend” is performative, Derrida’s promise of a friendship and a democracy-to-come is explicitly performative and deliberately works to rescind the apparently constative nature of the utterance “there is no friend.” Concluding with a reformulated performative call—“O my democratic friends”—, Derrida asks if it would be possible to conceive and enact democracy without reviving the history of fraternal friendship. Is it possible, he asks, “to open out to the future, or rather, to the ‘come,’ of a certain democracy?” (PF 306). He answers with a promise, or rather with a concept, of democracy-as-promise: “For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come” (PF 306). Like friendship, democracy is promised: democracy, in other words, performatively promises democracy; in enacting democracy it promises more democracy. Friendship, too,

is performative: it is always the promise in the future of friendship; the promise that—in reiterating its heritage—friendship will be performatively transformed from a canonical, fraternal friendship into an incommensurable, strange, haunting friendship-to-come, perhaps between sisters and cousins. Friendship is not a constative description, a state of affairs, a noun describing a certain type of relation: it is rather a performative that brings into being friendship. Friendship becomes friendship through the citation and re-iteration of a history that is, with each enactment, “enriched,” transforming and reinventing “friendship.” Thus friendship is always renewed. Thus friendship is promised.

Just Queer

Geoffrey Bennington

All the contributors to this remarkable volume converge in the thought that Derrida's thinking is fundamentally queer.¹ The very queerness of queer, the energy that on almost every page here has the adjective go verbal, the queering of queer in what Calvin Thomas calls "queerance" rather than "queerness," is irresistibly brought up and brought on by the thought of the trace and of *différance*.² *Différance* just is queer, just is queering. And just as *différance* is nothing, no thing at all, but an indefinite process with no possible end or determinate product, the perpetual differing and deferring of any thing or outcome whatsoever, so queering queers and will queer again, endlessly. This almost limpid thought that affirms queer as the very *différance* of *différance* can give an almost jubilant tone to some of the essays here: it's almost too good to be true, as though we could finally wake up from the ongoing nightmare of straightlined, straightlaced repressive orthopedic normalizing heteronormativity and greet, as the new dawn heralded by Jacques Derrida, the prospect of the neverending ongoing queering of queer.

This is itself a queer thing to think, but it is certainly not simply false, not just a false dawn. Derrida himself comes fairly close to affirming it himself in an essay on J. Hillis Miller entitled

1. [Note: Bennington's postface was written in 2010 and refers to an earlier version of this volume, which has been slightly altered. —Ed.]

2. [Calvin Thomas, "No Kingdom of the Queer," in this volume. On *différance*, see Jacques Derrida, "*Différance*," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P), 21-22; *ibid.*, "*Différance*," in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1973), 129-160. —Ed.]

“Justices,” quoted from here by Nicholas Royle.³ Though elliptical, a passage from this essay provides all the materials we might need to confirm the “limpid thought” that sees *différance* as very queer. Almost like a fable, this passage provides a highly condensed version of deconstructive thinking, from the disruption of ontology to the prospect of an ethics, to justice itself, the whole fantastic story finally appearing explicitly under the sign of queer. “To be is to be queer,” says Derrida, glossing Miller’s Hopkins, no less, like another slogan to add to the deconstructive t-shirt, the best slogan, perhaps, the most in-your-face, superseding previous favorites such as “Infinite *différance* is finite,” “There is nothing outside the text,” “To be is to inherit,” and even “In the beginning was the telephone.” “To be is to be queer” would then be the slogan of all deconstructive slogans, capitalizing all deconstructive energy in its splendid pithiness, sheer queer, just queer.

Here’s some context for that potential slogan. Derrida is following Miller looking at Hopkins’s notions of, among others, “inscape” and “selftaste.” These lead to a thought of a singularity that is in a certain sense unspeakable, unpresentable in language (just because it is singular):

Each unique and irreplaceable time, a singularity exceeds the generality of the language. It thus overflows the language. The singular says itself, but it says itself as “unspeakable.” What is strange and “queer” here is that all this comes down to an experience and, in Hopkins own words, to a sort of theory of the queer, if not to the impossible uncanniness of a “queer theory.” (J 238)

I’ll return in a moment to the “impossible uncanniness of a ‘queer theory,’” and also pursue this quotation into its immediately following moment, where “queer” will be linked (by Hopkins) to vice. Let’s stick for the moment to this more “ontological” or even

3. [Nicholas Royle, “Impossible Uncanniness: Derrida and Queer Theory,” in this volume. See also Jacques Derrida, “Justices,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Provocations to Reading: J. Hillis Miller and the Democracy to Come*, ed. Barbara Cohen and Dragan Kujundzic (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 238. Hereafter cited in the text as J. —Ed.]

“onto-theological” moment, to which Derrida returns just a little later in the piece. In the case of Hopkins, the singularity that is being spoken as unspeakable in terms of “inscape” or “selftaste” is drawn in part from Duns Scotus’s notion of *haecceitas*, and the concomitant thought of the “univocity of being”: that doctrine states that God “is” in the same sense that we “are,” and Derrida goes on to develop this in the direction of a kind of singular solitude of God:

It is thus that Hopkins describes at the same time his solitude and the unspeakable singularity of this selftaste on the basis of which all the same he speaks, addresses himself to another, and gives to be shared just that, the unshareable of his own taste. This radical solitude, the isolation or the insularity he analyzes belongs to the tradition of the *ultima solitudo* of Duns Scotus. [...]

[This question] is borne by this doctrine of the univocity of being according to which the word being has the same sense for God and for his creatures. God is God, therefore God is alone, alone in being God, and he is alone as we are alone, and each time the word *being*, the copula *to be* in “he is alone” and “we are alone,” has the same sense. Being is there univocal, and that is why, by analogy, we understand the solitude of God; he is alone like us, which pains us very much, and that is why we love him. We do not love him (this is at least the hypothesis I am risking for the fun of it) because he is a sovereign and all powerful father, generous and formidable, giving and forgiving. We love him because he is alone, the poor fellow, the loneliest of all beings, and thus as vulnerable, in his divinity, as an abandoned child. This is not necessarily Christian thinking, as you might well suspect, even if it could become so, for example, for a Catholic like Hopkins, although it is not exactly his argument or his language here. This solitude of the unique, at once ineffable, abandoned, and vulnerable, mute as a child, is also what we imagine with regard to all those we love, friends and lovers. It is here that arises the “queer,” the properly onto-theological dimension of which I will specify in a moment, but also perhaps its excess, in prayer, over onto-theology. (J 238-9)

“Queer”, then, is singular, a kind of absolute singular that is both

the ground for an ontology and for its undoing, and leads directly to our slogan:

One could demonstrate, although I won't have the time to do so here, that this doctrine of the univocity of being is the ultimate origin and the very experience of absolute solitude that we were speaking of a moment ago. It is the origin of what is queer in the inscape but also in *being*. To be is to be queer. (J 290)

To be is to be queer because to be is to be singular: which then pushes “queer” beyond or outside of “being” itself, beyond the copula if not exactly beyond copulation. If to be is to be queer, then being “itself” is queer, “is” already queer, being as being-queer queers its own pitch as being, being queers being in an oddness, singularity, queerness without “-ness,” just queer.

Whence what Derrida earlier refers to as “the impossible uncanniness of a queer theory”: if queer has to do with singularity, and a singularity before or beyond being, then queer cannot really be the object of a theory strictly speaking. Queer theory queers theory, renders it uncanny, just by “being” queer. And this too leads to the thought that if queer does not give rise to theory, maybe we do better to look in the direction of ethics to think queer. Nothing would be a more common move today, in the wake of an often cursory reading of Lévinas, than to think that a kind of collapse or failing of ontology should open a dimension it is extraordinarily tempting to call “ethical.” And it is certainly not by chance that Derrida’s whole essay on Hillis Miller should be written under the title “Justices.” The thought would be that the same queer singularity that undoes ontology and renders theory impossible opens at least the possibility of justice.

In Hopkins, this sequence involves a move from an intrinsic virtue of singularity to its intrinsic becoming-vice. As quoted by Derrida quoting Miller, Hopkins says, “Now, it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped” (quoted J 238). Singularity (here as inscape) “is” distinctive: let’s say differential. *Différance* opens the field of singularity. But singularity is intrinsically singular, odd, queer. There seems to be a seamless

transition between the distinctive and the queer, an inevitability that Hopkins figures as vice, a becoming-vice of virtue or a falling of virtue into vice. Let's say (this is not in fact quite how Derrida puts it in "Justices"), following the lead of Éamonn Dunne's essay here, that the "virtue" of singularity (distinctiveness) becomes perverted, or perverts itself into the "queer."⁵ This principle of perversion, which drives Hopkins to think of a virtue turning vicious, becoming a vice, flows directly from the logic of queering. And this same principle, under the name of an essential pervertibility, is a fundamental operator of what in deconstruction comes to occupy the place traditionally known in philosophy as "ethics." That this flows directly from the kind of failing or ruin of onto-theology that is named by *différance* is not difficult to see, in that this principle of pervertibility is really a kind of extension of the deconstructive operator most familiar from "Signature Event Context" or "The Purveyor of Truth" as "necessary-possibility-that-not."⁶ For a letter to be able to arrive at its destination, it must, necessarily, be possible for it not to arrive; for a speech-act in general to have a chance of being "felicitous," it must, necessarily, be possible for it to misfire. And, in a famous further step, this "necessarily-possibly-not" continues to affect ("torment with a kind of inner drift") even the most apparently successful cases of letters arriving or speech acts being felicitous. As is pretty well understood now, I think, this inclusion of "possibly-not" in "necessary" inserts the contingent into the transcendental such that conditions of possibility are transformed into being simultaneously conditions of impossibility. What is sometimes still less understood is that this necessary possibility of failure is being affirmed as a positive condition for the possibility of any imaginable success.

The "ethical-and-political" consequences of this are immense, and consist in precisely the logic of pervertibility I was just mentioning, and that still requires of us, I think, a good deal of reflection. Here, for example, is how Derrida lays it out in *Adieu*

5. [Éamonn Dunne, "Deco-pervo-struction," in this volume. —Ed.]

6. [See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982), 307-330; *ibid.*, "Le facteur de la vérité," in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), 411-496. —Ed.]

à Emmanuel Lévinas:

In the deployment of justice, one can no longer discern between fidelity to one's word and the perjury of false witness, and before that between one betrayal and another betrayal, always more than one betrayal. One would then need, with all required analytic prudence, to respect the quality, modality and situation of failures in this sworn faith, this "original word of honor" before all oaths. But these differences would never erase the trace of this originary perjury. [...] The agency that opens both ethics and justice is here in a situation of quasi-transcendental originary—even pre-originary—perjury. One could call it *ontological* given that it welds the ethical to everything that exceeds and betrays it (ontology, precisely, synchrony, totality, the State, the political, etc.). One might even see in it an irrepressible evil or a radical perversion, were it not for the fact that ill will can initially be absent from it and that its possibility, at least the haunting of its possibility, if some pervertibility were not also the condition of the Good, of Justice, of Love, of Faith, etc. And of perfectibility.

This spectral "possibility" is not, however, the abstraction of a liminary pervertibility. It would, rather, be the *impossibility* of controlling, deciding, determining a limit, the *impossibility* of situating, so as to settle oneself on it—of situating by criteria, norms and rules, the threshold that separates pervertibility from perversion.

This impossibility *is necessary* [*il la faut*]. This threshold must not be at the disposal of a general knowledge or a rule-bound technique. It must exceed every rule-bound procedure in order to open itself to the very thing that always runs the risk of becoming perverted (the Good, Justice, Love, Faith,—and perfectibility, etc.). This is necessary, we must have this possible hospitality to the worst for good hospitality to have its chance, the chance of letting the other arrive, the *yes* of the other no less than the *yes* to the other.⁷

7. Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), 68-69.

The sequence seems clear, then, from the queering of any discourse of Being by *différance*, to the ensuing necessary-possibility-of-not, and the affirmation of that principle as the positive condition of the ethical as such. Justice just is queer; or at least: there is no chance of justice without what we are here calling queering.

At which point, we might be tempted to stop and say, agreeing with all the papers in this volume: QED. Case closed. Not only is there some more or less tangential or fragile link between Derrida and queer theory; in fact Derrida lays out the logic of queer, beyond any “impossible” theory, so powerfully that queer is, as it were, maximally queered. Whence, as I mentioned, a certain jubilant tone in some of these essays: as Calvin Thomas is kind enough deliberately to misquote me as saying: deconstruction is the queerest of discourses imaginable.

* * *

All of which is true and important, but leaves out the extent to which this is also all about sex. Queering in the radical sense I have been laying out so far, one might suspect, might always be subtly re-straightening the queer in the very gesture of supposedly queering it: nothing to complain about if “queer” turns out to be the very (im)possibility of Justice, no less, the thought would go, we’ll take that, but we might still want our queer to be queering what it was out to queer in the first place, namely, a specific “heteronormative” discourse about sex and sexuality. In fact, as many of these essays document at some length, there is plenty of queering in this sense too in Derrida’s texts, from the Genet column of *Glas*, through the “Envois” of *The Post Card*, to “Circumfession.”⁸ Indeed, as is at least implicit in more than one essay here, the very “definition” of *différance* is implicated just here, as differing from (as queering, then) the philosophical way with difference summed up by Hegel in the greater *Logic*, in a passage picked out by Derrida as crucial in

8. [See Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); *ibid.*, “Envois,” in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, 1-256; *ibid.*, “Circumfession,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). —Ed.]

Positions, but read in detail only in *Glas* in precisely the context of the deconstruction of a sexual difference construed in dialectical terms.⁹ The deconstruction of sexual difference is, as it were, the test case for establishing that *différance* is thinkable, and resists all dialectical resolution. The deconstructive refusal of *metaphysical* “homosexuality” (i.e. the determination of sexual difference as necessarily oppositional, therefore contradictory and therefore sublatale) in the name of the pluralizing scatter of queer *différance*, is an absolute crux of the deconstruction of phallogocentrism, and communicates, always differentially of course, with the generalized queering we have been describing, and that the contributors to this volume bring out so well.

* * *

“The impossible uncanniness of a queer theory” might still give us some pause, however, and does indeed sit a little uneasily across some of the essays in this volume. For even allowing the importance of the moment of sexual difference in the general shape of the argument, and its extension into species difference also interestingly explored in more than one of these essays, the formally triumphant quasi-transcendental arguments laid out here, however irrefutable they appear (and remain: no remotely convincing philosophical critique of Derrida has yet been advanced), still of course *resolve* nothing at all. The very singularity that is the basis for the queer form of this argument in fact guarantees that this lack of resolution, this sense of unfinished business, will remain the case, and just is part and parcel of its queerness. Just this is what leads Derrida, in the long quotation I gave from the Lévinas essay, to suggest that, as well as the general “pervertibility” argument, there was a specific undecidability between pervertibility and perversion that is part of the logic of pervertibility itself. Pervertibility as a positive general condition of ethics or politics, as the chance of Good or of Justice, prescribes *nothing* as to the specific cases in which one must judge as

9. [See Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981), esp. “Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta, 39-45. —Ed.]

to the relation between that pervertibility and *this* situation where specific perversion may be welcomed or condemned. Saying that pervertibility is the chance of the Good does not mean that any given instance of pervertibility at work is *good*: saying that Justice depends on an originary perjury does not mean that *specific* acts of perjury are to be welcomed, and in fact puts much greater pressure than any philosophical ethics ever could on a singular responsibility for the truth. In a still more general way, saying (as Derrida does in “Faith and Knowledge,” for example) that without the *possibility* of radical evil there would be no possibility of the good does not of course amount to saying that radically evil acts are good.¹⁰ The singular case in its singularity may rely on those necessary possibilities, but in its singularity lays claim to our judgment each time, in the moment of decision that entails undecidability and is famously, after Kierkegaard, a moment of madness, a moment that no theory of the subject could ever take into account (see *Politics of Friendship*).¹¹ It is because of that queer insistence on the persistence of the singular that any such (ethical-and-political) questions appear to have a history, for example, and are not simply absorbed into some transcendental realm. This historicity is of course made possible by the same quasi-transcendental logic we have been following, which maintains the historicity of that historicity by positing the singularity of its own cases as never entirely subsumable under the generality the logic also provides. The singular cases thus posited, we might say, are never quite just cases *of* the logic that opens the space, as it were, in which they can appear in their odd—queer—singularity. It is, I imagine, because of the residual but essential singularity of these cases that deconstruction also has regularly given rise to an anxiety as to its ethical or political *credentials*, or as to its reliability in guiding us to the appropriate judgments in ethical and political matters. This is why, we might assume, the triumphant affirmation of the queerness or queerness of

10. [See Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason,” trans. Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), 42-101. —Ed.]

11. [See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. Georges Collins (London: Verso, 1997). —Ed.]

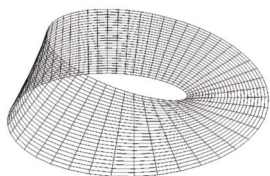
Derrida's thought in these essays is also doubled by a certain anxiety that, quite properly (one might be tempted to say) haunts the potential euphoria of the endless queering of queer and provokes the need not just to identify cases and experience the queer undecidability of judgment in those cases, but to imagine that one's responsibility to those cases might be better served by arranging them in some historical dimension or other. And just this would be the motivation for the need to confront the deconstructive account of queer with authoritative figures in the field whose credentials seem so impeccable—here most notably Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, and more or less anxiously or wishfully seek some ground of reconciliation with those figures. If only the quasi-transcendental rigor of Derrida's thinking could be brought together with Foucault's historicism, and especially with the mesmerically attractive notions of modernity and biopower, so the thought goes, then all would be for the best in the best of all realms of queer. This is not the place to show in detail why this dream cannot be fulfilled, although a re-read of "Cogito and the History of Madness," "To do Justice to Freud," and *The Beast and the Sovereign* is a salutary reminder of all the problems this would involve.¹²

As a form of shorthand for why Derrida will never be squared with Foucault (or Butler, whose rather extraordinary [mis-]treatment of Derrida's *Glas* is here brought out so clearly and politely by Martin McQuillan),¹³ let us just say this in conclusion: *text is not discourse*. (This is in fact just another way of saying: to be is to be queer.) Once text is not discourse, then (this is the lesson of the end of the "Cogito..." piece) the possibility of *reading* becomes unavoidable, and reading plays mad havoc with all historicism (which is why Foucault has in fact nothing at all to say about it).

12. [See Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 31-63; *ibid.*, "To Do Justice to Freud: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas, *Critical Inquiry* 20.2 (Winter 1994): 227-266; *ibid.*, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. 1., trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009). —Ed.]

13. [See Martin McQuillan, "Practical Deconstruction': A Note on Some Notes by Judith Butler," in this volume. —Ed.]

This does not mean there is no reason to “do” something like history, but it does suggest that it would be incumbent on that history not to close off the very dimension of its own possibility that deconstruction brings out. And once text is not discourse, then at some point the performative dimension of discourse is exceeded by the coming of singularities the queerness of which is just that they cannot be performed, and entail a kind of radical passivity that makes all activism possible. The consequences of this, for so-called “identities” of all sorts, are, as they say, yet to come, perhaps the to-come “itself.” The thought of that to-come flows directly from the thought of *différance*, and is the queering of time itself. The future is queer.



Supreme Court (1988)¹

David Wills

Without presuming to know where the direct begins and ends, this essay presents itself as an oblique reading of *Right of Inspection* [*Droit de regards*], the photo-novel by Marie-Françoise Plissart that is “followed by a reading by Jacques Derrida.” It does that for more than one reason. First of all, although neither written nor photographic text will be fully represented here, privilege is obviously given to the written because it can be quoted in the same medium as the present text and because of its author’s name [“Derrida”] in the context of this [volume].² Thus my reading admits to being structurally partial, without presuming to know where a total reading might begin.³ But the photographic text is in a sense doubly absent, given the content of the photographs, the look of them. What is unavoidable when one looks at the photographs and much less explicit

1. [Note: a verison of this essay appears in David Wills, *Matchbook: Essays in Deconstruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 157-176. It was originally published as David Wills, “Supreme Court,” *Diacritics* 18.3 (1988): 20-31. © 1988 Johns Hopkins University Press. It is reprinted here with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press. —Ed.]

2. [See J. Hillis Miller, “Preposterous Preface: Derrida and Queer Discourse,” in this volume for a reading of *Droit de regards* that does include many scanned photographs from Plissart’s photo-novel. —Ed.]

3. Something of the politics of such a privileging—and of obliquity and partiality—is confirmed by the English translation of the book. In its original version, the text is described as a “photo-novel” authored by Marie-Françoise Plissart, and “followed by a reading by Jacques Derrida” (Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regards, suivi d’une lecture de Jacques Derrida* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985]). In English translation, the title page transforms it into “Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, photographs by Marie-Françoise Plissart” (Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, trans. David Wills [New York: Monacelli Press, 1998]). I disclaim responsibility for the

when one reads Derrida's text, could, if I wished, remain altogether unspoken in this essay: namely, that many of them show women making love to one another. Whether that should be an issue, or make for a more oblique reading, is one of the principal questions underlying this discussion.

Second, one among any number of laws or conventions related to looking decrees that the type of regard in force in photography necessarily inscribes a distance between subject and object of that regard. That is the law of monocular perspective which is also the law of realism, and the camera—which emerged in our culture during the same period (Italian Renaissance) in which that law was institutionalized within the domain of the visual arts—has come to represent the most rigorous upholder of its edicts.⁴ Now what the laws of monocular perspective and realism have taught us is anything but the importance of obliquity: the look of the camera and the distance it involves is presumed rather to inscribe direct lines of visual force, all of which emanate from a single and fixed vantage point that holds the whole field in its scope. [See Figs. 1 & 2] Of course, the ideological underpinnings for those laws ignore or occlude the fact that the distance that constitutes or renders possible this type of looking also institutes forms of obliquity. The field of vision available to the human eye from a fixed vantage point in fact

transformation of the title and priority of authorship. Another unfortunate accident of translation is the loss of the page numbers in the Monacelli edition. The French paginates the photographs in Arabic and Derrida's text in Roman numerals. On the other hand, the English version reproduces the photographs referred to by Derrida, along with the French text whose pages coincide approximately with the English, in miniature in the margins. For the purposes of my references to the English edition, appearing here as RI parenthetically in the text, I have mechanically paginated Derrida's text starting with its first page.

4. The camera obscura utilized by Renaissance artists is recognized today as the technological precursor of the modern camera. The ideological importance of monocular perspective in relation to the technology and practice of photography and cinema has been the object of much discussion by film theorists. See, for example, the essays collected in Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986). [See also Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1990). —Ed.]

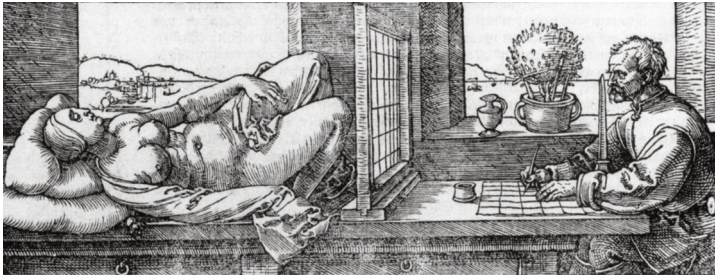


Fig. 1: Albrecht Dürer, *Draughtsman Drawing a Recumbent Woman* (1525).

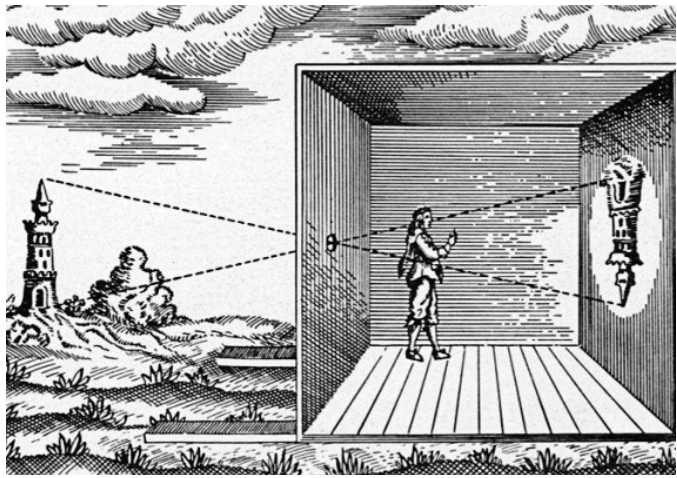


Fig. 2: Renaissance artist utilizing camera obscura.

describes a cone or pyramid whose borders are defined by oblique lines. It is thanks only to the codes of focal length, depth of field, and vanishing point, and the whole teleology of centrality and linearity, that one perpendicular line of vision is able to prevail within the field.

Taking my cue from the reading practices that Derrida exploits, especially in *Right of Inspection*, I shall therefore promote a type of obliquity as a form of resistance to the laws of looking. As I elaborate below, this resistance is not simply an opposition, but exists in a complex relation of, shall we say, deconstruction with respect to those laws: exploiting the contradiction between a field of vision that opens the space of obliquity and practices of visuality that severely restrict it. Nor should it be understood as a simple contrast between image and writing, first because they both rely on forms of visuality, and second because writing as much as the image can be reduced to a straightforward reception instead of opening to reading. In the first line of Derrida's text, looking is both associated with and distinguished from discourse: "You will never know . . . all the stories I kept telling myself as I looked at these images" (RI 1), and a little later it is contrasted with reading: "Precisely, this abyssal inclusion of photographs within photographs takes something away from looking, it calls for discourse, demands a reading" (RI 5). Hence the remaining reasons for this being an oblique reading bring me directly to that written commentary. But I shall make another digression to explain the sense of my title.

The Supreme Court is the highest legal institution in the United States. Its members sit for life, thus guaranteeing continuity and solidity for the law and an almost religious system of inheritance to preserve the constitutional legacy. From the Founding Fathers to Scalia, Kennedy, and beyond, authorial intent will have been transmitted intact. There has been some debate about that in recent times, focusing in important instances on the questioning of effects of textual and interpretive legitimation such as has been undertaken by Derrida.⁵ But more specifically, the Supreme Court has seen fit

5. See the work of the Critical Legal Studies theorists—for example, the Symposium on Critical Legal Studies in *Stanford Law Review* 36.1-2 (1984); or discussion of law and literature in *Texas Law Review* 60.3 (1982);

to decree that practices such as those depicted in Marie-Françoise Plissart's photographs, to which Derrida's text here under discussion remains apposite, are not protected by the Constitution. They fall within the legal definition of sodomy.⁶ Considered deviant, or might we say "oblique," such practices were not deemed to lie within the scope of what the Founding Fathers foresaw when they gave their overview of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What

and for explicit reference to Derrida and how critical legal theory is reading deconstruction, see J. M. Balkin, "Deconstructive Practice and Legal Theory," *Yale Law Review* 96 (1987): 743-786; Gerald E. Frug, "The Ideology of Bureaucracy in American Law," *Harvard Law Review* 97 (1984): 1277-1388; Gary Peller, "The Metaphysics of American Law," *California Law Review* 73 (1985): 1151-1290. For a more recent overview, see Peter Goodrich, "Europe in America: Grammatology, Legal Studies, and the Politics of Transmission," *Columbia Law Review* 101.8 (2001).

6. This essay was written following the Supreme Court decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 106 S.Ct. 2841 (1986), at a time when 25/50 states had anti-sodomy laws on the books. *Bowers* was overturned by a six to three majority in *Lawrence v. Texas* on June 26, 2003, with Justice Kennedy writing unequivocally that "*Bowers* was not correct when it was decided and is not correct today. It ought not to remain binding precedent. *Bowers v. Hardwick* should be and now is overruled." One should read the dissenting opinions of Rehnquist, Scalia and Thomas for unwavering support of the opinions that prevailed until 2003. At the time of the *Lawrence* decision, 14 states, Puerto Rico, and the military had anti-sodomy laws in effect.

In *Bowers*, the court found that a Georgia man was liable to prosecution for an act of "sodomy" committed in his own home and chanced upon by a policeman delivering a traffic summons (*Lawrence* came about under comparable circumstances). Most states that have decreed on these matters define sodomy as both homosexual (gay and lesbian) and heterosexual practices falling outside the procreative norm, hence my use of the term as shorthand here. It is a characteristically repressive gesture that reduces homosexual activity to anal intercourse and defines it as a crime against nature, leaving unspoken the whole question of lesbian practices. The Georgia statute until 1968 defined sodomy as "the carnal knowledge and connection against the order of nature, by man with man, or in the same unnatural manner with woman." Rulings under the statute found both lesbian practices and heterosexual cunnilingus not to be prohibited. However, the new law, under which *Hardwick* was charged, defined sodomy as follows: "A person commits the offense of sodomy when he performs or submits to any sexual act involving the sex organs of one person and the mouth or anus of another."

could be called the climate that, during the Reagan years, produced or served as the context for the *Bowers v. Hardwick* Supreme Court decision, was also responsible for a series of explicit interventions by judicial institutions into issues of morality (not that, as critical legal theorists easily argue, morality as a function of ideology is ever absent from judicial maneuvers). I refer to the Meese Commission on Pornography and pressure on 7-Eleven stores to stop selling *Playboy*, to Louisiana's creationism law, Tennessee's and Alabama's censorship of school textbooks, not to mention the widespread withdrawal of books from public libraries, pressure by publishers on the authors of textbook to avoid subjects considered contentious, like evolution, homosexuality, abortion, and so on. Suffice it to say that the clouds of such a climate continue to darken the skies of George W. Bush's America.⁷

Therefore, because Plissart's photographs will not be printed here, and because my discussion is constrained by various institutional factors to be, at best, only obliquely about sodomy, I wish to initiate a series of moves as a result of which this essay's title might become shorthand for the question and problem of that which does not speak its name, for what *any* text keeps under silence and more so this one. Without presuming to have explained what all that means—and indeed, more than once I have considered the limits of what can and cannot be said or written, included or excluded, to be the sole and insoluble question for writing as commentary, and in different terms for all writing⁸—I shall try to be more direct. Lying there in the empty white space at the top of this as yet unmade essay are two words facing the same direction, the back of one against the front of the other, the one caressed or held by the other, two words that should be taken as metonymic

7. [To say nothing of Donald Trump's America—and his potential nominees to the Supreme Court. "Trump's trump card," as Hugh Hewitt noted during the 2016 presidential campaign, was precisely the Supreme Court. Or as Trump stated: "Even if people don't like me, they have to vote for me. They have no choice. . . . You know why? Justices of the Supreme Court." See Hugh Hewitt, "It's the Supreme Court, Stupid," *Washington Examiner* 28 Dec. 2016. —Ed.]

8. [See David Wills, *Matchbook: Essays in Deconstruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). —Ed.]

for whatever by assent or decree is excluded from the practice of academic discourse and from the practice of sexual relations; particularly, then, the sodomy that, in all its various genres and genders, and however much I flirt with or court it, will not be the subject of this essay.

That, however, is not the only reference made by the title of this essay. I refer also to Derrida's supreme court in *Right of Inspection*, his own flirting with, or provocation of, feminists who might argue that he is pandering to heterosexual male voyeuristic fantasy by discussing Plissart's photographs. The word *court* might well be a Nietzschean word or spur for woman, "acting from a distance."⁹ One courts danger and one courts affection, one courts a lover (of the same sex or a different sex), and so on. The word implies distance, rather like looking, and it also implies looking; it is an exploratory, experimental, and perhaps voyeuristic gesture suggesting obliquity rather than directness, having the form of a solicitation or seduction. The verb comes from the sense of the noun; one is presumed to court, solicit, or seduce among those who fall within one's real or imagined field of vision, those who form one's court or entourage. Derrida's provocation or flirtation seems addressed to those, feminists and others, who are close to him in the sense of being acquainted with his work. However, we might also assume that the association of his text and Plissart's photographs destines it to a different audience from his usual readers, which might as a result lead him to take less for granted, to be involved in a more general yet more circumspect courting exercise. But to the extent that even that type of courting involves relegation, bringing someone (or something) from the exterior of the circle (or square) of acquaintance toward its center, effecting a type of appropriation, Derrida's strategy might lead him to some tergiversation; he might at some point turn his back on it. His courting might therefore point to, encourage, or work through forms of obliquity, not to say perversity.¹⁰

9. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/Éperons: Les styles de Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979).

10. [For more on Derrida and perversity, see Éamonn Dunne's essay, "Deco-pervo-struction," in this volume. —Ed.]

Derrida has never been unaware of reactions to his writing by feminists, nor reticent about addressing those reactions, although one could argue that he waits until he is solicited. This is explained clearly in the interview with Christie V. McDonald entitled “Choreographies” where he is asked about *Spurs* and justifies his use of terms such as “hymen” and “invagination.”¹¹ A tone of slight paranoia in this regard is evinced in *The Post Card*: “and if because I love them too much I am not publishing *your* letters . . . I will be accused of erasing you, of stifling, of keeping you silent. If I do publish them, they will accuse me of appropriating for myself, of stealing, of violating, of keeping the initiative, of exploiting the body of the woman, always the pimp, right [*toujours le mec, quoi?*]?”¹² While not resolving the double bind of effacement or appropriation, *Rights of Inspection* chooses to have more than one voice speaking throughout,¹³ and the speaker flirts either with himself/-ves or with another/others. This begins with the coy distinction made in the opening line, repeated on page 3, between the familiar and non-

11. Jacques Derrida, “Choreographies,” *Diacritics* 12.2 (1982). For more recent discussion, see Jacques Derrida, “Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference,” trans. Reuben Bevezdivin, in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 380-402; *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Nancy J. Holland (University Park: Penn State UP, 1997), which reprints “Choreographies”; and Peggy Kamuf, “Derrida and Gender: The Other Sexual Difference,” in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 82-107.

12. See Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), 230-31. Hereafter cited in the text as PC.

13. As I have argued elsewhere, there are grounds for suggesting that the other correspondent of “Envois” [in *The Post Card*, 3-256] more than speaks, albeit in citation, that in a sense she writes the whole text. See David Wills, “Matchbook,” in *Matchbook: Essays in Deconstruction*, 45-68. Similarly, it could be claimed that a polyvocal style marks all of Derrida’s texts, although that takes a particularly explicit form in such works as “Restitutions,” in *Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), 255-382; *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2014); *Monolingualism of the Other; or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998); and *Right of Inspection*.

familiar addresses: “You [*tu*] will never know, nor will you [*vous*], all the stories I kept telling myself as I looked at these images” (RI 1). From the moment of that beginning, the reading is organized around the possibility of a private narrative fantasy, a secret kept from even the most intimate interlocutor and involving the images we would see if we had access to the book more directly than this commentary allows. That beginning is therefore an initiative of seduction or feint of seduction, an invitation to and preemptive move against a form of complicity, as if he were saying “you will never know, wouldn’t you like to know, come and try to find out all my private narrative fantasies.” And the seductive ploy casts a widening net, from the intimate or familiar (*tu*) to the less so (*vous*), acting at increasing distance.

However, with nothing but dashes and indentations to separate the utterances the reader cannot, with any certainty, attribute individual ones to identifiable speaking subjects. One might, for instance, understand that first coy demurral to be uttered by Derrida, and assume as a consequence that the second utterance belonged to his interlocutor—say, for argument’s sake, the photographer—and maintain the consistency of that assumption up to the repetition of the first line, and beyond. But other factors would at the same time be working against such an assumption. On the one hand, there is the play between formal and informal address just mentioned, which would seem to pluralize the interlocutors. Yet French does allow for a situation where one speaker addresses the other in the familiar form of the verb and the other replies in the formal, and, remembering “Envois” [see footnote 13], the reader is also faced with the possibility that *tu* refers to the addressee “within” the text, and *vous* to us the readers. On the other hand, there is no logical reason to assume that it is Derrida, some “Derrida,” who is seducing us with the lure of coy private narratives in the opening line rather than (one of) the interlocutor(s), or indeed that there are several “Derridas” speaking to themselves. The last hypothesis becomes increasingly plausible, for if we presume that two speakers are alternating in a dialogue, we soon encounter utterances in the mouth of the other presumed interlocutor that we might well expect to hear from the mouth of a Derrida, to the extent that a reader can assume what will come from the mouth, or more precisely the pen, of a Derrida.

For example, on page 4, a female speaker is identified as such when reference is made to *elle* and an utterance made three paragraphs earlier is attributed to her (“When she was specifying just now that she no longer knew . . .”). At the same time, the idea of there being at least three separate interlocutors is reinforced—a first person speaks to a second person about a third. And at least two of those speakers are female, or feminine, for in the paragraph identified as being spoken by a “she,” the speaker addresses a feminine second person (“I see you pensive [*pensive*] and undecided [*indécise*]” [RI 3]). But the speaker who here sees a pensive and undecided female, a speaker who will soon be referred to as *elle*, is the one whom we might previously have identified as the coy “Derrida” of the first line, and who, a few lines later, will utter more of what we might be used to hearing from the mouth of a Derrida, for example a “Derrida” who is the correspondent of “Envois” (not that his sex was certain there): “you [*tu*] know me, I write for you alone, and at this very moment I speak solely to you of the most important things, I look with you alone, only you have the right of inspection over what I am risking here” (RI 4).

Now I have merely detailed there what the text itself makes explicit, namely, questions about the form and number of the participants in the discussion called a reading [*une lecture*]. The first pluralities referred to are those of stories and images: both are feminine, and both are to some extent personified. The stories are said to “grow within you like desire itself, they invade you,” and the photographs are described as “generative [*génératrices*]” (RI 2), as if capable of giving birth. More than that, the laws of photography in question here concern “the pose, position and supposition, the place of each *subject*,” the process or procedures whereby “each implicit ‘address,’ each apostrophe whether in the singular or the plural, masculine or feminine, with all its formal and familiar modes, seems conjugated by a photographic grammar . . . declined by the rhetoric and/or erotics of a certain photographic apparatus” (RI 3). Hence one should never have expected to find a simple logic of interlocution or dialogue, and if I am belaboring a well-taken point, it is rather to demonstrate the extent to which Derrida, whoever she may be, is courting or flirting, acting from a distance, exploiting the right to look as a right to be oblique, deviant or devious, changing places, taking chances. But more specifically it is because in *Right of*

Inspection the plurality of voices or the division of forms of address, indeed of address itself, represents the abyssal structure whereby the whole textual system is deconstructed, so that I end up coming back to it regardless of the route of access I choose. That deconstruction is already at work in the opening line, in a play between addresses (*tu* and *vous*), between the direct discourse of a divulgence (what I kept telling myself) and the refusal to divulge (you will never know), and finally between the stories, become discourse, and the images. It is as if the photographs themselves migrate into the discursive structure of the written text, imposing their law and that of photography upon it, their prerogative or right of inspection over it; and as if the characters from the images migrate in turn, not necessarily to appropriate the voices of the polylogue, but to introduce a confusion whereby they, as subjects of the photographs and subject to the laws of the gaze, call into question the status of the speaking subjects who utter the discourse that constitutes the written text. The characters in the photographs never speak, and when on a few occasions one or a couple of them appear to be about to, they instead resort to acts of temper or violence. It might be said that they mime their way through a series of tableaux, game-playing, falling, fighting, and making love, addressing each other by means of circumlocution and unorthodox intercourse. For if the abyssal deconstruction at work in *Right of Inspection* revolves around the question of address, it will eventually devolve into a question of gender/genre. That question in turn proves to have a very shifting, or oblique, signification, a series of senses that seem to self-generate, and it all takes place against the graphic, indeed the *photographic* background of people of the same sex making love in contravention of the (currently defunct) laws of a number of the states of America. As we shall examine, the question of genre generated by the photographs and script of *Right of Inspection* is finally posed as the very question of the law of technology and of the technology of the law.

We have learned from *The Post Card* that we are [already] in technology from the moment of the first address: "To post is to send by 'counting' with a halt, a relay, or a suspensive delay, the place of a mailman, the possibility of going astray. . . . technicity, positioning, let's say even metaphysics . . . would belong to the first envoi—which is evidently not first in any order at all. . . . as soon as there is, there is difference . . . and there is postal maneuvering,

relays, delays, destination, telecommunicating network” (PC 65-66). The address of the camera functions through the technology of the pose, that is to say the particular form of interpellation, indeed arrest—the *demeure*, as Derrida refers to it—that the shot performs.¹⁴ But the camera also reminds us of the important position photography occupies on the threshold of the modern technological age, both in respect of the invention of the machine in the nineteenth century and the generalization of monocular perspective in the fifteenth century. Photography represents the automatism of mechanical reproduction as defined by Walter Benjamin,¹⁵ and it stands in an important relation to obliquity in terms of the shift in vision it represents, the institution of new laws of looking and the repression of difference so implied, in spite of the opening up of a whole new dimension of visibility in artistic representation. But more than that, we are reminded of the relation between photography and obliquity in terms of the very fact of the postal, the technology of address and the structure of a destination, the structural division of that address. Obliquity would be the line of a destination or misaddress that is inscribed within the very operation of a supposed direct transmission. From this point of view, the particular technological age inaugurated by photography is also that of the information sciences and their massive reinforcement and occultation of the postal principles of relay, misaddress, and so on. That is to say, photographic technology, with its seizure of the instant, implies the possibility of rapid and repeated shifts such as begin to emerge with cinema and that are not reducible to uncritical concepts of linearity and teleology, however much they depend upon them. Although that possibility does not simply arrive with photography, irrespective of where we assign its origin, the mechanism does take a different turn, especially to the extent that it points to the transformation of the document that occurs with the computer age. Photography stands at the threshold

14. [For more on interpellation, see the crucial essay by Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” (1969), trans. Ben Brewster, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186. —Ed.]

15. See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” [1936], in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217-251.

here: it is concerned with the production of a document, a very archival one at that, and hence its relation to painting; but by the same token it is the first “technological” art in the modern sense, looking forward to the digital image, etc. For the reproducibility of the photograph signifies in fact a type of virtuality of that document, its archivation in a form of hidden or virtual memory that is the negative, developed or undeveloped, a virtuality that is more radical than was the case with typeset vis-à-vis the printed page. Because the negative can produce each time, according to variations in the process, a different print, it can be argued that it is itself the document and that it operates in a way that is closer to the word processing file. The printed photograph does not itself have the same secure status of the master document that, say, a book has; it exists rather within a structure of ephemerality. This new version of ephemerality, implying a certain redundancy of the document, in turn brings new pressures to bear on reading, new relations between reading and speed.

For Derrida, Plissart’s photo-novel demonstrates both the time of the photographic instant or pose, capable of being extended into the languor of a repose but also conceived of as a constraint, and the diagonal veering by means of which the reader escapes that constraint, but risks being deprived of the time to reflect, drawn inexorably along by the narrative or simply metonymic drift of the series. The first idea is developed through the word *demeure*, from *demeurer*, which literally means “to put or hold in a static position” or “to stay still,” and thus suggests the address of the camera and the pose of photography. In slightly more figurative usages, it means “to stay” or “remain,” and so we see the characters playing out their trysts or idyllic repose, as well as their dramas, by sojourning in a sumptuous residence for which the French word is also *une demeure*. They pose in that *demeure* and so are *mis en demeure*. The latter term, however, has a specifically legal sense, conveying a warning, formal address, or notice of a delay beyond which proceedings will be put into effect. It as if by staying there they are yielding to the law of photography, and are as it were assigned to residence, under a form of house arrest. There is no repose without this type of immobility prescribed by the law.

The second idea, that of escape from constraint, functions through the word *partie*, occurring in the context of the game of

checkers (*une partie de dames*) being played by some of the characters in the photographs, but standing also for the games being played by the “ladies” (*dames*). The game of checkers is something of a figure for photography itself, on account of its articulation of black and white. *Partie* refers also to two senses of “part”—the parerga or details, and the sexual parts displayed; then to the juridical sense of sides taken, the parties to a litigation; and finally, via a shift to *pièce*, meaning both a “part” or “piece” and a room, it is diverted through Italian to *camera*. However, once it is subject to the grammatical laws of gender, *partie* functions as the feminine past participle of *partir*, referring to the fact that the women are often seen leaving lovers or rooms. It is thus the word for fragmentation and shifting itself, especially the diagonal shift that divides, diverts, and veers,¹⁶ and as in checkers, that escapes and conquers the opponent; the means of least resistance that is also the rapid relay that accelerates toward the endgame.

Nothing shifts, however, quite like the question of gender/genre itself. It is where the matter of address is addressed by the middle of page 5: “I see her, the one you are addressing now, posing as a question of gender or genre.” Already there it slides to evoke the generic (*générique*), and generation, both the written discourses that account for a photographic discourse (credits in a film) and a paradigm for a series, as well as the conditions of possibility giving rise to an event of reproduction. And already there one finds the suggestion developed a little further on, that the female characters whose relations are portrayed in Plissart’s photographs, or perhaps those very relations between them, are themselves in question: “the question of *genre* takes bodily form, becomes a body that moves other bodies about, moves the bodies of others. . . . Giving rise, serving notice, the said question raises itself and immediately abandons you” (RI 6). In a further move, the question of gender/genre is said to be photography itself—“it neither says nor represents anything other than photography” (RI 5)—then again, the “name of something belonging to another genre for which there is yet no specific category” (RI 6). But those formulations are once more re-

16. [For more on veering, see Nicholas Royle, “Impossible Uncanniness: Derrida and Queer Theory,” in this volume. —Ed.]

configured: “the work silently poses the question of genre as a question concerning the right of inspection” (RI 7), specifically that in force in photography by means of a play of inversion, which leads finally to the assertion that the *question of genre* poses as that of sexual difference (RI 9), “in its most undecided and instable form, precisely as a difference that trembles and not as an oppositional duality” (RI 10).

As such, that is in terms of instability, indecision, difference as *différance*, the genre/gender question has a familiar ring for readers of Derrida. On that basis one can go back and rationalize each of the sides to the question, each overlaying the other in a somewhat dizzying spectral or prismatic effect:

1. It relates to address in terms of the division of addressee implied by a destination, the possibility that the letter does not arrive. As soon as there is such a destination, as *The Post Card* amply demonstrated, there is no more stability of gender or genre.
2. It becomes a body that moves other bodies to the extent of a polymorphous pluralization of sexual relations.
3. It is photography in terms of the differential relations involved in the exposure and development of film, the play of black/white, positive/negative configurations.
4. It is by definition a question about a name, about the law of the father that regulates the proper name, and calls for the legislative performance of a naming of that which has as yet no name.
5. It is a question concerning the law of the photographic gaze, its right of inspection, the fixing and developing of a pose, the systems of control that presuppose subjection and subjectivation and the extent of their imposition.
6. It concerns an indecision, or perhaps an undecidability, regarding sexual difference to the extent that gender means sex, and that is itself perhaps an undecidable question, especially in a language whose words are gender marked.

In all these cases, Derrida's aim is to point to an instability where conventional wisdom, or the force of institutions, would insist that there is none: letters always arrive sooner or later; sexual relations are based on an opposition between two sexes; photography's "reality" is there in black *and* white, not black *or* white; as soon as a thing exists it has a name; once the pose or shot is taken it is immobilized; these are women making love, *la voile* is not the same as *le voile*. Like obliquity, inasmuch as it produces an instability, the question of genre/gender thus generates forms of resistance to the force of institutions, in this case the institution that is the laws of looking as paradigm for any such constraint. But precisely how that form, or those forms, of resistance operate, to what extent the law of genre of photography changes the rules and challenges the strategies that are familiar to readers of Derrida, remains to be seen and will continue to preoccupy this discussion. It is for that reason that I hesitate to read the "indecision" of the question of genre, this "hesitation" (RI 4) or "suspended question" (RI 5), as the aporetic undecidability we have encountered systematically in much of Derrida's later work. That is to say that once the question of genre comes to concern the law of the photographic gaze in its relation to decision, once it becomes a question concerning the instant of the *pose* or shot, it is for this reading a question that might "destabilize" the aporetic "economy" of undecidability and thus come to be a question about the genre of Derrida's recent writing. Obliquely at least. The point at which that question would be raised is the point of a resistance to the law that can no longer avoid the sense of contravention. Obliquity, it seems, is a divergence from that point that nevertheless and inevitably returns to it.

In "Passions," Derrida both acknowledges and critiques his recourse to obliquity as a form of resistance to the presumption that one can tackle a question "head on, directly, straightforwardly."¹⁷ He shows himself to be somewhat nervous about the word, first admitting in a note that he has made use of it "often, too often and for a long time" (P 138), then repeating in the text that "I have always been ill at ease with this word of which I have, however, so

17. See Jacques Derrida, "Passions," in *On the Name*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 12. Hereafter cited in the text as P.

often made use” (P 13). He acknowledges there that “the oblique does not seem to me to offer the best figure for all the moves that I have tried to describe in that way” (P 13). In the aforementioned note, he gives a number of examples of his use of the word—in spite of the fact that he “no longer remember[s] where, nor in what context” (P 138)—but the texts he mentions do not include *Right of Inspection*.¹⁸ It would therefore seem worthwhile to follow the incline or inclination of an obliquity that appears unavoidable in this text, in order to see what pressures it puts on a certain logic of deconstruction.

As I stated earlier, it is reading that is presented in *Right of Inspection* as an obliquity with respect to the laws of looking: “If I understand correctly, one has to bring enormous attention to bear on each detail, enlarge it out of all proportion, slowly penetrate the abyss of these metonymies—and still manage to skim through, diagonally [*lire en diagonale*]. Accelerate, speed up the tempo, as if there were no more time” (RI 22). Reading along an oblique line (*lire en diagonale*) is the expression French uses for skimming through. One has to look at all the details yet still manage to read, and read obliquely; that is to say, one has to look but also look in the oblique way that constitutes a reading, and read in the oblique way that constitutes skimming, but without ignoring the details. This obligation is determined by the law of photography that decrees that “one doesn’t have the time, there is no more time” (RI 22). One has, therefore, to find a way to defy time, and reading obliquely, reading as obliquity, would be a form of resistance to the law of photography and of time. In figural terms, the oblique move is seen as the law of the game of checkers, the diagonal relation of the one hundred black and white squares of the board, mirrored by the one hundred and one pages of black-and-white photographs (counting front and back covers of the original edition). One moves through those squares by means of a play of reading. Yet what returns explicitly to a definition of reading as oblique skimming is something that we have seen existing in an often problematic relation to the deconstructive

18. “In *Margins of Philosophy*, certainly (the *loxōs* of “Tympan”), and in *Glas*, in any case. Very recently, and in a very insistent way, in “Force of Law” and in *Du droit à la philosophie* [and] *Mes chances*” (Derrida, P 138).

enterprise. I refer to the idea of speed I have discussed elsewhere,¹⁹ highlighted here by the technological trigger operation of the camera. The law of photography's "no more time" is clearly a law of speed.

When we read Derrida, we find that the law of reading is double when it comes to speed. The accelerated skimming that we have just encountered is considered by him to be outside the law in other contexts. Where Derrida demonstrates most strikingly, and stridently, his own impatience, when it comes to making quite clear what he has no time for, he is invariably taking aim at the tendency to read too fast. The lesson he gives the authors of "No Names Apart," in his response to their critique of "Racism's Last Word,"²⁰ consists of repeated reproaches concerning their unseemly "haste": "you quite simply *did not read* my text, in the most elementary and quasi-grammatical sense"; "in your haste, you took or pretended to take a subjunctive to be an indicative"; "an hour's reading . . . should suffice for you to realize"; "it is no reason to read quickly or badly."²¹ However much sympathy one might have for Derrida's tone in that response, one finds him drawn into the paradox of pleading for deliberateness and patience at the very point at which his own is being tried. For he will also find himself obliged "to hasten [his] conclusion," "to go quickly" and so forth" (BB 168, 169). Now I do not wish to collapse important and valid distinctions between inattentiveness to the intricacies of an argument, or to the terms of its language, and recourse to discursive economy. Derrida's response is full of close attention to the text written by McClintock and Nixon. But beyond those different versions of speed—the "bad" speed of lack of attention to detail and the necessary, even if not "good" speed of temporal and spatial constraint—the very question of speed in its relation to reading continues to be posed.

19. [See David Wills, "JD-ROM," in *Matchbook*, 90-112; *ibid.*, "Technology or the Discourse of Speed," in *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, eds. Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 237-264. —Ed.]

20. [See Jacques Derrida, "Racism's Last Word," trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 290-299. —Ed.]

21. Jacques Derrida, "But, beyond . . . (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)," *Critical Inquiry* 13 (1986): 157, 159, 167, 169. Hereafter cited in the text as BB.

Before it returns in the forms we have encountered in *Specters of Marx* and *Echographies*,²² the same question is raised in “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives).”²³ The nuclear arms race is there emphasized precisely as a race, as a war or “rivalry between two rates of speed,” and although Derrida acknowledges that “the most classical wars were also speed races,” he asks whether we are now having “another, different experience of speed,” whether the war of speed is “an invention linked to a set of inventions of the so-called nuclear age, or . . . rather the brutal acceleration of a movement that has always already been at work?” (NA 20, 21). He leaves the question unanswered precisely because he doesn’t have time, and instead offers an injunction—“watch out, don’t go too fast”—that is also a “hasty conclusion, a precipitous assertion” in the form of the hypothesis that there is perhaps “no radically new predicate in the situation known as ‘the nuclear age’”; one needs to “decelerate,” avoid “rushing to a conclusion on the subject of speed.” On the other hand, however, such a deceleration carries its own risk, the risk that by being meticulous one will fail to notice the impending catastrophe, and “one may still die after having spent one’s life recognizing, as a lucid historian, to what extent all that was not new.” Speed is thus called an “aporia,” an impasse concerning the “right speed . . . the need to move both slowly and quickly,” and a quandary concerning “at what speed we have to deal with these aporias: with what rhetoric, what strategy of implicit connection, what ruses of potentialization and of ellipsis, what weapons of irony . . . rhythm of speech [and] procedures of demonstration . . . arguments and armaments . . . modes of persuasion or intimidation” (NA 21; translation modified).

In both “But, Beyond” and “No Apocalypse,” speed remains tied to practices of reading, though in the latter case it is indissociable

22. [See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); hereafter cited as SM; and Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); hereafter cited as E.—Ed.]

23. Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14.2 (1984): 20-31. Hereafter cited in the text as NA.

from the particular technological conjuncture constituting the nuclear age. In both cases it gives rise to questions concerning rhetorical strategies. In his later work, Derrida will be less hesitant about whether contemporary technologies, namely those of the media, have in fact brought about a qualitative evolution in the concept of speed. Whereas the qualitative distinctiveness of speed remained unclear in the face of an impending apocalypse, it seems that when it comes to the technologies of mediation, their speed has in fact produced a “new structure of the event” (SM 79). Something different has clicked into place, namely a technology of the media whose shutter is first heard opening and closing between the lines of *Right of Inspection*, in what is developed there in terms of the law of photography, and in terms of the tension or alternation that that law produces between looking and reading, and among the types of looking that constitute the forms and strategies of reading. Whereas from this text, through “But, Beyond” and “No Apocalypse,” to *Specters of Marx* and *Echographies*, there is a constant question about the rhythms of analysis and deliberation, and the discursive strategies thereby given rise to, when one examines why the “go fast and slow” of the earlier texts changes to a more explicit “not so fast” of the later ones, one finds a frustration with particular effects of mediation, precisely with a supposed instantaneity, the very instantaneity that emerges with the photograph. But if reading is the obliquity that subverts or deconstructs that instantaneity, it nevertheless has to come to terms with its own effects of speed.

The law of photography is the law of technological mediation, the instantaneous click of the shutter that occults its very effect of mediation, and allows it to pose as the *immediate* relay of the real. It would seem thereby to be also the law of decision, the law as decision, the incontrovertibility of the shot, the *prise*, the fact of something being “taken,” like a decision, the fact and evidence of an occurrence and the irreversibility of a *flagrante delicto*. However, photography’s technological instant, its click of the shutter, operates in association with a series of transformations that, although complementing its law, also transform and subvert it. The instant of that click is inseparable, in the first place, from the time of the pose, and even where no explicit posing appears to take place—say in the case of a unforeseen event or “scoop”—the decision regarding what to take constitutes nevertheless a complicated “time” of preparation,

a type of availability or *disponibility* that works according to a speed and rhythm quite different from that of the instant of exposure. In the second place, the instant of the shutter is inseparable from the series of oppositional light and dark developments that follow it: exposure and developing of the negative film, exposure and developing of the positive print. Without such supplementary moments, there is no photograph, the magical instant of the shutter's opening and closing attains no phenomenological status as photography, the moment of the "image" remains an unrevealed moment within the flux of the real world.

Media technology, represented here by photography, compresses and concentrates the instant to give it the appearance of an instant, to occlude its temporality and duration, to give it the force of a law conceived of as the moment and revelation of pure light (Gk. *phainesthai*). That is the law of photography as law of the law. Yet the contextualization, and hence deconstruction, of the technological instant just referred to is not limited to those questions of posing and developing. The very opening and closing of the shutter comes similarly to be divided within itself. Can that instant be constituted by the fact of revelation that is exposure to light without also taking into account the prior and subsequent imposition of darkness, the prohibition of light upon which it just as rigorously relies? In other words, can it be constituted by the instant of the shutter's opening anymore than by the instant before it opens and the instant in which it closes again? There is, it would seem, no technological instant without that sort of binary doubling, hence no pure instant as such. From this point of view, the instant of the law is divided precisely by the infraction of the law; its shedding of light also turns up its dark side; it is broken even as it is imposed. The law also breaks itself by coming thus to be technologized, no longer simple, immediate, and automatic exposure to the light and truth, but mechanization and contrivance, automatism without natural force. It is that technologization of the instant of the law, its doubling and its infraction, that elsewhere I have called "spectral speed,"²⁴ and here would be tempted to name "real speed," in contrast with the so-called real time of technological media; an

24. See David Wills, "JD-ROM," in *Matchbook*, 105.

inconceivable dimensionality of speed, something like its black hole, that will divide and double the speed of technology, however fast it gets, doubling it with something like a pure technology that is, however, unrealized by technology itself, a pure contrivance beyond technological possibility to the extent that it seems no longer to obey the logic of artifice, is no longer produced or performed.²⁵

The vector for a speed doubled by and against itself would be the diagonal, and what is being called here obliquity would read as that very deconstruction of the law of the instant, the obliquity of a subversion of the law by means of such a doubling inversion; less, therefore, a breaking of the law conceived of as a frontal attack on it than an exposing of the fact that it is always already turned against itself, the “diagonal” turning that is the exposure of the back side.²⁶ This law of the law would draw the law of its diagonal. We have, after all, for a long time seen the law figured precisely as the diagonal, the prohibition that is the erasure of any number of things by means of a solid red diagonal line: no entry, no parking, no spitting, no radios, no photography. [See Figs. 3 & 4] In the light of that we should also imagine how to figure the law against sodomy, imagine a sign for “no sodomy” within such terms, and we should thereby realize that the law against sodomy would at the same time sanction it to the extent that it was required to acknowledge and represent it. For the diagonal is not simply the contravention of the law without also being its invention. The line of the law is the line of decision and counter-decision, the “diagonal” inversion that constitutes the law by dividing the purity of the instant, as if inserting the vector along which decision can take place while at the same time dividing that decision within itself. Inasmuch as the law can either require or prohibit it is already structured by such a line, it is simultaneously

25. In “Technology or the Discourse of Speed,” I attempted to explain this in terms of the technology of language, and in “Bookend: Fiber Allergics,” coming at it from another angle, in terms of the speed of prosthesis. See David Wills, “Technology or the Discourse of Speed,” in *The Prosthetic Impulse*, 237-264; *ibid.*, “Bookend: Fiber Allergics,” in *Matchbook*, 177-195.

26. [For more on the (queer) ramifications of this “turning that is an exposure of the back side”—which Wills has called a “dorsal turn”—see David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back through Technology and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). —Ed.]



Fig. 3: Generic diagonal sign.



Fig. 4: Museum signage.

invention and contravention. The diagonal would therefore be the invention of contravention, a mad law that decreed that what was prohibited must also be performed, not just in the sense of reinforcing a taboo, but by means of the technological division of its instant whereby its imposition was also its violation; a pose that is also a fall, as occurs with two different generations of characters in Plissart's photographs.

From this point of view, the diagonal describes the figure of an undecidability that does not precede decision so much as structurally divide it, as Derrida argues in "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.'"²⁷ Obliquity would be the urgency of a *différance* that perdures "beyond" any singular decision. But it also refers to the instantaneity—as if an automatic simultaneity—that produces the structural commonality of various interventions with respect to the law including forms of contravention of it. Those interventions appear to pose a question of genre by, as it were, spontaneously generating in the instant of the law of photography, in the instant of the law of technology, introducing an instability that is precisely "a difference that trembles and not . . . an oppositional duality" (RI 10). *Right of Inspection* seems ready, by its recourse to obliquity, to follow the diagonal inclination or instability of such interventions through the moment or epoch of photography, profiting from the instantaneity to imply a turning of the law against itself and a turning of one's back on it. In *Specters of Marx*, on the other hand, it is feared that mediatic instantaneity has reduced or excluded the possibility of any such oblique maneuvering, prescribing the pose in such absolute terms—sit there and say what you have to say fast!—that there can be no resistance to it within it, only against it; no invention but only contravention of it. What I am arguing here is that the possibility of contravention can only develop out of the instant of the law, and necessarily develops out of the instant of the law by dividing it against itself in the moment of its constitution, such that wherever there is contravention there are also forms of invention, versions and inversions of such contraventions and such

27. [See Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 228-298. —Ed.]

inventions; one is always already in the speed and in the necessity of them, always already turning toward the force of the oblique. This does not deliver us from the difficulty of inscribing the diagonal lines of resistance within the instant of *mediatic immediacy*—to point out that contradiction, as Derrida does in *Echographies*, would be one such line²⁸—but argues for a continuing engagement with each successive, and future, moment of the technological instant, from photography to the digital and beyond. Derrida's uneasiness about obliquity seems then to be a reluctance to recognize its paradox: that the force of its speed precipitates it toward the very head-on that it seeks to avoid, the head-on that will also imply, at some point, opposition to the law, contravention of it. My insistence is that what the law of photography, as the law of the technological instant, reveals, is an obliquity the effect of whose speed is to divide the law at the same time as it imposes it, to be therefore the very line and vector of reading.

In *Right of Inspection*, for example, attention to a visual text such as photography promotes a type of reading and writing that uses speed as a rhetorical operation, to give sudden, oblique changes in the levels of discourse, in the functioning of lexical elements, in distortions of syntax. But it also suggests how those strategies might be further radicalized in terms of moving pictures, or the rhetoric of the video clip. One begins to imagine a discourse informed by angle shots, double shots, shifts of focus, close-ups:

A process of fragmentation [*Faire pièce*], that is what is going on here. Never any panorama, simply parts of bodies, torn-up or framed pieces, abyssal synecdoches, floating microscopic details, X rays sometimes focused, sometimes out of focus, hence blurred. The zooms, the dolly shots . . . never deliver the whole, it is never before her eyes in its entirety. The whole withdraws, and in withdrawing, or re-drawing, leaves only traces in the form of fragments. (RI 24)

28. In *Echographies*, Derrida asks: "How to proceed without denying ourselves these new resources of live television [*le direct*] (the video camera, etc.) while continuing to be critical of their mystifications? And above all, while continuing to remind people and to *demonstrate* that the 'live' and 'real time' are never pure, that they do not give us intuition or transparency, a perception stripped of interpretation or technical intervention" (E 5).

To exploit the possibilities of a writing informed by its technological heritage would again be the challenge for a deconstruction rooted in the tradition of textual exegesis. The supreme court of *Right of Inspection* must therefore finally be with obliquity as developed above, including its effect of contravention. In order to go fast, Derrida at times resorts to dogmatic resistance in the form of an opposition—“I’ll be the first to admit that only the words interest me” (RI 3), “in the final analysis what we are saying bears no relation whatsoever to the stills that hold us under their law” (RI 7); or, as we have seen, advocates going slowly and fast at the same time—“bring enormous attention to bear on each detail, enlarge it out of all proportion, slowly penetrate the abyss of these metonymies—and still manage to skim through diagonally [*lire en diagonale*]. Accelerate, speed up the tempo, as if there were no more time” (RI 22). Such forms of reading divide along the line of what I have called a diagonal inversion—“there is nothing but *inversion* in this work” (RI 8)—shifting between two seemingly opposite possibilities, male/female, black/white, negative/positive, and so on, to exploit a series of turnings in and out of the strictures of the law:

Here everything demanding *inversion*, that of the sexes, that of the order of the series or temporalities, calls for a certain reversibility, the time to leaf back through, to move the sequences about like checkers, to calculate other possible moves within the space of the labyrinth and the simultaneity of the board, to traverse or cross through the narrative sequences in several directions, always according to the rules, skimming obliquely. (RI 11)

Always, I would add, according to the rule of the diagonal. Once inversion calls for reversibility, as it does here, we are at the outer limit of such a law, at the outer limit of obliquity, like when “plato” dictates to Socrates, when the coin flips, or the piece jumps squares, extending the impulse of decision beyond the confines of the board, into the space of invention.

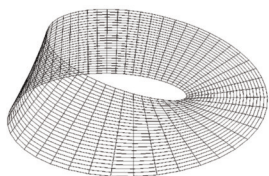
For my purposes, to have done, shifting modes, reversing a prior position, coming out if you like, *inversion* in French is another word for homosexuality, that of all of us. I promised not to write about it. To do so would be not to read the text at hand, to follow

too quickly an oblique bent, to concentrate too much on the images, even if one did want to compensate for the lack of attention one of the interlocutors insists on giving them. It might mean reading too quickly, profiting from the articulations of writing inscribed with its photographic or technological other to digress through a series of rapid transfers, like checkers; imagining pieces of like color, genre or gender making for that privileged place at the end of the board where they get to double up, lie on top of each other and call themselves kings or *dames*, men or queens, the languages becoming as undecidable as the genders, and the specialist vocabulary of jumping and eating entering the play too explicit for an academic paper to handle. Or it might mean reading too slowly, failing to move past the referential abyss opened by the first line: "You will never know . . . all the stories I kept telling myself as I looked at these images" (RI 1).

Or failing to move past the title, photographing it, making it a pretext for a pose and an oblique line of flight, with its questions concerning rights and laws, of looking and hence of reading, laws that position bodies and readings in well-defined and decidably fixed relations. The right to look given by photography operates in conjunction with an apparatus that prescribes and proscribes looking: "A text of images gives you . . . a right to look, the simple right to look or to appropriate with the gaze, but it denies you that right at the same time: by means of its very apparatus it retains that authority, keeping for itself the right of inspection over whatever discourses you might like to put forth or whatever yarns you might like to spin about it" (RI 2). It is because of that that the reader of *Right of Inspection*, this one and that one, the straight or the diagonal one, is required to resort to oblique strategies. But how oblique can one be in the face of an interdiction? Whether it be addressed at the word, a text such as this one or that one, a *Catcher in the Rye* or an *Alice in Wonderland* denied its place in a library or a syllabus in some benighted reach of this country where the school board is as conservative as the Supreme Court, whether it be a book of Mapplethorpe photographs or any number of the texts we are committed not just to reading but to teaching and disseminating, how does one then teach to read slowly or quickly against such interdictions? Or whether it be addressed at the text of the body, look or love this way but not that way, what can one do about

sodomy when, to quote from the canon, the law is an ass? Whether we be readers or sodomists, and as readers we are positioned by the law in the pose of the sodomist, that of disrespect and disregard, we are faced with the outside dilemma of obliquity, there where it becomes inversion, direct opposition. It is time, finally, to dissent both quickly and slowly, to move by a series of rapid, oblique, or perverse moves to a vantage point and a different perspective, exploiting the moment of blindness after the flash of light by which those for whom light is truth have documented and fixed theirs as the single attitude, the single pose and the single position, time to do it under their very eyes.

This is our supreme court, the ultimate challenge, to walk into the library and find ourselves in the bedroom, subject to close surveillance and decided interdictions, to find ourselves conditioned in our responses, to experience the dissolution of the walls between text and world, to realize and respond to the fact that our reading is as sanctionable as our fucking and the force of the laws of reading which it is our business to invent and contravene are found to have been structurally subsumed by the force of the law, period. Conversely, we find ourselves in photography as a result of the particular forms of surveillance it institutes, within its “history of the rights of inspection and of the modern laws that regulate this new technology: professional secrecy or the way that it is exploited by the police . . . confusion between the public and the private” (RI 8)—and we position ourselves in these photographs, assume the nakedness and vulnerability of those bodies, and refuse thus the aberrations of certain American state legislatures, for when questions of genres of reading have been overridden by a proscription on reading, implicit here explicit there, then it is time more than ever to multiply the strategies and divide our writing in the manner of the Supreme Court, appropriate their prerogative to generate dissenting opinions as they appropriate our rights, time to look, love, and read like kings or *dames* of undecidable gender, backward or forward, engendering versions or inversions of obliquity, moving fast between the squares of black and white, the allowed and the forbidden, borrowing the force of the instant to slide along its bias and swing both ways, unseat the legal rectitude, take the law itself toward the limits of its strictures, further and further, until out.





St. Michael Fighting the Devil (Theodor Mintrop, 1858).

To be is to be queer.

—JACQUES DERRIDA, “Justices”



Derrida and Queer Theory

Hite, Christian

punctum books, 2017

ISBN: 9780998531892

<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/derrida-and-queer-theory/>

<https://www.doi.org/10.21983/P3.0172.1.00>