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Crossing (out) the Boundary: Foucault and Derrida on Transgressing Transgression

Michael R. Clifford

To make light of philosophy
is to be a true philosopher.
— Pascal

Recently,[1] I had the opportunity to ask Derrida a question I had been wanting to ask him for some time. Did he consider deconstruction to be *transgressive*? Behind this question was a growing suspicion that the effectiveness of deconstruction was offset by a kind of revitalization of the very texts which were deconstructed. I was troubled by this constant return to the texts of metaphysics, which seemed to forestall that "future epoch of difference" anticipated by Derrida himself. But I had no doubt that deconstruction was at least designed to have the *effect* of transgression, even if one could not, properly speaking, understand this as an overt intention. His reply was that he thought the idea of transgression a "tired notion." One might find his response particularly disturbing, considering that many have come to identify Derrida and deconstruction with a way of thinking which, if anything, is epitomized by transgression. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, *Derrida.* What were they doing if not attempting to transgress and overcome a way of thinking — metaphysical thinking, the thinking of presence, the subsuming of

difference under the identity of the same — which had dominated western philosophy for 2500 years? Foucault had gone so far as to claim, "Perhaps one day it [transgression] will seem as decisive for our culture, as much a part of its soil, as the experience of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought."[2] But, he had hastened to add, such a time "lies almost entirely in the future." Had the day come and gone? At what moment had transgression become a *tired notion*?

What could Derrida, this man who in his writings chooses his words with such care, have meant?[3] If it can be shown that deconstruction is, in fact, a transgressive philosophy, what would it mean for a transgressive philosopher to call transgression a "tired notion"? Such are the questions of this essay. But before we can attempt to answer them, we have first to arrive at an understanding of transgression. In Part I we shall look to Foucault for this understanding. Out of this understanding emerges a preliminary and provisional strategy for thinking transgressively, a strategy full of cautions and erasures. In Part II we examine deconstruction to ascertain its transgressive character. It turns out that deconstruction is transgressive in the most radical sense, but this is a thought which must be transgressed.

I. Foucault on Transgression

To transgress. Literally, to "step across." This term, which is etymologically so innocuous, has for the longest time in western thought carried a negative connotation which is essentially *moral*. Transgression is inseparable from the notions of moral agency and culpability. Lapse, error, offense, infringement, iniquity, breach, encroachment, trespass, violation, crime, sin: these acts of transgression all denote necessarily the contravention of established codes, laws, prohibitions, trusts, agreements, truth. No act of transgression can be committed, necessarily, constitutively, without the threat of disapprobation, of retribution, of punishment. The relationship between transgression and that which is transgressed is thus always mediated by the notion of *judgment*. But this relationship is not merely negative, as if transgression belonged outside (of) the sphere of the ethical. Transgression is constitutive of morality *as such*. What appears to be sets of oppositions whose members repel each other — right/wrong, truth/error, virtue/vice, good/evil — are in reality projections of a single axis, projections which complement each other in the most fundamental way possible: they give meaning to one another. Without the possibility of transgression there would be no morality. Aristotle as well as Nietzsche understood full well the complicity of moral virtue with transgression.

But the necessity of this complicity, and on this point Nietzsche goes beyond Aristotle, is bound to a discursive order which may be radically arbitrary and historically contingent. According to Nietzsche, western morality may have originated from the accidental grouping of ascetic practices with the Socratic injunction to "know thyself."[4] A "reversal of perspectives" occurred which placed the value of an action in the intentions behind it. This, of course, presupposes the emergence of an originating subject whose actions are morally praise-worthy or blame-worthy. A subject who reflects on his or her own actions before committing them, who considers their consequences as well as his or her intentions; this notion both required and made possible the ideas of conscience, free-will, and responsibility. Responsibility entails judgment;

judgment in turn entails the establishment of codes of moral conduct, the delimitation of (more or less defined) systems of standards and rules, canon and law, which are necessary to give form to judgment. What gives force and meaning to such delimitations, which evolve over time, become attached to various sources of power, and belong with the metaphysical search for truth, is the possibility of their transgression. Within the discursive space circumscribed by such delimitations are "the moral," "the good," "the virtuous." Exterior to such delimitations are immorality, vice, evil. But the latter are merely the violation of the former, and the former are merely the abstention from the latter. Suggests Nietzsche, ". . . what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things — maybe even one with them in essence."[5]

Ought we not conclude, then, that transgression is not exterior to the delimitations of virtuous conduct inscribed within moral systems, but rather that it belongs within such systems constitutively; that transgression is not so much a cancellation of morality, in whatever form it takes, as it is the *confirmation* of morality? To believe otherwise is to be seduced by the very discursive orders we wish to call into question.

But, if this is true, what could it mean to think *beyond* good and evil?

Nietzsche inaugurates a philosophy of transgression, "To recognize untruth as a condition of life — that certainly means resisting accustomed value feelings in a dangerous way; and a philosophy that risks this would by that token alone place itself beyond good and evil."[6] A philosophy of resistance, suspicion and renunciation; in short, a philosophy of "bad character" whose "secret work" is the "overcoming of morality" as such. Such a philosophy would indeed be dangerous. But there is another risk: i.e., of valorizing the very things which traditional morality denounces and thus of repeating the same metaphysical gesture. This would be a counter-delimitation of the same oppositions, one which merely reversed their relationship: a profound upheaval with respect to traditional morality, but what would transgression amount to ultimately in such a philosophy?

It is perhaps too soon, and too easy, to say that this new philosophy would turn its suspicion on itself, that it would seek to transgress itself. We first have to examine transgression apart from morality before we can entertain the idea of its appropriation in a "philosophy of the future." Says Foucault, transgression "must be detached from its questionable association to ethics if we want to understand it . . ." (*PT*, 35). This is our first step then, a step perhaps arbitrary and doubtless suspect: to think transgression "neutrally," to isolate it from the discursive order in which it has all its meaning. This may be a move which later we may want to recant, if it turns out that much of the force, the power, of transgression lies precisely in its relation to ethics, and if we want to make that force our own, albeit in a radically shifted, even "perverted" (from the standpoint of the order from which we purloin it) manner.

Foucault characterizes transgression as a "violent act" (*PT*, 35). Breach of promise, broken laws, shattered vows: such expressions echo, if only faintly, the violence of the transgressive act. But the violence of transgression differs from the violence of the battlefield, of the storm, of the splitting

of the atom, etc., in which the violence has a certain sanctioned, or at least quasi-sanctioned, acceptability (or if not acceptability, then inevitability). It is precisely the *non-sanctioned* quality of transgression which makes its violence so acute, which to a certain extent marks the transgressive act *as* violence. The violence of transgression is always a violence of violation.[7] As an *act*, this violative violence has a certain poignant "against-ness" which in non-transgressive violence is merely formal. The act of transgression is an act of opposition, of contrariety, of *going against* the inviolable. This against-ness, whose intensity is defined as much by the inviolability of the violated as by the act of transgression, constitutes the violence of transgression, in fact.

Besides (intrinsic to) opposition, against-ness carries a sense of being "next to" something. And, of course, transgression is meaningless by itself; it presupposes that which is transgressed. Observes Foucault, "Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the lines it crosses" (*PT*, 33-34).[8] That which is transgressed is thus always a limit, a line, a boundary which circumscribes, which delimits a space, an order, a mode of thinking, a way of being, and beyond which it is forbidden to go. The violence of transgression is a violence against the limit. The limit is at once necessary to inviolability and the condition for the possibility of transgression. But the limit in turn has no meaning without transgression. "The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (*PT*, 34). A limit carries the possibility of its transgression constitutively.

But doesn't the possibility of transgression entail that a limit has already been transgressed? Or rather, that a limit is only revealed in the moment of its transgression, a moment which forces the limit "to experience its positive truth in its downward fall?" (*PT*, 34). Foucault characterizes the act of transgression as a kind of "lightning flash" which traces the very line it effaces. Transgression in every case illuminates and in some sense creates the limit it transgresses. Transgression is wedded to the limit by annulment; it gives birth to the limit by abortion. Here the against-ness of transgression is more of an *again-ness*.[9] The play of the limit and transgression is repeated again and again in an infinitesimal, even time-less, instant, an instant of no time, a lightning flash, a *trace*. "Transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration" (*PT*, 34).[10] The no-time of the transgressive act entails that transgression cannot be identified with any *particular* action or activity, and thus cannot be, properly speaking, attributed to an agent or originating subject. The transgressing subject is, in fact, an effect of the against-ness (vis-a-viz the limit) of the transgressive act, a shadow caused by and discernable in the lightning flash of transgression. Thus, the act of transgression can be said to be prior to the transgressing subject."

Furthermore, whatever content a particular act of transgression has is given to it by the limit it transgresses. But in reality transgression *as such* is void of content, not in the sense of

empty or formal being, but rather in that transgression has no being, no essence, apart from its act, from its transgress*ing*. Transgression is neither negative nor positive, says Foucault:

> Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being — affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time. But, correspondingly, this affirmation contains nothing positive: no content can bind it, since, by definition, no limit can possibly restrict it. Perhaps it is simply an *affirmation of division . . . of difference* (*PT*, 35-36. Emphasis added).

Transgression is its moment of occurrence, a moment which re-marks and de-limits the line it crosses. Transgression exposes the limit in its brilliant but summary flash, exposes it in a way which reveals both the limitedness of the being it circumscribes and the limitlessness of all the limit fails to contain. But transgression is not bound, nor defined, by either — not the limited being which it transcends nor the unlimited zone of existence toward which it leaps. Transgression is not "a victory over limits," nor does it transform the other side of the limit "into a glittering expanse" (*PT*, 35). Rather, transgression is an affirmation of *difference*, an affirmation which confirms the alterity of the different, without denial or recapitulation. Transgression is the moment of pure difference.

We shall want to return to this notion of transgression as affirmation. For now we can set it in juxta-opposition to the line. The limit is not so much a negation of difference as it is a denunciation, a *denial*, of difference. Denial carries with it the senses of saying "no" (which is not the same as negation), of being in opposition to, of refusing to accept, and of disowning. The limit disowns difference by appropriating differences under the identity of the same. Disowning is, paradoxically, an appropriation by the limit. The limit owns the limited by disowning pure difference. Says Nietzsche, "Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal." Truth "is formed through an arbitrary abstraction from . . . individual differences, through forgetting the distinctions."[12] Delimitation is thus a refusal, a subordination, a repression of difference. The limit says "no" to difference and this no-saying becomes raised to the level of a prohibition, the limit as such.

Perhaps at this point a "cartography" of limits would be warranted, a mapping out of the orderings of being which have plagued western thought since Plato's "delicate sorting operation" subordinated appearances to essence.[13] But we already know what they are; genealogists since Nietzsche have been mapping them out for us for some time, and, in their tracing of the limits of such orderings, calling them into question, making them tremble under their subversive suspicious gaze. Even a partial listing would include discourses from religion, ethics, science, and philosophy.[14] In each case we can say, with Foucault, that, "Difference is transformed into that which must be specified within a concept, without overstepping its bounds" (*TP*, 182). What else is this subjection of difference under the domination of the concept, of categories, of tables of representation, all of which constitute the quintessential moves of western thought's relentless will to truth — except the *violence* of the limit, a violence which is opposed to/by the violence of transgression? The tyranny of the limit lies in its abstraction from particularity in terms of identity and sameness,

its organization of differences into ordered matrices of resemblances. The limit masters difference by apprehending "global resemblances . . . at the root of what we call diversity" (*TP*, 185).

At the heart of this domination, this violence, says Foucault, is *good sense*. "Good sense is the world's most effective agent of division in its recognitions, its establishment of equivalences, its sensitivity to gaps, its gauging of distances, as it assimilates and separates" (*TP*, 183). It is only "good sense" to delimit, to circumscribe, to organize, to categorize, to extract, abstract, and theoretize: how else are we to *understand* the world? But good sense itself is a kind of exclusion, a kind of limit: to ignore or to lack good sense is to go "out of bounds," to risk the stigma of stupidity in the face of knowledge and truth. There is, thus, a moral dimension to good sense which sanctions it and gives it power. In apprehending good sense, which amounts to apprehending the limit at its source (for what limit ever thought itself lacking good sense?), "we encounter the *tyranny* of good will, the *obligation* to think 'in common' with others . . ." (*TP*, 181, emphasis added). The morality of good will consecrates good sense, sanctions its violence, the violence of the limit, and makes it obligatory. It circumscribes and designates a *community*. To refuse citizenship in this community is to show bad judgment, lack of common sense, ill will. The morality of good will ranges over all of our so-called truths. It informs and pervades every science, every pedagogy, every body of knowledge. It belongs to the very essence of metaphysics and ontotheology. All so many limits, all so many models of good sense, the breach of which cannot help but be immoral — that is to say, *transgressive*. It seems that transgression cannot escape its complicity with ethics.

But we know now that transgression is a violence against violence. To transgress is to liberate difference from the tyranny of good will. The limit fears the violence of transgression "instinctively," and, by definition, sets itself up as a prohibition to such violence. But since the limit carries the possibility of its transgression constitutively, it can never completely conquer transgression. Instead, it anticipates transgression by overlaying it with guilt. This is risky for the limit because, on the one hand, this has the effect of increasing the intensity of the violence of transgression, a threat to the very existence of the limit; but, on the other hand, the sanctity of the limit is reinforced, and, further, guilt affords the limit the opportunity to re-appropriate any particular transgressive act within its confines and make it its own (although negatively, by turning transgression into a limit, the limit of the limit).[15]

But guilt does not necessarily have to attend transgression. On the contrary, to refuse guilt is the first step toward a philosophy of transgression. What would it mean to accept transgression, to "begin thinking from it and in the space it denotes?" (*PT*, 35). Foucault "outlines" the conditions for a transgressive thought.

First of all, transgression must be disassociated from its negative connotations. Transgression must be *affirmed*. Philosophy must be willing to risk the "dangerous maybe" of transgression's violent trace. In so doing, in the wake of transgression's deconstruction of the limit, philosophy plunges headlong into an uncharted world:

> Transgression opens onto a scintillating and constantly affirmed

> world, a world without shadows or twilight, without that serpentine "no" that bites into fruits and lodges their contradictions at their core. It is the solar inversion of satanic denial (*PT*, 37).

To affirm transgression means affirming the affirmation of difference. To affirm difference requires liberating it from the domination of the limit. "Difference can only be liberated," says Foucault, "through the invention of an acategorical thought" (*TP*, 186).[16] An acategorical thought would be one which allowed for the play of the event, of the phantasm, of the simulacrum, without their being organized and subsumed under some greater unity. It would think in the gaps: it would give play to differences. A philosophy of transgression would oppose itself to the morality of good will which informs every philosophy of representation. "Let us pervert good sense and allow thought to play outside the ordered table of resemblances" (*TP*, 183). Perversion is the key to thinking transgressively. "The philosopher must be sufficiently perverse to play the game of truth and error badly; this perversity, which operates in paradoxes, allows him to escape the grasp of categories" (*TP*, 190).

What could be more perverse than Nietzsche's refusal to reconcile the obvious contradictions which rage throughout the pages of *Beyond Good and Evil* and other works. He lets such contradictions fester and swell, and out of their mutual violence emerges a *difference* of thought. Or consider Foucault's perversive practice of rescuing obscure and forgotten discourses and allowing them to play side by side, which has the effect of undermining any notions of a progressive history or pure rationality. Perverse philosophers refuse to follow the rules of traditional philosophy, not because they are "skeptical" of its truths, but because they know that such truths are interpretations, vested interests, forms of domination, which close off and suppress much more than they reveal. If they enter the game of traditional philosophy, as often they must, because language has not yet escaped its representational function and because transgression *requires* the limit, it is by donning masks; and they enter it, *as a game*, only to shake it, to make it tremble, from within.

A transgressive philosophy would be one which affirms the affirmation of difference: a double affirmation. This means that, in order to avoid repeating the same metaphysical gestures in reverse, we must be careful not to *valorize* difference. Says Foucault, "We must avoid thinking . . . the form of a content which is difference" (*TP*, 196). We must resist the temptation of making difference into a category, a concept which organizes a philosophy of difference or a *telos* toward which such a philosophy must strive. To do otherwise would be to turn difference itself into a kind of limit. But these cautions, these "musts," are not attached to a transgressive philosophy from outside, as prescriptions, or worse, prohibitions. This too would be a kind of delimitation. On the contrary, a truly transgressive philosophy carries its own erasure constitutively. To think transgressively requires an *on-going* suspicion, a perpetual overcoming of even its own thought the moment such thought threatens to acquire the status of "truth."[17] Thus the affirmation of transgression means the transgressing of transgression itself.

We anticipate Derrida.

II: Derrida on Transgressing Transgression

Who has voiced, or should we say "written," these precautions more con-

sistently than Derrida? Deconstruction is perhaps the most "cautious" of the transgressive philosophies (to the extent any of them are "philosophies.") But there is no question that deconstruction is transgressive: when all the subtleties are pushed aside, it announces itself as the destruction of western metaphysics, the "*limitation* of the sense of being within the field of presence," for the sake of a "future epoch of difference," a thinking which would be both dangerous and perverse. Says Derrida, "The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which *breaks absolutely* with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of *monstrosity*."[18]

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida shows that western thought, which is pervaded through and through by the metaphysics of presence, has been dominated by a *logocentrism*, the subordination (and debasement) of writing to the spoken word, to logos. By "enlarging" and "radicalizing" writing, Derrida wishes to undermine the suzerainty of logos, from whose authority issues the metaphysical determinations of truth and rationality, to open up a space of thought *outside* of its domination. "I wish to reach the point of a certain *exteriority* in relation to the totality of the age of logocentrism" (*OG*, 161).

Derrida recognizes this totality as an organized and organizing *system*, an "orb," as he calls it, which must be *broached*. "But to think the history of the system, its meaning and value must, in an *exorbitant* way, be somewhere exceeded" (*OG*, 85). Deconstruction is exorbitant. Exorbitance means literally to "go outside the track" (exorbit), to breach the line traced by the encompassing movement of the system, to break out of its sphere of influence. This "going outside" implies being at one time *within* the orbit, circumscribed by it along with everything else:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it (*OG*, 24).

Thus, exceeding the track of the orb involves *crossing* it: passing through the line it traces, crossing it out in crossing it, a double sense of crossing, a breaking through and a violation, a *double-cross*. Commensurate with this first meaning, exorbitance also means, more commonly, *going beyond what is reasonable, just, or proper*. Reason, justice, propriety: the essence of good sense. Deconstruction undermines the propriety of reason. It exposes the injustice (the violence) of justice. It exceeds the boundary in which reason, justice and propriety *make sense*. In short, it is perverse toward the morality of good will.

Deconstruction proceeds by a kind of "double reading" which is at once a critique which inhabits a text in a faithful, interior way, re-tracing its movements *up to* its very limits; while at the same time, it *marks* the limits of the text and from some unnameable exterior traces what the text, as a limit, has been able to forbid and repress. That which exceeds the text in deconstruction is the trace of différance. The trace exposes the blank spaces, the "whites," of the written text, which "mark" all that the text fails to constrain. The text, which designates the "being written" of the metaphysics of presence, commands differences within

its lines, keeps differences in line, so to speak; but it cannot master the unnameable différance which falls between the lines. Derrida's perverse misspelling of différance conveys that vast excluded world of *differences* which escapes the authority of the text. The trace, in its re-marking of the text, gives place to that différance which cannot come to word in the written text.

The paradox of différance is that it is the very possibility of textuality and yet it exceeds the text at all times. Says Derrida, "Différance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible" (*OG*, 143). The trace is the trace of this possibility/impossibility: a trace of the schism which is no-thing. Thus, the trace, which is not bound by a content, does not designate a repressed *concept*, erases itself immediately. It is a "lightning flash" which illuminates (retraces) the limits of the text. In so doing, it transgresses (exceeds) the text. No text can sustain itself under the violent flash of the trace. But as a trace, différance cannot be understood in terms of a simple absence related oppositionally to a presence, specifically the privileging of presence constitutive of metaphysics appropriation of being. Rather, différance is the "obliterated origin" of both presence and absence. Thus, différance "does not *resist* appropriation," says Derrida, "it does not impose an exterior limit upon it" (*OG*, 143). To do so would be to repeat the same gesture of delimitation in reverse, in other words. Rather than resisting appropriation, the trace *interrupts* it, suspends its violence indefinitely. But this has the effect of altering the text (and the mode of thinking it supports) radically. A deconstructed text can never be read the same way again.

Inhabiting the text, dwelling within the *closure* of metaphysics, is essential to the movements of deconstruction. It is only from within that it can attempt an "opening." But this inhabiting by deconstruction is also its danger. From within the system, deconstruction will look like an empiricism; it will appear to stand in opposition to metaphysics in a way similar to positivism's denunciation of the "nonsense" of metaphysics. The thoughts of deconstruction — différance, the trace, arche-writing, etc. — will begin to resemble "truths," concepts which cannot escape the internal contradictions of skepticism (*OG*, 162). But the opposition between empiricism and metaphysics, between philosophy and nonphilosophy, is itself determined within the orbit of metaphysics, is itself metaphysical. If this were the limits of deconstruction's opposition to metaphysics, it would hardly be transgressive. On the contrary, says Derrida, "This proposition of transgression, not yet integrated into a careful discourse, runs the risk of formulating regression itself" (*OG*, 23).

Thus, when Derrida makes statements like, "The trace *is* the *absolute origin* of sense in general," or that différance "*is* what not only *precedes* metaphysics but also *extends beyond* the thought of being," (emphasis added), such statements, such thoughts, must be placed under erasure. The "*is*" of such formulations must be, through a "technique of writing" borrowed from Heidegger, *crossed out:* ~~is~~. Without this crossing out, deconstruction would instantiate a transcendental discourse as "guilty" of appropriation, of bringing to presence a transcendental signified, as the metaphysical discourses it seeks to escape. Through this crossing out, this effacing of its own thoughts, deconstruction puts itself into question. In this way, "the

enterprise of deconstruction always . . . falls prey to its own work" (*OG*, 24). That is, in transgressing metaphysics, deconstruction transgresses itself, which amounts to saying that it transgresses transgression itself.

This crossing out, in order not to stand as a kind of limit, must be understood in terms of *play*. "One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of ontotheology and the metaphysics of presence" (*OG*, 50). This play (which is thought radically only by *exhausting* the totality of the system of metaphysics, through the play of deconstruction which inhabits the system, as a game, only to exceed it) — plays with itself, crosses out its crossing out, pushes it to absurdity, reveals it as the *representation* of what the trace of différance has already done, is always already doing.

A provisional, rather playful, logic can be employed here. If crossing out denotes a negation (but only in the sense of an interruption of a certain privileging of language), then crossing out the crossing out — a double-cross — would denote a negation of negation: an affirmation. Play double-crosses deconstruction just as deconstruction, as a play, double-crosses the texts of metaphysics. An affirmation of affirmation: a double affirmation. Play is the playing trace of différance, of difference. Thus, deconstruction, considered broadly both in terms of its inhabiting and of the exteriority toward which its movements proceed, is the affirmation of the affirmation of difference. If our earlier reflections were correct, to call deconstruction transgressive at this point would be redundant.

But, in any case, deconstruction would resist the appellation. To call deconstruction transgressive is to give it a name and it is the very province of deconstruction to put into question the name of the name.[19] It would place "transgression" between quotation marks the way Nietzsche might do with "God" or "man." This would be tantamount to calling transgression a "notion," and if we wanted to hold on to it (for security), to make it definitive of deconstruction without putting that privilege into question, this would undermine the very radicality of transgressive thought, drain its force and energy, and turn transgression into a "tired notion." Calling deconstruction "transgressive," without erasure, would betray a certain weariness with respect to the on-going necessity of deconstruction's active movements, a necessity which spares transgression itself least of all. Deconstruction would be quick to point out the "tiredness" of this notion, to rebuke this desire for closure, for victory in the *name* of transgression.

As a name, "transgression" is tired — worn out — the moment it is uttered. Like the worn out coinage of philosophical metaphor, of metaphysics, it "has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and striving . . ."[20] In other words, it erases that trace of différance which made its utterance possible. But this erasure is not an erasure of itself, a crossing out, a double-cross. On the contrary, it sustains itself, as metaphor, through holding out the possibility of restoring an "original figure" which remains hidden beneath its metaphoricity. Thus, "transgression," as a name, is nostalgic. It sits in repose, longing for some transcendental ground which would sanction and support its occurrence.

If deconstruction is transgressive, it is so only through its effects, through inhabiting texts and *exhausting* them from within. It is this exhausting, this

re-tracing structures to their very limits, which opens up a certain exteriority with respect to those structures. These effects cannot be organized under a category of "transgression" without the effects themselves, deconstruction itself, becoming exhausted. Deconstruction can only be *called* "transgressive" from within the systems it deconstructs; and to do so, to give it this name, would signal the suspension of its active movements, its tracing. Even if it could be done (marginally) from that exteriority which it opens up, calling deconstruction "transgressive" would have the effect of halting deconstruction in its tracks.

We see the danger: of turning transgression into a kind of limit. Transgression is not something which can be canonized, even, or rather especially, in a philosophy which genuinely thinks transgressively.

Nietzsche speaks of Zarathustra's weariness, of how the black serpent, the traditional symbol of transgression, crawls down Zarathustra's throat and threatens to strangle him. Summoning all his strength, Zarathustra bites off the head of the snake and spits it out. In perverse philosophies, this moment returns eternally. To think transgressively requires the transgressing of transgression without end . . .

ENDNOTES

1. In Perugia, Italy at the Collegium Phaenomenologicum on "Rethinking the Transcendental: The Philosophy of Jacques Derrida," Summer 1987.
2. Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice,* ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 33 (hereafter cited as *PT*).
3. There is no suggestion here that Derrida should be held accountable for something he said in a casual conversation. Rather, his response should be taken, as it is in this essay, as an opportunity to explore the "notion" of transgression more deeply.
4. *Beyond Good and Evil,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 44ff.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. Ibid., 12.
7. In one sense this is trivial, since it is part of the very definition of transgression to violate, but in another sense this serves to differentiate transgressive violence from other forms of violence which we would not want to call transgressive.
8. Is it not also true that the limit, as *pure* limit (to use Deleuze's phrase), has its entire space in being crossed?
9. The words "against" and "again" share the same Old English cognates *ongegn* and *ongean,* which mean "directly up to" or "facing."
10. Foucault adds that "this relationship is considerably more complex" than this and resists the attempts of thought to encompass it.
11. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate this in their consideration of incest in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), esp. 160-62.
12. "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche,* ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 46. Putting into question appropriation, propriety, ownership, etc., constitutive of the metaphysics of presence, is also a central motif of deconstruction.
13. Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* 167 (hereafter cited as *TP*).
14. It is very important that genealogists such as Nietzsche have *worked through* such discourses; otherwise our indictments could only come from outside and would lack force and credibility.
15. The phenomenon of guilt needs to be explored more deeply.
16. Foucault thinks that Deleuze has invented such a thought.
17. Cf., *Beyond Good and Evil,* 236.
18. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 23, 93, and 5 respectively, emphasis added (hereafter cited as *OG*).
19. Cf., Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 26-27.
20. Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy,* 213.

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee 37235