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AFTER THE BIRTH/DEATH OF KANT/DERRIDA

ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore some points of cross-over (as well as points of difference) between Kant's framing of critique and Derrida's deconstruction of this frame. I begin by situating the question concerning "where we stand now" in terms of some of Kant's late (unpublished) thoughts on metaphysics and "*Fortschritt*" (stepping-forward and progress) in his "What Real *Fortschritte* has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?" I show how Kant inadvertently tears open a deconstructive space at the center of critique (a framing of a metaphysics of the future, of the to-come [*Zukunft*] which never properly comes) while eschewing an attempt to walk through it. With this in mind, I then read Derrida's picking up of this tear in his discussions of the *Parergon*, *Ergon* and the *hors d'oeuvres*—the starter *outside* and *before* the main work—in *The Truth in Painting*. My aim is to unravel a view in which we can say simultaneously, perhaps metaphorically but also methodologically, that Derrida's death frames Kant's birth, and that the birth of deconstruction frames the death of critique.

KEYWORDS

Critique;
Deconstruction;
Metaphysics; Future;
Frame; *Parergon*; *Ergon*;
Fortschritte; *The Truth in Painting*

"But the other 'end' is the 'beginning', the 'birth'"
—Heidegger (1977: 373)

"Now where do we situate the syntagma 'my death' as possibility and/or impossibility of passage? (As we shall see, the mobile slash between and/or, and/and, or/and, or/or, is a singular border, simultaneously conjunctive, disjunctive, and undecidable)"

—Derrida (1993: 23)

What of the repetition of the "mobile slash" between the birth/death and Kant/Derrida in my title? It refers to the conjunctive, disjunctive simultaneity of the birth *and/or* death of Kant *and/or* Derrida, in the sense that where we talk about the birth of Kant, there too we talk about the death of Derrida. Or perhaps we should read the center between the two slashes, the "death of Kant" framed and cut off by the "birth [...] Derrida"? And then again, perhaps when

we talk about the birth/death of Kant/Derrida or the death/birth of Derrida/Kant, we also refer tacitly to the birth of deconstruction *as* (not only and/or) the death of critique? But we must start more concretely, pushing off from these already entrenched and loaded questions.

The occasion is of course 20 years since the death of Derrida. But this year also marks 300 years since the birth of Kant. This double occasion prompts us to mark it by asking after some of the constellations as well as the differences between these two bodies of work. To bring us around once again to the question repeatedly being asked this year (“where do we stand now in relation to and after Kant?”) the other question consists of how we might respond *after* Derrida (not “where do we stand now in relation to Derrida?” but “where do we stand now in relation to Kant because of Derrida?”). Indeed, this question, “where do we stand now?” is one that both thinkers tarried with, but I’d like to go a step further by suggesting that, perhaps, Kant, or critique, can only be read after Derrida, or deconstruction. That is, in the double meaning of the word, “after”: after the emergence of as well as in the manner of. But, as I will argue, there remains a stubbornness at play in critique resisting deconstruction by (or while) simultaneously making it possible—it refuses to become deconstruction. For while Derrida is clear that deconstruction is decidedly *not* critique,¹ this means we should pay special attention to how close they are, to the minimal gap (verging on immense distance) between them. After all, in Derrida’s (bracketed) words, “(this is why one must read Kant and always begin by rereading Kant)” (Derrida 2015: 37).

With respect to inquiring into where we stand now, I’ll push off from Kant’s own posing of the question, which hangs on the somewhat elastic term, *Fortschritte*—stepping-forward and stepping-away, advancement and progress. This word heads an unpublished piece from 1793, “What Real *Fortschritte* has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?” (the so-called *Preisschrift*)² and so I’ll linger with it in the first half of this paper, which I hope to weave into a broader accentuation of a barred future (a *Zukunft* always to come) inlaid into the heart of critique. To draw this out further, I discuss Derrida’s deconstruction of the frame, enframed, *parergon* and *ergon* in *La Vérité en peinture* (*The Truth in Painting*) sparking questions as to what lies after or outside the frame of critique.

Overall, this paper suggests that perhaps just as Kant hopes for a “*neue Geburt*” of metaphysics (AA 4:257), we might hope for a (re)birth of Kant *after* Derrida (whose shadowy trace has never fully been born nor fully died where Kant studies is concerned). Indeed, deconstruction frames the work we do

1 Here I echo Geoffrey Bennington in one of his lectures at EGS (Bennington 2012).

2 All citations of Kant’s work are from Kant (1901–) (AA) with the volume number followed by page number apart from Kant (2013) (KrV) which is quoted according to the A/B pagination (as is customary). All translations from the German are my own. I’d like to thank the organizers and attendees at the *Kant 300* conference put on by the Romanian Academy (April 2024) where I first gave this paper. In particular, I thank Rodica Croituru and Claudiu Baciu for their engaged comments and questions.

on and in critique in a manner reminiscent of Heidegger's *Unlebendiges*, the un-living or non-alive (Heidegger 1977: 238). And yet it is critique that allows for the frame of deconstruction to appear at all. Thus, Derrida persists in reading Kant, permitting us to momentarily catch a glimpse of what was in critique all along but could only be uncoiled *after* the intervention of deconstruction; that is, an after-critique within critique itself.

Rest in Peace

Fortschritte, then, how does Kant use this term in the *Preisschrift*?

Let's start at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the last two lines of the Doctrine of Method, on the History of Pure Reason which, it must be remarked, is surprisingly short since it still largely lies ahead as an empty title that "must be filled-out [*ausgefüllet*] in the future" (KrV A852/B880). Kant closes the book with a decided opening and openness: "The *critical* way [*Weg*] alone is still open [*offen*]" (KrV A855/B883). The critical philosophy offers and opens a path (a *Weg*, a way) leading to a closure yet to come. As Kant goes on to state, the aim is to take a step along the pathway for the sake of bringing reason to "full satisfaction," "*völligen Befriedigung*" (KrV A855/B883), to pacify it by closing down the need for further steps. Or to stretch it a little further, to bring reason to a peaceful end (in the sense of *im Frieden*) such that we can say "*Ruhe im Frieden*," rest in peace.

We might also recall another text Kant drew up afterwards, namely, the philosophical *Entwurf* of "*ewigen Frieden*," eternal peace. But as we know from the start of that sketch, there is somewhat of a joke that lingers on. "Eternal peace this way" as the sign above the inn says, a directive that teeters on the edge of what is, for critique, theoretically impossible to encounter.³ Kant finds it amusing that we might point the way toward what is essentially the actualization of a transcendental idea, that if eternal peace were found then it would erase the characteristics that make it what it is, it would lose its horizontal, asymptotic status—eternal peace ultimately refers us to death and "the cemetery" as Hannah Arendt reminds us (Arendt 1992: 52). There is a self-deprecating failure or internal undoing at work in the sign which we might transliterate as "step this way for that which one can never actually step into." In the end, all we have is the sign that signals its own impossibility of actualization and the bare, minimal mark of pointing or waving at it through a clue (*Wink*).⁴ So to bring to full satisfaction or to peace—to encounter reason dying—already circumscribes a dubious area; the full appeasement of reason ultimately points to the inability to fully appease it, its inability to lay itself to rest.⁵ John Sallis' opening words

3 As Peter Fenves puts it, the text is "written under the sign of failure" (Fenves 2003: 92).

4 See KrV B421, AA 5:300 and 5:352. Also see Derrida (1987: 39).

5 We might also open this out to Heidegger's conversation of the *Ende* and *Ganzheit* in *Being and Time*, as well as to the example of the unripe fruit which "*vollendet sich*," "completes itself" in ripeness (Heidegger 1977: 244). Of course, this would take us down

to his compelling text on Kant are indeed fitting here: “Reason—the very word now bespeaks crisis, failure of every available sense to fulfil what cannot but be intended” (Sallis 1980: 1).

Despite this, however, Kant maintained the hope that the full satisfaction of reason was not far off, that this might even happen by the close of his century and that reason’s hitherto fruitless quest for grounded metaphysical knowledge had become tantalizingly close owing to innovations made by the *Critique of Pure Reason*. What are we to make of this hope despite the impossibility of satisfaction? It is this structure of the “hope despite” that I think gives us a clue. We might call this “hope despite” something like a zone of perpetual vacillation, a holding back of the step-forward (the *Fortschritt*), a suspension of reason’s demand for a metaphysics precisely because of the advancement (again, the *Fortschritt*) made by critique. *Fortschritte* repeats or resounds in a double echo: a step-forward projected onto the future by remaining hopeful for the full laying to rest of reason in a metaphysics; and an advancement away from the metaphysical demand to cede the sensible to the super-sensible despite reason’s refusal to be put to rest in this matter.

We come, then, to Kant’s own (unpublished) 1793 diagnosis of the steps taken 12 years after the first edition of the first *Critique*; what “progress” did Kant think had been made? Had the *Fortschritt* taken an unforeseen step-backward? The question, put more generally, could be: what is the current standing of metaphysics after the advent—or should we say event?—of the *Critique of Pure Reason*?

In the first line of the *Preisschrift* Kant echo-locates his own project, demonstrating that he is not only aware of the context of the question as if standing outside it, but actively placed within its milieu. Critical philosophy is a major part of what has happened in metaphysics since Leibniz and Wolff; after all, the question of *Fortschritte* concerns “one part of philosophy, in one part of learned Europe, and also for one part of the current century” (AA 20:259). It’s a question of history in the sense of asking after the present, inquiring into where we are at *this* time, in *this* place, and in *this* geographical and disciplinary area of investigation. For this reason, Kant’s response to the question is premised upon a reading of the history of metaphysics via an encounter with its “first and oldest steps [*Schritte*]” (AA 20:261), followed by a series of stages that it had to go through (AA 20:264). Moreover, this encounter is modulated through the lens of critique itself understood as an interpellation that interjects into or intervenes in the battlefield (*Kampfplatz*) of metaphysics by succeeding its history while at the same time projecting forward to a distinctively *critical* metaphysics, a future metaphysics *after* critique. Thus, while there is a clear line separating the before-critique and the after-critique the details of

a different pathway toward the dynamic of opening and closing indicative of Dasein’s *Sein zu Tod*, Being-toward-death and the inadequacy of describing the fruit in terms of two entirely different states—that is, the inadequacy of all models of completion and wholeness where Dasein is concerned.

their entanglement remain ambiguous in so far as critique is still in some way a part of the history of metaphysics by Kant's own reckoning.

The togetherness of these two strands—the history of metaphysics and its reading through the lens of what comes after critique (an anticipatory nod toward a future, rejuvenated metaphysics)—harbors a contemporary awareness of the historical context and the role one's own text might play in it. That an "analysis" should start with a history, not only of the past but of the present is hinted at in the title of Kant's First Section, "History [*Geschichte*] of Transcendental Philosophy Among Us in Recent Times [*unter uns in neuerer Zeit*]" (AA 20:265). In other words, a history of the writing, general thesis and contextual impact of the critical philosophy which is still in our midst, *among us*.⁶ This mixing of history (*Geschichte*) and recent times (*neuerer Zeit*) perhaps underlies the confusion Henry Allison faces in the "Editor's Introduction" to his translation of the text, when he says that there are "significant discrepancies" between the historical understanding of metaphysics and its role after critique; he claims these are due to "an uncertainty on Kant's part about whether to base the divisions on the familiar distinctions within traditional philosophy [...] or on the divisions of the critical philosophy (which partly coincide with these)" (Allison 2002: 341). A discrepancy perhaps, but things aren't as clear-cut as Allison hopes, for Kant conducts an experimentation with the ambiguous jointure of the two steps (*Schritte*), one forward and one backward, or perhaps, a step back *for the sake of* a step forward. Ultimately, metaphysics after critique points to an area of undecidability such that the so-called discrepancy Allison detects is not an error overlooked by Kant, but is constitutive or "built-in," so to speak. What Allison sees but doesn't recognize is the doubling of *Fortschritte* by means of a projective draft that comes before; critique as a ground-laying for a future metaphysics—a "*Grundlegung* of metaphysics" in Heidegger's words (Heidegger 1991: 208)—and then its failure to deliver this metaphysics, which results in a collapse between the before of the projective draft and the after of the metaphysics.

And this isn't about transforming critique into an alternative metaphysics as Gerard Lebrun warns us, "Kant doesn't now support another thesis, he doesn't now search for a better method; he speaks another language" (Lebrun 2008: 31). That is, he speaks a language other than the logical "yes" or "no" that Allison seeks: he speaks in an indecisive tone that says both "yes" and "no" simultaneously. It is here that critique sustains itself at a fork in the road, facing off in two directions (AA 20:261). The *Fortschritt*, then, (and I refer both to the text itself and the thematic it harbors) is not only concerned with the death of metaphysics but also with its birth or, more precisely, its *re*-birth under a different rubric than how it was yesterday, by framing what's happening now around what should happen tomorrow.

6 According to de Vleeschauwer, the essay "marks an important stage in the process by which the distinction between the critical propaedeutic and the transcendental system became obscured in Kant's mind" (de Vleeschauwer 1962: 153).

But we must disentangle the various meanings of metaphysics here. In Kant's late estimation metaphysics is polysemic, concurrently signifying: a natural pre-disposition that we cannot escape no matter how much we believe ourselves to have been purged of it (AA 4:279 and KrV A500/B528); an italicization prompted by a future text entitled *Metaphysics*, divided into two parts (morals and nature) projected by Kant before (AA 18:9), during (KrV Axxi) and after (AA 6:216 and 445) the establishment of critical philosophy; and the demand for another type of *Fortschritt*, an *Überschritt*, or stepping-over from the sensible to the super-sensible in a manner conducive to the limits set by critique (that is, by way of practical philosophy and its encounter with human freedom).⁷

Speculatively tying these strands together, we could argue that stepping-over from the sensible to the super-sensible, even if through practical philosophy and human freedom, calls upon critique to have transgressed its own limit "all along" because the drive toward metaphysics and the writing of a text entitled "*Metaphysics*" (and more precisely a theoretical "*Metaphysics of Nature*") are themselves natural pre-dispositions. This confrontation with the limit reveals the ambiguous edge or margin of critique and so provides a potential opening. We might say that a tear rips open precisely when the delivery of a metaphysics/*Metaphysics* is both demanded *and* indefinitely suspended.

To come back to our point of departure, the peaceful death of reason reveals itself to have been deferred all along because it cannot help but be busy crossing from the shore into the ocean,⁸ even after—or precisely *because of*—the drawing of limits conducted by critique. Accordingly, far from the stiff, dusty rigor(-mortis) one often gets a whiff of in interpretations of Kant, critique here takes on the garb of instability, a restless turbulence in the face of its own undeliverable *Fortschritte*.⁹ It is an inevitable fall in the face of the limit it sets itself since critical philosophy is still called upon to navigate the "shoreless sea [*uferloses Meer*], in which the step-forward [*Fortschritt*] leaves behind no trace [*Spur*]" (AA 20:259). To return to Lebrun, he puts it well when he says, "The simple project of methodologically establishing the ground of metaphysics is now equivalent to the death of 'that' which has always been called 'metaphysics'" (Lebrun 2008: 35). The aim of critique was to establish the ground for metaphysics but it results in a death, an accidental death. Not the full satisfaction of reason in a restful state, but the violent (albeit inadvertent) putting to death

7 Kant alludes to this last one in the *Preisschrift*: "it is the science [*Wissenschaft*] of stepping-forward [*fortzuschreiten*] from knowledge [*Erkenntniß*] of the sensible to that of the super-sensible through reason" (AA 20:260), later contrasting it to a leap (AA 20:273).

8 I refer here to the internal split of Transcendental Logic in the first *Critique* where the Transcendental Analytic is compared to an "island" and the "land of truth" while the Transcendental Dialectic is compared to "a wide and stormy ocean [*Ozeane*], the proper seat of illusion" (KrV A235/B294–5).

9 Diane Morgan encodes this element of critique by way of the "Egyptian metaphor," which "helps to reveal architectonic foundations in general, and more particularly Kantian philosophy, as flimsy, as not fixed" (Morgan 2000: 65).

of the possibility of a future metaphysics. In other words, the attempt to pacify reason is seen here as the involuntary manslaughter of metaphysics wrought by critique. Perhaps Kant was, after all, the “all-destroyer”¹⁰ of metaphysics, but not on purpose and not in the way that prominent neo-Kantians might claim.

This gives rise to the question: is it possible to detect something of a *De-struktion* or indeed deconstruction of the history of metaphysics here in this margin (even if this death is accidental)?

[...]

The most extended and (for us) interesting encounter between Kant and Derrida is in the first chapter of *The Truth in Painting*. In particular, Derrida hones in on critique as composed of “detachable” (*détachable*) parts (e.g., the detachment of the theoretical and practical). But he goes further, relating it to the fact that critique itself is detached from the system of metaphysics in the manner of a *hors d'oeuvres*, a starter or appetizer, or what comes outside (*hors*) the main work (*oeuvre*).¹¹ This points to a more fundamental suspension:

It is in the critique that, precisely, the critical suspension is produced, the *krinein*, the in-between [...] But the system of pure philosophy *will have had to* [*aura dû*] include the critical within itself, and construct a general discourse which will get the better of the detachable and account for it. This system of pure philosophy is what Kant calls *metaphysics*. It is not yet possible [*elle n'est pas encore possible*]. Only the critique can have a program that is currently possible [*actuellement possible*] (Derrida 1987: 39).

And so, the third *Critique* attempts to bridge the theoretical and practical domains as well as constituting the outer edge that leads to a system of metaphysics, a reattachment between critique and metaphysics (and note Derrida's italicization of *metaphysics* here, whose “m” Derrida refrains from capitalizing—it is a quasi-title). But we must also underscore that “it is not yet possible” (*elle n'est pas encore possible*) and that Derrida italicizes the “*will have had to*” (*aura dû*), since this system is never given and so doesn't and can't reincorporate critique into itself. It is not yet possible and never will be; it *will have had to* and so it didn't; it remains a pure, indefinite potential, a literal future perfect that remains outside. The detachability of critique therefore permanently stays detached, leaving a “lacuna” (*lacunaire*) both between the first and second *Critique* but more importantly *after* the third *Critique* where the system of a critically grounded metaphysics (a doctrinal text bearing the title *Metaphysics of Nature*) should have been. In this connection, Derrida goes to the end of the Preface of the third *Critique*, claiming,

10 Moses Mendelssohn, quoted from Beck (1969: 393). Also see de Vleeschauer: “the critical era had opened victoriously with the destruction of its opponents” (de Vleeschauer 1962: 152).

11 See Derrida (1987: 57).

After deploring that nature has mixed up the threads, at the moment when he is finishing his critical work [...] admitting the lacunae [*lacunes*] and projecting a bridge over the abyss [*l'abîme*] of the other two critiques, Kant speaks of his age. He must gain time, not let the delay accumulate, hurry on toward the doctrine. (Derrida 1987: 43)

Derrida then introduces an ellipse by framing an empty space on the page, perhaps a performative gesture¹² to the lacuna Kant leaves:



This empty space, this shining through of the blank, white page¹³ which is formed only by enacting it (it is not even quotable without performing and reperforming it, for there is nothing *there* to quote) waves at the very last words of the third *Critique*'s Preface (which I have subtracted and framed with "[...]" in the quotation):

I will step [*schreiten*] without delay to the doctrinal [part], in order, if possible, to wrest-from [*abzugewinnen*] my increasing age some time still favorable [to the task]. It's self-evident that there is no special part for judgement in it, since with respect to judgement critique serves instead of theory; rather, following the division of philosophy into the theoretical and the practical, and [the division] of pure [philosophy] equally into such parts, the metaphysics of nature and of morals will constitute that business [*Geschäft*]. (AA 5:170)

Again, it is a matter of stepping (*schreiten*) toward the doctrine, which comprises two sides, "metaphysics of nature" and "metaphysics of morals"—which are now, noticeably, *not* italicized as they were in the first edition of the first *Critique*.¹⁴ The completion of this business is concurrently the arrival of the future perfect, a delivery of the yet to come announced by critique, the bridging of the lacuna and the filling in of a blank space. But precisely because this doctrinal metaphysics never fully appears (Kant only delivers a *Metaphysics of Morals*), the desire of reason ends up plummeting into the abyssal "*bythos*" beneath it and recoiling back into the anticipatory preparation (Derrida 1987:

12 For more on the performativity of the *parergon* see Harvey (2004: 59ff).

13 As Foucault said in the context of reading Kant, there is a continuing speech "*la page une fois blanche*," "once the page [is] blank" but also in the emptiness of the page, "the page [at] once blank" (Foucault 2008: 95).

14 This reflects the de-italicisation of these terms between the two editions of *Critique of Pure Reason* from 1781's "title [*Titel*], *Metaphysics of Nature*" (KrV Axxi) to 1787's "plan [*Plan*] of providing the metaphysics both of nature and of morals" (KrV Bxliii).

41). After all, here we are, three centuries later still in the ambit of critique, still stepping along the pathway tarrying with the propaedeutic (we are still in the midst of it and it is still “among us”); we stand at the portal of the *par-ergon* and not even the first line of the work itself, the *ergon*, has been written. While this blank has yet to be properly filled, Derrida implies that this is no oversight on the part of Kant but rather constitutes the very marrow of critique: it has the power it does only in so far as the future perfect remains empty and undelivered. It is this *Mangelhaftigkeit* (deficiency and deficit) that Kant sends us through the cacophony of failed attempts to present such a doctrine, the various post-Kantianisms aimed at plugging the lacuna (e.g., Reinhold’s *Elementarsystem*, Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* etc.). There is no time to waste, and yet we could waste all our time attempting to deliver the system in the hope that it will eventually be complete. But, alas, it continues to unavoidably recoil back into the padded comfort of the propaedeutic, back into the *Grundlegung* of metaphysics rather than the metaphysics itself.

In a sense, we could say that the propaedeutic character of critique is akin to the sublime, whose “abyss [*Abgrund*] threatens to devour [*verschlingen*] everything” (AA 5:270) except Kant has created a frame which has always already swallowed up any metaphysics that might succeed it by limiting knowledge to objects of possible experience. In this connection, the suspension of a theoretical doctrine of metaphysics is precisely what gives critique its critical flavor. Derrida again:

But even if it were established that in principle, in metaphysics in the Kantian sense, one must begin at the foundations, critique is not metaphysics: it is, *first, in search of the foundation* (and thus in fact comes *afterwards*), suspended like a crane or a dragline above the pit, working to scrape, probe, clear, and open up a sure ground (Derrida 1987: 50).

Critique is taken back to the Greek *krinein* here: to cut apart through decision, to keep separate, but also to hold in a state of sustained *krisis*:¹⁵ critique holds crisis open.¹⁶ In the end it is bound up with a suspension of the end in a promise that not only cannot be kept but must remain indefinitely promissory for the sake of the very fabric of critique.

But what about when Derrida speaks directly about the frame, when he defines a “*discourse of the frame*” (Derrida 1987: 45) as denoting a thickness—which also echoes a certain *Dichtung*, a fiction, a poetry and invention as densification (*dichten*)¹⁷—between two zones. With reference to the third *Critique*, Derrida shows that the frame Kant outlines is itself the instantiation of the inside and outside such that the line isn’t drawn between two pre-existing entities, but

15 See the entries for “critique” and “crisis” in Onions (1966: 229).

16 Sallis again: “*Metaphysics*—this too bespeaks crisis, no less than does *reason*. It bespeaks the same crisis” (Sallis 1980: 3).

17 See Schürmann (1987: 12).

rather being on/over (*Über*) the line¹⁸ first generates an interior and exterior or a before and an after. Just as in the performative framing of empty space dispersed throughout “Parergon” as well as Antonio Fantuzzi’s prints framing rectangular and oval empty spaces (e.g., Derrida 1987: 65–6), if there were no frame, the inside and outside, the before and after, wouldn’t only be indistinguishable, they’d cease being anything at all. Where does the (always) promissory, absent metaphysics stand in relation to this frame, then; is it the frame or the enframed? Where is the overlap between the before of critique and the after of metaphysics (if indeed there is an overlap at all)?

Arguably, a glimpse of it can be found in a 1799 note published by Kant, the infamous Declaration (*Erklärung*) against Fichte and the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Here it appears that the frame of critique has forced an incorporation of the doctrine that it prepares the ground for into itself. For instead of the demand for a (re)attachment of critique,¹⁹ Kant now acts as if its detachment never existed by nesting it into the system it always anticipated and pointed toward. The frame of critique now trespasses into the void it framed at its center. For while it is still about stepping—specifically the “*übergeschritten*” (stepping-over, transition or transgression)—from transcendental philosophy to metaphysics, directly after this Kant makes a powerful statement against reading the critique as merely preparatory:

Here I must remark that the presumption [*Anmaßung*] foisted upon me [that] I wanted to deliver merely a *propaedeutic* to transcendental-philosophy and not the *system* of this philosophy itself is incomprehensible [*unbegreiflich*] to me. (AA 12:370–1)

Critique is no longer merely the frame, then. But how could this statement not be incomprehensible to those who still live in the ambit of critique, that is, *to us*?

Against many of Kant’s remarks both in and around the first *Critique* (e.g., KrV Bxxxvi and Bxlili)—and even against Kant’s own plea in the *Erklärung* to read *Critique of Pure Reason* by the letter (AA 12:371)—critique must now be identified with the transcendental philosophy, which in turn seems to be ambiguously bound up with the reborn system of metaphysics. (And we cannot fail to engage in a nod toward Heidegger’s thesis that transcendental philosophy is *metaphysica generalis*, that is, ontology here).²⁰ It’s as though Kant says, “no future needs to be assumed; we have everything right here, right now in 1799; the promise has, all along, been fulfilled, we just didn’t realize it until now.” Doesn’t the after-critique, which must remain blank, not only get filled in here, but erased entirely since the frame has dissolved into its own absent

18 See Heidegger’s and Jünger’s (2008) correspondence and the latter’s essay dedicated to Heidegger’s sixtieth birthday, “*Über die Linie*.”

19 See AA 5:168 and Derrida (1987: 39).

20 See Heidegger (1995:199–200). For more on this interconnection see de Vleeschauwer (1962: 165).

enframed? And doesn't this erasure also wipe-out the very reason why the interpellation of critique had the impact it did on metaphysics and its history?

To put this closer to Derrida's terms, Kant's *Erklärung* sees the *parergon* falling into the *ergon*, or the point where the supplement and frame is shown to have all along—perhaps secretly—been the entire work itself.²¹ Critique had been viewed by Kant as a preparatory project, an annex leading onto a system of metaphysics. It was considered a prior, albeit entirely necessary, supplemental clearing; a *parergonic hors d'oeuvres* that prepares the ground for a future *ergon*, a future *oeuvre*. And now, here in the *Erklärung* we find this distinction collapsing such that the use of the word "*Erklärung*" is quite apt in its equivocation; the clearing of the pathway toward the system needs to overlap with the system itself, which is affirmed in another type of *Erklärung*: clearing-up the controversial matter of Fichte, making it clear that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not needed since critique is itself the long desired *Lehre*. In a way, the situation is more deconstructive than deconstruction itself as if Kant made critique *too* strong, *too* powerful, such that it overflowed beyond its intended purpose, for as Derrida puts it, critique is a "discourse constantly threatened with overflowing [*débordment*]" (Derrida 1987: 70). (And *débordment*, as Derrida reminds us, also refers to a de-boarding or perhaps a sort of walking the plank and falling into the sea). The *hors d'oeuvres* is no longer an announcement of what is to come, it is no longer the outside that remains outside; for Kant now reveals that it has been the main (dis)course all along; but right at that moment, just when we accept this revelation, the deconstructive moment calls out: we remain in a state of hunger.

"One fine, sunny day"

With all this in mind, I want to reach for a broader conclusion here to do with the absence of work in general and its connection with the dynamic between the *parergon* and *ergon*. For what Derrida hints at in his deconstruction of Kant is a project of reading the history of Western thought not only under the rubric of a "metaphysics of presence" but also under its related mode of occurrence, that is, the prosthesis and the stand-in or substitute. Because what critique opens onto, ultimately, is a "non-existent" text; indeed, it is *premised upon* the (impossible) possibility of someday bringing this non-existent text to presence. Derrida's intervention is to show how, when broadened, this may apply to *all* properly "philosophical" texts in the history of Western metaphysics, that they are all prosthetic stand-ins for unpenning texts never delivered; the work itself as the shadow of another work that was never written. Giorgio Agamben says it succinctly:

Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned, and destined to remain so, because later works, which in turn will be the prologues or the molds for other absent works, represent

21 See Derrida (1987: 59).

only sketches or death masks. The absent work, although it is unplaceable in any precise chronology, thereby constitutes the written works as *prolegomena* or *paralipomena* of a non-existent text; or, in a more general sense, as *parerga* which find their true meaning only in the context of an illegible *ergon*. (Agamben 1993: 3)

The text we receive is always the shadow of (and sometimes, as with the case of Kant's three *Critiques*, in the shadow of) a work never written. The *ergon*, even if Kant tries to backhandedly identify it with the *parergon* to save critique in the face of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, must remain—can *only* remain—illegible in the literal sense of unreadable because there is no text present to read.

The implication of course is that the only text which can be called properly “philosophical” is the text that doesn't prosthetically stand-in for an absent work, the text that is not simply present in the shadow of a work that is not there, but is this absent work itself sustained in its illegibility. But this is equivalent to demanding a pure *ergon* without any *parergon*, which would result in a sort of self-cancellation of the *ergon* (after all, for the *ergon* to be *ergon* it must be framed by a *parergon* or else it dissipates into a pure nothing). So the absent work that is most authentically absent *as* absent and not hidden behind a sheen of false presence would be a text that isn't really a work but is only an announcement of its own absence. Metaphysics, in Kant's sense of the term, then, can only be a proper metaphysics in so far as it remains absent—that is, if it sustains itself as a marked, italicized *Metaphysics* without a readable text corresponding to it. For in the mere announcement of a work through its entitling and then the subsequent failure to write it, Kant accidentally opens up the deconstructive space wherein one can read the problematic text of the history of metaphysics as consisting in none other than the tradition of assuming its deliverability. And it is here that we could project an alternative reading of the history of metaphysics not based on presence, but on absence.

What holds critique back from becoming deconstruction, then? It is Kant's self-assurance of closure, the unreflective certainty he has that reason can be pacified if critique stows away unnoticed under the guise of doctrine. As Morgan puts it (albeit in reference to a slightly different locale): “Kant still retains the notion that one fine, sunny day the philosophical event will take place” (Morgan 2000: 77). Derrida was not so sure, for his assurance was of a different kind, a keeping open of no assurances, a birth always in the process of being born. The roles have, then, been figuratively reversed; we find that it is really a matter of the failed attempt at closure by putting to death in Kant, and the deferral of closure by refusing to die in Derrida.

Of course, my point has not been to claim that we should “return” to Kant through Derrida, for we know that we can return to Kant at any moment in any manner we like. My point, rather, has been that Kant opens up a potential deconstructive space within his own work that makes possible what Derrida does. But it isn't as simple as a transcendental relationship, critique doesn't act as the condition of possibility for deconstruction, not only because of the

radical distance between them, but because the marginal blind spots in critique are left in the margins by Kant. For it is only on the basis of Kant's eschewal, of his holding back (from engaging in a *Fort-schritt*), of his handing over to absence, that critique doesn't morph into deconstruction—that is, Kant's turn away from confronting the deficit that is the marrow of critique is what opens up a pathway. Moreover, when this is combined with Kant's refusal to diagnose an overflowing of the margins of critique into the metaphysics it attempted to lay the ground for, a potential route to deconstruction is carved out. Or to put it in a way reminiscent of Jean-Luc Nancy, it is Kant (whose feminine form, *die Kante*, means "edge") who inadvertently delineates the border—or drives a wedge, which is an edge—between them.²² Kant is, for Nancy at least, "*die Kante* of philosophy" (Nancy 2008: 99), the edge of philosophy; perhaps the frame.

Thus, we end up with a curious circle, not quite a tautology but also not entirely free from the tautological: deconstruction steps away from critique, but it couldn't do this without the tear harbored within critique and its subsequent refrain from stepping-forward into it. Kant *after* Derrida, finally, means to read what is already at work in critique as the "presence of an *absence*" (Kojève 1980: 135)—to riff on Kojève at this late stage—and yet what can only trace itself through the framing conducted by deconstruction (an absence of the presence of a work of metaphysics at the core of critique). And so, in some obscene sense, Kant's birth is framed by Derrida's death, or maybe it is the birth of deconstruction which frames the death of critique?

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22 See Nancy (2008: 91).

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Terens Tomson

Posle rođenja/smrti Kanta/Deride

Apstrakt

U ovom radu istražujem tačke preklapanja (kao i razlike) između Kantovog uokvirivanja kritike i Deridine dekonstrukcije tog okvira. Počinjem situiranjem pitanja „gde se sada nalazimo“ kroz neke od Kantovih kasnih (neobjavljenih) misli o metafizici i „Fortschritt-u“ (napredovanju i progresu) iz njegovog dela *Kakve su stvarne napretke postigle metafizika u Nemačkoj od vremena Lajbnica i Volfa?* Pokazujem kako Kant nenamerno otvara dekonstruktivni prostor u samom centru kritike (uokvirivanje metafizike budućnosti, onoga što dolazi [Zukunft]), a što nikada zaista ne dolazi, dok istovremeno izbegava pokušaj da kroz taj prostor prođe. Imajući to u vidu, zatim analiziram Deridino preuzimanje ove pukotine kroz njegove diskusije o *Parergonu*, *Ergonu* i *hors d'oeuvres*—predjelu izvan i pre glavnog dela—u *Istini u slikarstvu*. Moj cilj je da razjasnim perspektivu prema kojoj možemo istovremeno reći, možda metaforički, ali i metodološki, da Deridina smrt uokviruje Kantovo rođenje i da rođenje dekonstrukcije uokviruje smrt kritike.

Ključne reči: kritika, dekonstrukcija, metafizika, budućnost, okvir, parergon, ergon, Fortschritt, *Istina u slikarstvu*