The Anti-Aesthetic

ESSAYS ON POSTMODERN CULTURE

Edited and with an introduction by Hal Foster

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The Object of Post-Criticism

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What is at stake in the controversy surrounding contemporary critical writing is easier to understand when placed in the context of modernism and postmodernism in the arts. The issue is "representation"—specifically, the representation of the object of study in a critical text. Criticism now is being transformed in the same way that literature and the arts were transformed by the avant-garde movements in the early decades of this century. The break with "mimesis," with the values and assumptions of "realism," which revolutionized the modernist arts, is now underway (belatedly) in criticism, the chief consequence of which, of course, is a change in the relation of the critical text to its object—literature.

A rationale for this shift may be found in Hayden White's complaint that "when historians claim that history is a combination of science and art, they generally mean that it is a combination of late-nineteenth-century social science and mid-nineteenth-century art," modelled on the novels of Scott or Thackeray.[1] White suggests, instead, that historians of literature (or of any discipline, for that matter) should use *contemporary* scientific and artistic insights and methods as the basis for their work, pursuing "the possibility of using impressionistic, expressionistic, surrealistic, and (perhaps) even actionist modes of representation for dramatizing the significance of data which they have uncovered but which all too frequently they are prohibited from seriously contemplating as evidence" (*Tropics,* pp. 42, 47-8). I will argue, following White's lead, that "post-criticism" (-modernist, -structuralist) is constituted precisely by the application of the devices of modernist art to critical representations; furthermore, that the principal device taken over by the critics and theorists is the compositional pair collage/montage.

Collage/Montage

By most accounts, collage is the single most revolutionary formal innovation in artistic representation to occur in our century.[2] Although the technique itself is ancient, collage was introduced into the "high arts" (as is well known) by Braque and Picasso as a solution to the problems raised by analytic cubism, a solution which finally provided an alternative to the "illusionism" of perspective which had dominated Western painting since the early Renaissance.

> In a still-life scene at a café, with lemon, oyster, glass, pipe, and newspaper [*Still-Life with Chair Caning* (1912), the first cubist collage], Picasso glued a piece of oilcloth on which is printed the pattern of woven caning, thus indicating the presence of a chair without the slightest use of traditional methods. For just as the painted letters JOU signify JOURNAL, a section of facsimile caning signifies the whole chair. Later Picasso would go one step further and incorporate into his collages actual objects or fragments of objects, signifying literally themselves. This strange idea was to transform cubism and to become the source for much of twentieth-century art.[3]

The interest of collage as a device for criticism resides partly in the objectivist impulse of cubism (as opposed to the non-objective movements which it inspired). The cubist collage, by incorporating directly into the work an actual fragment of the referent (open form), remains "representational" while breaking completely with the *trompe l'oeil* illusionism of traditional realism. Moreover, "these tangible and non-illusionistic objects presented a new and original source of interplay between artistic expressions and the experience of the everyday world. An unpredicted and significant step in bringing art and life closer to being a simultaneous experience had been taken." [4]

It is not necessary to repeat here the historical account of how collage became the predominate, all-pervasive device of 20th-century arts. Rather I will note the principles of collage/montage which have directed representations in a diversity of arts and media, including most recently literary criticism: "To lift a certain number of elements from works, objects, preexisting messages, and to integrate them in a new creation in order to produce an original totality manifesting ruptures of diverse sorts." [5] The operation, which may be recognized as a kind of "bricolage" (Lévi-Strauss), includes four characteristics—découpage (or severing); preformed or extant messages or materials; assemblage (montage); discontinuity or heterogeneity. "Collage" is the transfer of materials from one context to another, and "montage" is the "dissemination" of these borrowings through the new setting (*Collages*, 72). Two features of collage illustrated in *Still Life with Chair Caning* are worth noting here: 1) that the borrowed

fragment is a signifier "that would summarize in one form many characteristics of a given object" (Fry, 32-3); 2) the chair caning is in fact represented by a *simulacrum*—the printed oil cloth—which is nevertheless a readymade addition rather than an illusionistic reproduction.

Photography is an equally useful model for the mode of representation adopted by post-criticism—if it is understood not as the culmination of linear perspective, but as a means of *mechanical reproduction* (as described in Walter Benjamin's famous article). The analogy between post-criticism and the revolution in representation which transformed the arts, then, should include as well the principle of photographic representation in both its realist and semiotic versions. Considered at this level of generalization, photographic representation may be described according to the collage principle. Indeed, it is a collage machine (perfected in television), producing simulacra of the life-world: 1) Photography selects and transfers a fragment of the visual continuum into a new frame. The realist argument, most forcefully stated by André Bazin, is that because of mechanical reproduction, which forms the image of the world automatically without the intervention of human "creativity" (the reduction of this "creativity" to the act of selection, as in the readymade), "the photographic image is a kind of decal or transfer, . . . [it] is the object itself."[6] 2) Although semiotics prefers to designate this relation to the real in terms of iconic and indexical signifiers, the photographic image signifies itself and something else—it becomes a signifier remotivated within the system of a new frame. There are several versions of the argument that photography (or film) is a language, best summarized in Sergei Eisenstein's notion of "intellectual montage," in which the real is used as an element of a discourse.

The strongest version of the semiotic theory of photography is realized in the strategies of photomontage (in which are joined, in any case, the principles of photography and collage/montage). In photomontage the photographic images are themselves cut out and pasted into new, surprising, provoking juxtapositions, as in John Heartfield's *The Meaning of the Hitlerian Salute* (1933), which, besides the title, consists of:

> A caption which takes the form of one of Hitler's slogans: "I have millions behind me." An image: in right profile Hitler gives the Hitlerian salute, but reversed to the back [his unique version of the gesture, with palm flipped back, fingers extended beside his ear]. His silhouette reaches only to the middle of the image. Above his palm [is] a wad of banknotes being handed to him by a large-bellied figure, dressed in black, immense and anonymous (one barely sees his chin).[7]

Hitler's words as well as his image are turned against him in this recombination, revealing in a stroke the link between German capitalism and the Nazi party.

Photomontage illustrates the "productive" potential of collage promoted by Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht (among others). "I am speaking of the procedure of montage: the superimposed element disrupts the context in which it is inserted," Benjamin says, describing Brecht's plays. "The interruption of action, on account of which Brecht described his theatre as *epic*, constantly counteracts an illusion in the audience. For such illusion is a hindrance to a theater that proposes to make use of elements of reality in experimental rearrangements. . . . [The spectator] recognizes it as the real situation, not with satisfaction, as in the theatre of naturalism, but with astonishment. Epic theatre, therefore, does not reproduce situations, rather it discovers them." [8]

Brecht defended the mechanics of collage/montage against Georg Lukács's socialist realism (based on the aesthetics of 19th-century fiction) as an alternative to the organic model of growth and its classic assumptions of harmony, unity, linearity, closure. Montage does not reproduce the real, but constructs an object (its lexical field includes the terms "assemble, build, join, unite, add, combine, link, construct, organize"—*Montage*, 121) or rather, mounts a process ("the relation of form to content is no longer a relation of exteriority, the form resembling clothes which can dress no matter what content, it is *process, genesis, result of a work*"—*Montage*, 120) in order to intervene in the world, not to reflect but to change reality.

There is nothing innately subversive about the photomontage principle, or any other formal device. Rather, as we are often reminded, such effects must be continually reinvented. Part of the interest of this context for post-criticism is that the debates among Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno, et al with respect to the value of montage experiments in literature will no doubt be reiterated now with respect to criticism. Will the collage/montage revolution in representation be admitted into the academic essay, into the discourse of knowledge, replacing the "realist" criticism based on the notions of "truth" as correspondence to or correct reproduction of a referent object of study? The question of post-criticism was first posed in just this way by Roland Barthes in his reply to the attack made on his Racine book by Raymond Picard (who associated Barthes with dadaism). Barthes explained that the modernist poets, beginning at least with Mallarmé, had demonstrated already the unification of poetry and criticism—that literature was itself a critique of language, and that criticism had no "meta"-language capable of describing or accounting for literature. Barthes concluded that the categories of literature and criticism could no longer be kept apart, that now there were only *writers*. The relation of the critical text to its object of study was to be conceived in terms no longer of subject-object but of subject-predicate (authors and critics both facing the same material—language), with critical "meaning" being a "simulacrum" of the literary text, a new "flowering" of the rhetoric at work in literature. The critic's text, he says,

suggesting the systematic transformation relating the two writings, is an *anamorphosis* of its object—an analogy with distorted perspective which, in post-criticism, is joined by the analogy with collage/montage.[9]

The response to his "paraliterary"[10] initiative was violent and hostile, Barthes explained, because his project, following the lead of the artists themselves, touched language directly.[11] Jacques Derrida recently restated this criterion of critical vanguardism: "The deconstruction of a pedagogical institution and all that it implies. What this institution cannot bear, is for anyone to tamper with language. . . . It can bear more readily the most apparently revolutionary ideological sorts of 'content,' if only that content does not touch the borders of language and of all the juridico-political contracts that it guarantees."[12]

Grammatology

That Jacques Derrida should explore the lessons of the modernist revolution in representation is understandable, considering that he undertakes a deconstruction of the very concept and philosophy of mimesis. "Mimesis," which Derrida labels "mimetologism," refers to that capture of representation by the metaphysics of "logocentrism," the era extending from Plato to Freud (and beyond) in which writing (all manner of inscription) is reduced to a secondary status as "vehicle," in which the signified or referent is always *prior* to the material sign, the purely intelligible prior to the merely sensible.[13] "It is not a question of 'rejecting' these notions," Derrida writes. "They are necessary and, at least at present, nothing is conceivable for us without them. . . . Since these concepts are indispensable for unsettling the heritage to which they belong, we should be even less prone to renounce them" (*Grammatology,* 14-15). Derrida's alternative to "mimetologism," then, does *not* abandon or deny reference, but re-thinks reference in another way: "It complicates the boundary line that ought to run between the text and what seems to lie beyond its fringes, what is classed as the *real*."[14]

It is becoming apparent that in his reliance on collage/montage as the stylistic device with which to deconstruct mimesis, Derrida is doing for this new mode of representation what Aristotle, in the *Poetics,* did for "mimetologism." In the same way that Aristotle provided at once a theory of tragedy (mimesis) and a method (formal analysis) for the study of all literary modes, Derrida in a text such as *Glas* (identified as the "exemplary" text of poststructuralism[15]) provides a "theory" of montage (grammatology) and a method (deconstruction) for working with any mode of writing whatsoever. Derrida is the "Aristotle" of montage.

In spite of its associated complexities and controversies, Derrida's basic formulation of the nature of language is relatively simple, a formulation which, placed in the context of the collage paradigm, takes on its fullest significance. Grammatology is "poststructuralist" in that it replaces the "sign" (composed of signifier and signified—the most basic unit of meaning according to structuralism) with a still more basic unit—the *gram*.

> It is a question of producing a new concept of writing. This concept can be called *gram* or *différance*. . . . Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each 'element'—phoneme or grapheme—being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. The gram, then, is the most general concept of semiology—which thus becomes grammatology.[16]

Collage/montage, in other words, is the manifestation at the level of discourse of the "gram" principle, as will be made clear when its definition is compared with the following rhetorical definition of the collage effect:

> Its [collage's] heterogeneity, even if it is reduced by every operation of composition, imposes itself on the reading as stimulation to produce a signification which could be neither univocal nor stable. Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality. The trick of collage consists also of never entirely suppressing the alterity of these elements reunited in a temporary composition. Thus the art of collage proves to be one of the most effective strategies in the putting into question of all the illusions of representation (*Collages*, 34-5).

This undecidable reading effect, oscillating between presence and absence, is just what Derrida tries to achieve at every level of his "double science," from his paleonymic redefinition (remotivation) of concepts to his publishing of two books under one cover (*Glas*).

The notion of the gram is especially useful for theorizing the evident fact, much discussed in structuralist psychoanalysis (Lacan) and ideological criticism (Althusser), that signifieds and signifiers are continually breaking apart and reattaching in new combinations, thus revealing the inadequacy of Saussure's model of the sign, according to which the signifier and the signified relate as if they were two sides of the same sheet of paper. The tendency of Western philosophy throughout its history ("logocentrism") to try to pin down and fix a specific signified to a given signifier violates,

according to grammatology, the nature of language, which functions not in terms of matched *pairs* (signifier/signifieds) but of *couplers* or *couplings*—"a person or thing that couples or links together." The following description of what Derrida calls "iterability" is also an excellent summary of the collage consequences of the gram:

> And this is the possibility on which I want to insist: the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication; in writing, which is to say in the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its 'original' desire-to-say-what-one-means and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context. Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be *cited,* put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable.[17]

In criticism, as in literature, collage takes the form of citation, but citation carried to an extreme (in post-criticism), collage being the "limit-case" of citation, and grammatology being the theory of writing as citation (cf. *Collages,* 301).

A useful point of departure for reviewing Derrida's own montage practice is the collection entitled *Dissemination* (a term which is listed as a synonym for collage/montage—*Collages,* 23) of which he says that "the most general title of the problem treated in those texts would be: castration and mimesis" (*Positions,* 84). In citing the object of study or in offering examples as illustrations, the critic is in the position of castrator: "Such a decision is a castration, at least acted out or feigned, or a circumcision. This is as it always is, and the knife that with obsessive frequency slashes the tree of *Numbers* [the text Derrida "studies" in the essay "Dissemination"] hones itself as a phallic threat. . . . The 'operation' of reading/writing goes by the way of *'the blade of a red knife'* " (*Dissemination,* 301). But rather than elaborating this connection between writing and psychoanalysis (exploited at length in Derrida's texts), I will confine myself to noting the two chief elements of Derrida's post-critical technique—grafting and mimicry:

1. *Graft.* Derrida's discussion of montage writing as "grafting" in "Dissemination" is itself couched in the collage style (it *does* what it *says*), in a text consisting of nearly equal portions of selections from *Numbers* (a French "new new novel" by Philippe Sollers) and Derrida's frame text. "To write," Derrida states, "means to graft. It's the same word" (*Dissemination,* 355). Then, in a description of method which applies as much to his own as to Sollers's writing, he adds, distinguishing post-critical from conventional collage:

> Hence all those textual samples provided by *Numbers* do not, as you might have been tempted to believe, serve as "quotations," "collages," or even "illustrations." They are not being applied upon the surface or in the interstices of a text that would already exist without them. And they themselves can only be read within the operation of their reinscription, within the graft. It is the sustained, discrete violence of an incision that is not apparent in the thickness of the text, a calculated insemination of the proliferating allogene through which the two texts are transformed, deform each other, contaminate each other's content, tend at times to reject each other, or pass elliptically one into the other and become regenerated in the repetition, along the edges of an *overcast seam.* Each grafted text continues to radiate back toward the site of its removal, transforming that too, as it affects the new territory (*Dissemination,* 355).[18]

The new representation, the new status of the example mounted in the critical frame, has to do in part with the shift away from commentary and explanation, which rely on concepts, to work instead by means of examples—both in terms of the substitution of examples for arguments in one's own writing,[19] and of approaching the object of study (when it is another critical or theoretical text) at the level of the examples it uses.[20] "Clip out an example, since you cannot and should not undertake the infinite commentary that at every moment seems necessarily to engage and immediately to annul itself" (*Dissemination,* 300). If the clipping is associated with "castration" ("So make some incision, some violent arbitrary cut"), the montage or dissemination of the fragments thus collected in the new frame is associated with "invagination" (collage/montage is a bisexual writing).

The logic of examples governed by the principle of invagination is itself illustrated by the "loop hole" of a figure borrowed from set theory (the modern heir of the notion of the "concept" as a "having" or "belonging to") in order to describe the paradoxical escape of the "example" from conceptualization (collage writing being a kind of theft which violates "property" in every sense—intellectual property protected by copyright, and the properties of a given concept). The illustration figures that which Derrida formulates as the "law of the law of genre":

> It is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy. In the code of set theories, if I may use it at least figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set. The trait that marks membership inevitably divides, the boundary of the set comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole; and the outcome of this division and of this abounding remains as singular as it is limitless.[21]

Derrida's strategy with regard to "invagination" (matting or mounting the

example) is to find a mode of critical "mimesis" which, like the law of the law of genre, would relate to its objects of study as an excess (and vice-versa)—the "law of participation without membership, of contamination," similar to the paradox of the hierarchy of classification in set theory: "The re-mark of belonging does not belong" ("Genre," 212).

The question Derrida poses, faced with the problem of comparing Blanchot's *L'arrêt de mort* with Shelley's *The Triumph of Life,* but seeking an alternative to "mimetological" commentary, is: "How can one text, assuming its unity, give or present another to be read, without touching it, without saying anything about it, practically without referring to it?" ("Borderlines," 80). His solution is to "endeavor to create an effect of *superimposing,* of superimprinting one text on the other," the text as "palimpsest" or "macula," a double band or "double bind" procedure which breaks with the conventional assumptions of criticism and pedagogy: "One procession is superimposed on the other, accompanying it without accompanying it." But, "You can't give a course on Shelley without ever mentioning him, pretending to deal with Blanchot, and more than a few others" ("Borderlines," 83-4). One version of the solution, utilized in "Dissemination" and *Glas,* is simply to interpolate rhythmically (the "art of interruption" as a kind of music) a series of citations from the "host" texts. But, as *Glas* proves, citation produces excessively long texts. The model for a writing which goes beyond juxtaposition to superimposition is not collage but photography. "Borderlines" itself is compared (with respect to the problem of translation) to a "film for developing," for "processing" —hence, the text as "procession." "This superimposing is readable," Derrida adds, referring to a double-exposed print in Blanchot's story, "on a 'photograph'" ("Borderlines," 77, 85). The task of post-criticism, in other words, is to think the consequences for critical representation of the new mechanical means of reproduction (film and magnetic tape—technologies which require collage/montage composition) in the way that Brecht, as Benjamin noted in "The Author as Producer," had done for theatrical representation. Derrida formulates his new mimesis of superimposition in terms of mime.

2. *Mime.* The most important innovation in Derrida's practice of montage is a "new mimesis" in which the text mimes its object of study.[22] *Dissemination* turns out to be a unified study in that the theory of a new mimesis worked out in the first two essays ("Plato's Pharmacy" is a review of "mimesis" in Platonic philosophy; "The Double Session" is a review of Mallarmé's alternative to Platonic mimesis, discovered in mime) is applied in the concluding piece ("Dissemination"). The chief lesson of "Plato's Pharmacy" is that any composition which works according to the principle

of mechanical reproduction falls under the category (despised in Platonic philosophy) of hypomnesis or artificial memory; hypomnesis can only mime knowledge. The sophist sells only "the signs and insignia of science; not memory itself (*mneme*), only monuments (*hypomnemata*), inventories, archives, citations, copies, accounts, tales, lists, notes, duplicates, chronicles, genealogies, references. Not memory but memorials" (*Dissemination,* 106-7). Writing, in short, is a simulacrum of "true science." But "true science," from Plato to positivism, is what post-criticism puts in question.

> We are today on the eve of Platonism. Which can also, naturally, be thought of as the morning after Hegelianism. At that specific point, the *philosophia,* the *episteme* are not "overturned," "rejected," "reined in," etc., in the name of something like writing; quite the contrary. But they are, according to a relation that philosophy would call *simulacrum,* according to a more subtle excess of truth, assumed and at the same time displaced into a completely different field, where one can still, but that's all, "mime absolute knowledge" (*Dissemination,* 107-8).

Secondly, Derrida concludes from his extensive analysis of Mallarmé's *Mimique* (in "The Double Session") that mime models an alternative to Platonic mimesis.

> We are faced then with mimicry imitating nothing. . . . There is no simple reference. It is in this that the mime's operation does allude, but alludes to nothing. . . . Mallarmé thus preserves the differential structure of mimicry or *mimesis,* but without its Platonic or metaphysical interpretation, which implies that somewhere the being of something that *is,* is being imitated. Mallarmé even maintains (and maintains himself in) the structure of the *phantasma* as it is defined by Plato: the simulacrum as the copy of a copy. With the exception that there is no longer any model, and hence no copy (*Dissemination,* 206).

Once one realizes that the mime emblematizes (for Derrida) mechanical reproduction, it becomes apparent that representation without reference is a description of the way film or tape functions as a "language," receiving exact copies of sights and sounds (in collage terms, mechanical reproduction removes or lifts sights and sounds from their contexts—*de*-motivates them, hence the *loss* of reference, the undecidability of allusion), only to *re*-motivate them as signifiers in a new system. Mallarmé earns the label of "modernist" by detaching mimicry from logocentric mimetology; Derrida becomes "postmodernist" by putting mimicry to work in the interest of a new reference (discussed as "allegory" in the next section).

Derrida's first experiments with mimed writing consisted largely of the collage procedure of direct, massive citation ("Here again I do nothing more, can do nothing more than cite, as you will come perhaps to see," [*Glas,* 24]). The working assumption was that repetition is "originary"—

"Repeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has the same center, *the origin has played.*"[23] Derrida's desire to superimpose one text on the other (the program to which mimicry is addressed) is an attempt to devise a system of reference or representation which works in terms of *différance*,[24] with its reversible temporality, rather than in terms of the irreversible time of the sign. From the very beginning, then, the strategy of deconstruction has been repetition: "There is probably no choice to be made between two lines of thought; our task is rather to reflect on the circularity which makes the one pass into the other indefinitely. And, by strictly repeating this *circle* in its own historical possibility, we allow the production of some *elliptical* change of site, within the difference involved in repetition."[25] Here we have the earliest version of text as "texture"—"touching" language—in which the deconstructive writing *traces* the surface of the object of study (writing as "tracing") looking for "flaws" or "faults"—the openings of joints, articulations, where the text might be dismembered. The deconstruction is accomplished in fact by borrowing the very terms utilized by the host work itself—"difference" from Saussure, "supplement" from Rousseau, and so on—and remotivating them, detaching them (following the principle of the gram) from one conceptual set or semantic field and reattaching them to another (but always with the most systematic attention to the potentials or materials available in the word itself).

As the strategy of "literal" repetition developed, the borrowing of terms and the direct citations were supplemented with the construction of general simulacra of the object of study. The practice is clearly illustrated in an extreme case, such as "Cartouches" (in *La Vérité en Peinture*), in which the task is to mime in discourse a *visual* work. The referent is a work by Gérard Titus-Carmel entitled *The Pocket-Size Tlingit Coffin* (1975-76), consisting of a "sculpture"—a mahogany box of "modest" dimensions—and 127 drawings of this "model," each from a different angle. The relationship that exists within the *Tlingit Coffin* between the sculpture and the drawings emblematizes or remarks the relationship of Derrida's critical mimicry to its chosen referent ("model"). The sculpture (the box as model) "does not belong to the line of which it makes a part," but is heterogeneous to it (*Vérité,* 217). Derrida's own discourse, as noted earlier, "touches nothing," leaves the reader or viewer alone with the work, "passes beside it in silence, as another theory, another series, saying nothing about what it represents for me, nor even for him" (*Vérité,* 227).

Unlike Heidegger, who declared that art "speaks," Derrida insists on the muteness of the series, or on its capacity to work without concept, without conclusions: "Such would be the de-monstration. Let us not abuse the easy word-play. De-monstration proves without showing, without evidencing any conclusion, without entailing anything, without an available thesis. It

proves according to a different mode, but proceeding with its step of demonstration [*pas de demonstration*] or non-demonstration. It transforms, it transforms itself, in its process rather than advancing a signifiable object of discourse."[26] The series of drawings, that is, de-monstrates the problem of order and representation in the relation of examples to models, which is why Derrida selected it, mounted it. Indeed, his own text relates to this referent the way the drawings relate to the box, an example mounted because, like *Numbers*, it exposes exposition.

The strategy for miming the *Tlingit Coffin* is to ignore the plastic objects as such (in the way that the "content" of *Numbers* essentially was ignored) and to mime the structuring process of the work—to concentrate on the generation of a "contingent" of terms (cartouche, paradigm, article, duction, contingent and the like) which are processed in a way parallel to the way Titus-Carmel runs through 127 variations in his drawings of the model, "putting them in perspective, turning them about in every sense (direction) by a series of swerves [*écarts*], variations, modulations, anamorphoses," finally stopping after a predetermined number of pages, creating the same effect of contingent necessity or arbitrary motivation as the series of exactly 127 drawings (*Vérité*, 229). The anagram and the homonym operate on the lexicon the way anamorphoses operate on representational perspective. Derrida mimes the dated drawings further by composing as if in a journal, with dated entries, each entry constituting a variation on a theme. Such is the logic of the simulacrum as translation, as verbal mimicry of a visual scene—a mimicry which functions similarly in other texts, regardless of referent.

The implication of textual mime for post-criticism, informing paraliterature as a hybrid of literature and criticism, art and science, is that knowledge of an object of study may be obtained without conceptualization or explanation. Rather, as if following Wittgenstein's admonition that "the meaning is the use," Derrida enacts or performs (mimes) the compositional structuration of the referent, resulting in another text of the same "kind" (genre—but "different" according to the "law of the law of genre" noted above). Post-criticism, then, functions with an "epistemology" of performance—knowing as making, producing, doing, acting, as in Wittgenstein's account of the relation of knowing to the "mastery of a technique." Thus post-criticism writes "on" its object in the way that Wittgenstein's knower exclaims, "Now I know how to go on!"[27]—with this "on" carrying all the dimensions and ambiguities of the "on" in Derrida's "Living On" (beyond, about, upon, on—including the parasitical connotation). Writing may show more (and other) than it says—the "surplus value" of writing which interests Derrida. The name of this "more" is "allegory."

Allegory

The importance of allegory for postmodernism has already been discussed by critics such as Craig Owens (among others) who in fact uses the writings of Derrida and Paul de Man to define the question. Owens identifies allegory with Derrida's notion of "supplement" (one of the many names Derrida assigns to the effect of the gram): "If allegory is identified as a supplement ["an expression externally added to another expression," hence "extra," yet supplying a lack], then it is also aligned with writing, insofar as writing is conceived as supplementary to speech."[28] Owens also makes good use of Derrida's notion of "deconstruction" to suggest how postmodernism goes "beyond formalism":

> The deconstructive impulse is characteristic of postmodernist art in general and must be distinguished from the self-critical tendency of modernism. Modernist theory presupposes that mimesis, the adequation of an image to a referent, can be bracketed or suspended, and that the art object itself can be substituted (metaphorically) for its referent. . . . Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference.[29]

Objections have been raised concerning the possibility of sustaining this distinction between self-reference and a problematized reference—both to Owen's statement and to Derrida's project.[30] These doubts about the "post," about the possibility of working "beyond" modernism or structuralism, are based in thought which is still semiological rather than grammatological. Grammatology has emerged on the far side of the formalist crisis and developed a discourse which is fully referential, but referential in the manner of "narrative allegory" rather than of "allegoresis." "Allegoresis," the mode of commentary long practiced by traditional critics, "suspends" the surface of the text, applying a terminology of "verticalness, levels, hidden meaning, the hieratic difficulty of interpretation," whereas "narrative allegory" (practiced by post-critics) explores the literal—*letteral*—level of the language itself, in a horizontal investigation of the polysemous meanings simultaneously available in the words themselves—in etymologies and puns—and in the things the words name. The allegorical narrative unfolds as a dramatization or enactment (personification) of the "literal truth inherent in the words themselves."[31] In short, narrative allegory favors the material of the signifier over the meanings of the signifieds.

An idea of how this material reference functions may be derived from the examples Owens mentions, including his point (supporting my discussion of

photography) that film is the "primary vehicle for modern allegory" because of its mode of representation: "Film composes narrative out of a succession of concrete images, which makes it particularly suited to allegory's essential pictogrammatism"; and, citing Barthes, "'an allegory is a rebus, writing composed of concrete images'" ("Allegorical Impulse, Part 2," 74). Owens also cites the example of Sherrie Levine, who literally "takes" (other people's) photographs, as an extreme version of the allegorical capacity of collage as "readymade." The point of a recent allegorical project by Levine, in which she "selected, mounted, and framed Andreas Feininger's photographs of natural subjects," Owens explains, is the deconstruction of the opposition between nature and culture. "When Levine wants an image of nature, she does not produce one herself but appropriates another image, and this she does in order to expose the degree to which 'nature' is always already implicated in a system of cultural values which assigns it a specific, culturally determined position."[32] Levine, that is, de-monstrates the grammatological writing appropriate to the age of mechanical reproduction in which "copyright" now means the right to copy anything, a mimicry or repetition which is originary, producing differences (just as in allegory anything may mean anything else).

Post-critics write with the discourse of others (the already-written) the way Levine "takes" photographs. In the words of the great montage-ist of electronic music, John Cage, "with magnetic tape, the possibility exists to use the literature of music as material (cutting it up, transforming it, etc.); this is the best thing that could have happened to it."[33] Roland Barthes typifies the relationship between science and art which exists in para-literature. In this new "intellectual art," he explains, "we produce simultaneously theory, critical combat, and pleasure; we subject the objects of knowledge and discussion—as in any art—no longer to an instance of truth, but to a consideration of *effects*."[34] The point is that "one plays a science, one puts it in the picture—*like a piece in a collage*" (*Barthes*, 100). In his own case, Barthes often played with linguistics: "you use a pseudo-linguistics, a metaphorical linguistics: not that grammatical concepts seek out images in order to express themselves, but just the contrary, *because these concepts come to constitute allegories*, a second language, whose abstraction is diverted to fictive ends" (*Barthes*, 124). Barthes's statement is as precise a definition as it is possible to give of what post-criticism is, and of the way Derrida writes with, allegorizes, the gram.

Walter Benjamin, to whom Owens also alludes, is perhaps the principal precursor of the post-critical use of collage-allegory.

> Benjamin saw affinity between the allegoric imagination of the German baroque dramatists and the artistic needs of the twentieth century; first in the melancholy spirit of the former, with its emblematic but inscrutable insignia, which he rediscovered in Kafka; then in the cognate principle of montage

> which he found in the work of Eisenstein and Brecht. Montage became for him the modern, constructive, active, unmelancholy form of allegory, namely the ability to connect dissimilars in such a way as to "shock" people into new recognitions and understandings.[35]

Benjamin applied the collage/montage style in the early *One-Way Street* (the cover of which, when it was published in 1928, displayed a photomontage by Sascha Stone as an icon of the technique applied in the text[36]). Defining the conventional academic book as "an outdated mediation between two different filing systems,"[37] Benjamin wanted to write a book made up entirely of quotations in order to purge all subjectivity and allow the self to be a vehicle for the expression of "objective cultural tendencies"[38] (similar to Barthes's project in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*).

Benjamin's response to the problem of representation raised in philosophy by the modernist crisis was to abandon the conventional book form in favor of the essay—incomplete, digressive, without proof or conclusion, in which could be juxtaposed fragments, minute details ("close-ups") drawn from every level of the contemporary world. These details, of course, functioned allegorically. But there is an all-important difference between montage-allegory and the object as emblem in baroque and romantic allegory. In the latter, adhering to the model of the hieroglyph in which the particular object of nature or daily life is taken over as a conventional sign for an idea, the object is used "not to convey its natural characteristics, but those which we have ourselves lent it."[39] In collage, on the other hand, the allegorical significance is literal, derives from the natural characteristics themselves. "The 'truth' which Benjamin had discovered in this literary form [*Trauerspiel*], one which had been lost in the history of its interpretation, was that allegory was not an arbitrary representation of the idea which it portrayed. It was instead the concrete expression of that idea's material foundation."[40]

The style of the essay was to be an "art of interruption": "Interruption is one of the fundamental methods of all form-giving. It reaches far beyond the domain of art. It is, to mention just one of its aspects, the origin of the quotation" (*Brecht,* 19). Benjamin's procedure was "to collect and reproduce in quotation the contradictions of the present without resolution"—"the dialectic at a standstill," juxtaposing the extremes of a given idea. This collage strategy was itself an image of the "break-up," the "disintegration" of civilization in the modern world, relevant to one of Benjamin's most famous formulas: "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (*Tragic Drama,* 178), the premise being that something becomes an object of knowledge only as it "decays," or is made to disintegrate (analysis as decay).

Theodor Adorno shares many of Benjamin's most basic assumptions about the value of the montage-allegory strategy. Adorno's method was

derived in part from his studies with Arnold Schönberg. Adorno wanted to do to philosophical idealism what Schönberg, with his twelve-tone compositional procedure, had done to tonality in music. "Schönberg rejected the notion of artist-as-genius and replaced it with the artist as craftsman; he saw music not as the expression of subjectivity, but as a search for knowledge which lay outside the artist, as potential within the object, the material. For him, composing was discovery and invention through the practice of music-making" (Buck-Morss, 123). The method is objective because the "object" leads, criticism being a translation into words of the *inner logic of the object,* thing, event, text itself. Once articulated, however, the material could be "rearranged" in order to render intelligible its "truth":

> The thinker reflected on a sensuous and non-identical reality not in order to dominate it, not to butcher it to fit the Procrustean beds of mental categories or to liquidate its particularity by making it disappear under abstract concepts. Instead the thinker, like the artist, proceeded mimetically, and in the process of imitating matter transformed it so that it could be read as a monadological expression of social truth. In such philosophy, as in artworks, form was not indifferent to content—hence the central significance of representation, the manner of philosophical expression. Aesthetic creation itself was not subjective invention so much as the objective discovery of the new within the given, immanently, through a regrouping of its elements (Buck-Morss, 132).

Benjamin perhaps put this attitude most concisely when he cited Goethe's notion of the symbol as suggestive of how photographs "mean": "There is a sensitive empiricism which makes itself most inwardly identical with the object and thereby becomes genuine theory."[41] But it is important to realize that this object-become-theory in montage-allegory functions in terms of a representation which is neither allegorical nor symbolic in the traditional senses (the meanings are neither purely unmotivated nor motivated—the opposition deconstructed by grammatology, according to which "meaning" is a continual process of demotivation and remotivation). An important aspect of this "philosophy of the concrete particular," whose true interest is "with the nonconceptual, the singular and the particular; with that which since Plato has been dismissed as transitory and insignificant, and upon which Hegel hung the label of 'foul existence,'" (Buck-Morss, 69), first intuited by Benjamin and then formalized by Adorno, is its ability to exploit the tension between science and art in a way that anticipates the strategy of post-criticism. Indeed, Adorno's description of the method as "exact fantasy" ("fantasy which abides strictly within the material which the sciences present to it, and reaches beyond them only in the smallest aspects of their arrangement: aspects, granted, which fantasy itself must originally generate" [Buck-Morss, 86]) outlines the project of poststructuralist theory—to locate the "subject" of knowledge—and of "pragmatics"—to

study the user's (knower's) attitude to the message.

What the baroque or romantic allegorist conceived of as an emblem, the post-critic treats as a model. A good example of Derrida's use of the quotidian object as a theoretical model is found in *Spurs, Nietzsche's Styles*. *Spurs* is a divagation on a fragment found in Nietzsche's Notebooks—"I have forgotten my umbrella"—apparently a meaningless citation, randomly noted. Derrida performs an "exact fantasy" apropos of this fragment, whose undecidable status, he argues, is replicated in Nietzsche's complete works (and in Derrida's own oeuvre as well). In the process of making this point, Derrida appropriates the umbrella as an icon marking or modelling the very structure of style as such: "The style-spur, the spurring style, is a long object, an oblong object, a word, which perforates even as it parries. It is the oblongi-foliated point (a spur or a spar) which derives its apotropaic power from the taut, resistant tissues, webs, sails and veils which are erected, furled and unfurled around it. But, it must not be forgotten, it is also an umbrella."[42]

The "double" structure of style—relevant to the problem of allegorical representation which at once reveals and conceals—finds, in the "morphology" of the umbrella with its shaft and fabric, a concrete model. Derrida borrows the "umbrella" left behind in Nietzsche's Notebooks and remotivates it (its meaning was indeterminate in any case) as a de-monstrative device. The umbrella counts for Derrida not as a "symbol," Freudian or otherwise, not as a meaning at all, but as a structural machine which, in its capacity to open and close, de-monstrates the unrepresentable gram.

A review of Derrida's texts turns up a small collection of such borrowed theoretical objects, including, besides the umbrella, a pair of shoes (from Van Gogh),[43] a fan (from Mallarmé), a matchbox (from Genet), a post card (from Freud)—all displaying the double structure of the gram. Together they constitute a collage, to be entitled "Still Life" (as models of writing they necessarily manifest the death drive); or perhaps "Autoportrait," in the surrealist mode, since each of these objects occurs in a discussion of fetishism. Let it suffice to say that the "example" in post-criticism functions in the manner of a "fetish object," thus linking allegory with psychoanalysis in paraliterature.

Parasite/Saprophyte

A model for the relation of the post-critical text to its object of study, often mentioned in the debate between traditional and post-critics, is that of parasite to host. J. Hillis Miller, speaking for the deconstructionists in a conference session on "The Limits of Pluralism," offered a rebuttal of

Wayne Booth's assertion (seconded by M.H. Abrams) that the "deconstructionist reading of a given work is plainly and simply parasitical on the obvious or univocal reading." [44] Given that Derrida describes grammatology as a "parasitical economy," this term may not be as "wounding" as Booth and Abrams intend. Miller's response is to problematize the meaning of "parasite": "What happens when a critical essay extracts a 'passage' and 'cites' it? Is this different from a citation, echo, or allusion within a poem? Is a citation an alien parasite within the body of its host, the main text, or is it the other way around, the interpretative text the parasite which surrounds and strangles the citation which is its host?" The issue is compounded in the case of post-criticism, which carries citation to its limit—collage.

Miller's rebuttal is meant to undermine the very notion of "univocal" reading by showing the equivocal, paradoxical plurality of the meaning of "host" and "guest," which turn out to share the same etymological root and are interchangeable in their sense. The point of this etymological exercise, he says,

> is an argument for the value of recognizing the great complexity and equivocal richness of apparently obvious or univocal language, even the language of criticism, which is in this respect continuous with the language of literature. This complexity and equivocal richness resides in part in the fact that there is no conceptual expression without figure, and no intertwining of concept and figure without an implied story, narrative, or myth, in this case the story of the alien guest in the home. Deconstruction is an investigation of what is implied by this inherence of figure, concept, and narrative in one another (Miller, 443).

In short, Miller's definition of "deconstruction" is what Maureen Quilligan describes as the operation of narrative allegory.

It so happens that Michel Serres has provided a full elaboration—allegory—of the very story of deconstruction, of the alien guest in the home, in a paraliterary text entitled *Parasite*. Not only does Serres support Miller's point regarding the equivocality of the host-parasite terminology, he supplements it by noting that in French a third meaning is available which permits the story of the parasite to be explored literally as an allegory of communication theory (or rather, as with the gram, the theory itself produces the allegory):

> The parasite is a microbe, an insidious infection that takes without giving and weakens without killing. The parasite is also a guest, who exchanges his talk, praise, and flattery for food. The parasite is noise as well, the static in a system or the interference in a channel. These seemingly dissimilar activities are, according to Michel Serres, not merely coincidentally expressed by the same word (in French). Rather, they are intrinsically related and, in fact, they have the same basic function in a system. Whether it produces a fever or just hot air, the parasite is a thermal exciter. And as such, it is both the atom of a relation and the production of a change in this relation.[45]

Taking the luck of this homonym as a clue, Serres researches a selection of literary examples, stories about dinners, hosts and guests, beginning with the fables of La Fontaine and including the return of Odysseus among the suitors, the *Symposium, Tartuffe,* etc., all examined in terms of *interruption,* interference, the noise which frightens away the mice, the call which took Simonides away from the table just before the roof collapsed (his recollection of which guest was sitting where, for purposes of identifying the bodies, is said to be the origin of "artificial memory"). Serres concludes that parasitism is "negentropic," the motor of change or invention—recalling Benjamin's art of interruption—consisting of a new logic with three elements: host, guest, and interrupter (noise is "the random element, transforming one system or one order into another"). The gram in the structure of language, and collage at the level of discourse, are operators of this inventive interruption.

This context provides an opportunity to demonstrate the usefulness of post-criticism not only as a compositional method but also as a method for reading paraliterature itself. I want to use the writings of John Cage as a test for allegorical reading, writings which in any case have exemplary value as some of the most important versions of paraliterature yet produced. Part of their value is that Cage is famous as a postmodernist musician. His "prepared piano" and early use of electronic equipment, along with his compositional innovations (graphic scores and aleatory procedures) and performance innovations (scores indeterminate as to performance), revolutionized—"postmodernized"—music. Students of post-criticism can benefit from the fact that Cage decided to apply his philosophy of composition to language ("I hope to let words exist, as I have tried to let sounds exist"[46]).

It is worth noting in this context that Cage, like Adorno, studied music theory with Schönberg. Cage adopted a view, similar to Adorno's strategy of the "concrete particular," that music should be a kind of research, an exploration of the logic of materials, which in Cage's case became extended to include not just the materials of music but everything in the natural and cultural worlds: "art changes because science changes—changes in science give artists different understandings of how nature works."[47] This attitude leads Cage to his own version—a musical one—of the "theoretical object":

> We know the air is filled with vibrations that we can't hear. In *Variations VII,* I tried to use sounds from that inaudible environment. But we can't consider that environment as an object. We know that it's a process. While in the case of the ashtray, we are indeed dealing with an object. It would be extremely interesting to place it in a little anechoic chamber and to listen to it through a suitable sound system. Object would become process; we would discover, thanks to a procedure borrowed from science, the meaning of nature through the music of objects (*Birds,* 221).

Moreover, this procedure is explicitly identified with the collage/montage principle, identified here as "silence" (or what Barthes calls the "death of the author"): "*The Gutenberg Galaxy* is made up of borrowings and collages: McLuhan applies what I call silence to all areas of knowledge, that is, he lets them speak. The death of the book is not the end of language: it continues. Just as in my case, silence has invaded everything, and there is still music" (*Birds*, 117). Cage acknowledges McLuhan, who has been credited with inventing a kind of "essai concret," and Norman O. Brown—both major representatives of post-critical writing—as important influences on his work.

Cage postmodernizes the critical essay by bringing to bear on its *inventio* and *dispositio* the same collage and aleatory procedures used in working with tape recorders and other electronic equipment in his musical compositions. The selection of the texts—Thoreau's Journals and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*—is not itself random but, as in Derrida's selection of *Numbers*, a major part of the critical statement. (The Journals and the *Wake* are appropriated, literally or in a mimed version, and signed by Cage, remotivated as signifiers in a new frame.) Cage does not write about Thoreau, but uses the Journals for the generation of other texts which are in fact musicalized simulacra. These simulacra are collage constructions in that all the words, letters, phrases in them are derived directly from the Journals, selected according to chance operations. "Mureau" ("music" + "Thoreau"), for example, is "a mix of letters, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences. I wrote it by subjecting all the remarks of Henry David Thoreau about music, silence, and sounds he heard that are indexed in the Dover publications of the Journals to a series of *I Ching* chance operations. The personal pronoun was varied according to such operations and the typing was likewise determined." [48]

A more elaborate version of this operation, entitled *Empty Words*, reveals that such works are intended for performance, which is how Cage uses them to produce "lecture-events" (thus fulfilling the original logic of collage/montage which "represents" not in terms of *truth* but of *change*—indeed, the *I Ching* is the "book of changes"). "Subjecting Thoreau's writings to *I Ching* chance operations to obtain collage texts, I prepared parts for twelve speaker-vocalists (or -instrumentalists). . . . Along with these parts go recordings by Maryanne Amacher of breeze, rain and finally thunder and in the last (thunder) section a film by Luis Frangella representing lightning by means of briefly projected negatives of Thoreau's drawings." [49]

When confronting such a text in print, the full import of Barthes's advice about writerly reading becomes apparent, for something like "Mureau" may not be read "conceptually." Rather, by skimming the eye over the page, letting it be arrested momentarily by different typefaces so that the sense of those randomly noted words is allowed to register, a powerful effect

emerges—the simulacrum of walking through the woods of Concord with the senses open and the attention floating. Cage explains that Thoreau listened "just as composers using technology nowadays listen;... and he explored the neighborhood of Concord with the same appetite with which they explore the possibilities provided by electronics."

Another example of Cage's procedure is *Writing for the Second Time through "Finnegans Wake."* This text was generated out of the *Wake* using Cage's mesostic form: "not acrostics: row down the middle, not down the edge. What makes a mesostic as far as I'm concerned is that the first letter of a word or name is on the first line and following it on the first line the second letter of the word or name is *not* to be found. (The second letter is on the second line)" (*Words,* 134). In this manner Cage produced, in his first version of the piece, one hundred fifteen pages of mesostics such as this one:

Just
A
May i
bE wrong!
for She'll be sweet for you as i was sweet when
i came down out of me mother.
Jhem
Or shen /brewed by arclight/
and rorY end
through all Christian
ministrElsy.

By restricting further which syllables would be allowed, the second version was reduced to forty pages, of which Cage says:

> From time to time in the course of this work I've had my doubts about the validity of finding in *Finnegans Wake* these mesostics on his name which James Joyce didn't put there. However I just went straight on, A after J, E after M, J after S, Y after O, E after C. I read each passage at least three times and once or twice upside down (*Words,* 136).

If texts such as *Empty Words* exemplify the post-critical penchant for mimicry and collage, Cage's other writings display equally well the montage-allegory principle in a way that illuminates the allegorical power of the host-parasite theme. "Where Are We Eating? And What Are We Eating?" is a good example (an account of Cage's travels with Merce Cunningham's dance troupe entirely in terms of what they ordered when they stopped to eat) with which to mark the parallel between Cage's narrative allegory and Serres's *Parasite,* with the latter alerting us to the "extra" import of the many anecdotes concerned with guests, hosts, and dining to be found throughout Cage's writings. The extraordinary insight made available through Serres's elaboration of the French meaning of

"parasite" (which means "noise" as well as "guest" and "parasite") is that Cage—who is famous as the composer who opened music to noise ("Since the theory of conventional music is a set of laws exclusively concerned with 'musical' sounds, having nothing to say about noises, it had been clear from the beginning that what was needed was a music based on noise, on noise's lawlessness....The next steps were social"—*M,* v)—when he is writing about dining, is *still* talking about noise. His anecdotes about eating are the essayistic, discursive equivalents of utilizing noise in his musical compositions. They are also a commentary on the "parasitical" invention process of citation, upon which his music and essays depend.

At the center of this allegory about noise and dining is Cage's passion for mushrooms. Cage, founder of the New York Mycological Society, owned one of the world's largest private collections of books about mushrooms. Again, although anecdotes having to do with mushrooms are disseminated throughout Cage's writings, they are the exclusive topic in *Mushroom Book,* whose collage construction may be seen in this prospectus: "To finish for Lois programmed handwritten mushroom book including mushroom stories, excerpts from (mushroom) books, remarks about (mushroom) hunting, excerpts from Thoreau's *Journal* (fungi), excerpts from Thoreau's *Journal* (entire), remarks about: Life/Art, Art/Life, Life/Life, Art/Art, Zen, Current reading, Cooking (shopping, recipes), Games, Music mss., Maps, Friends, Invention, Projects, + Writing without syntax, Mesostics (on mushroom names)" (*M,* 133-34).

Why mushrooms? Cage remarks that it is because "mushroom" is next to "music" in most dictionaries. But read as paraliterature, the mushroom may be understood as a model mounted in a discourse for allegorical purposes. Indeed, the mushroom turns out to be the best emblem yet for what Derrida calls the "pharmakon," a potion or medicine which is at once elixir and poison (borrowed from Plato), modelling what Derrida calls (by analogy) "undecidables" (directed against all conceptual, classifying systems). The undecidables are:

> unities of simulacrum, "false" verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (the *pharmakon* is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing (*Positions,* 43).

What the pharmakon is in the pharmaceutical (and the conceptual) realm, the mushroom is in the plant world, for, as Cage remarks, "the more you know them, the less sure you feel about identifying them. Each one is itself. Each mushroom is what it is—its own center. It's useless to pretend to know

mushrooms. They escape your erudition" (*Birds,* 188). Cage's fascination with mycology is due in part to this undecidability of classification, as indicated in his anecdotes about experts who have misidentified poison species as edible, or of people who have become ill, even died, from eating a variety which had no effect on other people (different individuals react differently to the same species sometimes). When he suggests, in the context of anecdotes about his own experiences of poisoning by mushrooms, that it is too bad that books are not edible, Cage seems to be making a point similar to the one Barthes made in *S/Z* with respect to the *risk* in reading. Sarrasine, having mistaken the castrato Zambinella for a woman, dies "because of an inaccurate and inconclusive reasoning": "All the cultural codes, taken up from citation to citation, together form an oddly joined miniature version of encyclopedic knowledge, a farrago: this farrago forms the everyday 'reality' in relation to which the subject adapts himself, lives. One defect in this encyclopedia, one hole in this cultural fabric, and death can result. Ignorant of the code of Papal customs, Sarrasine dies from a gap in knowledge." [50] The mushroom, in other words, de-monstrates a lesson about survival.

According to the montage-allegory principle, Cage's mushroom anecdotes constitute collaged fragments alluding to the entire science of mycology. To determine the larger significance of the mushroom as allegory, then, one must review the "logic of the material" thus paradigmatically evoked (just as the absent terms of a semantic field are implied negatively by the specific term used in a sentence). The connotation relevant to our specific context has to do with the parasite-host relationship as a model for the status of the citation in post-criticism. The lesson taught by the kind of fungi hunted (emblematizing the research activity in general) and eaten by John Cage in particular—the fleshy, fruity, "higher" fungi, Boletus, Morels, and the like—is *symbiosis*. These fungi are not parasites, but *saprophytes* (any organism that lives on dead organic matter), and exist in a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship with their hosts (the green plants and trees which supply the organic "food"). The genus "Cortinarius," for example, as described by C.H. Kauffman (whose study, *The Agaricaceae of Michigan,* Cage lists among the ten books which most influenced him), may be found "in the region of pine and spruce, or in old beech forests, where the shade is dense and the ground is saturated with moisture," growing, of course, on a substratum of decaying matter. The trees benefit from the fungi growing among their roots by absorbing the nutrients made soluble as a result of the decomposing process to which the mushrooms contribute.[51]

This symbiotic ecology (related to the usefulness of the lower fungi, whose fermentations are essential to the production of wine, cheese and bread) is Cage's version of what Benjamin was talking about when he compared allegory to ruins, for it could be said that the saprophyte, living off

the decay of dead organisms in a way that makes life possible for living plants, is to nature what the ruin is to culture, or the allegory to thought. For Adorno and Benjamin, the ruins were signs of the *decay* of the bourgeois era, requiring in philosophy a "logic of disintegration." For Derrida, too, deconstruction is a process of decomposition at work within the very *root* metaphores—the philosophemes—of Western thought. But we may see that this work is symbiotic, similar to the "mycorrhizal formation" in which tree roots and fungi supplement one another, enabling each to "live *on*," *sur*vive. The point is that if normal critics adhere to the model of the poem as living plant—the critic M.H. Abrams, for example, one of those accusing the deconstructors of being "parasites," whose *Mirror and the Lamp* provides the definitive study of the organic model in poetry—it might be useful to emblematize post-criticism as the saprophyte, growing among the roots of literature, feeding off the decay of tradition.

Cage suggests that his mushrooms could be read allegorically, even if he himself (being, as he says, the "grasshopper" of the fable) is too lazy to undertake the labor required for the comparison (*Silence*, 276). The social philosophy which he derives from his theory of music, however, manifests the symbiotic theme of ecology, of cooperation and an end to competition. For, as he warns, referring to the current world situation, to the same global implications of the parasite theme which inform Serres's study, "The party's nearly over. But the guests are going to stay: they have no place else to go. People who weren't invited are beginning to arrive. The house is a mess. We must all get together and without saying a word clean it up" (*M*, vii).

The immediate lesson for post-criticism, however, is found in this statement in the diary: "Mushrooms. Teaching-machines" (*M*, 196). In other words, what those who attack post-criticism as "parasitical" have not yet realized is that montage-allegory (the mushroom as teaching-machine) provides the very technique for popularization, for communicating the knowledge of the cultural disciplines to a general public, which the normal, so-called humanist critics claim to desire. Wayne Booth, in his recent Presidential address to the Modern Language Association, decried the drift of critical writing into solipsism, unaware that in *La Carte Postale*, to take just one example, Derrida makes available a working model capable of de-monstrating with utter simplicity the teleological essence of the logocentric tradition: "Everything in our bildopedic culture, in our encyclopedic politics, in our telecommunications of all kinds, in our telematicometaphysic archive, in our library, for example the marvelous Bodleian, everything is constructed on the protocolary charter of an axiom, which one could demonstrate, display on a card, a post card of course, it is so simple, elementary, brief, stereotyped" (*Carte*, 25)—that axiom being that Socrates comes *before* Plato, that the signified comes before the signifier; in

short, the rigid order of an irreversible sequence. And when one mails a post card, confident that it will be delivered to the addressee, one displays the ideology of identity. Cage remarks that "Something needs to be done about the postal services. Either that or we should stop assuming just because we mailed something it will get where we sent it." [52] In *The Post Card* Derrida suggests the possibility of a communications network without "destiny" or "destination," in which all mail (messages) would be addressed only "to whom it may concern"—a system which values "noise" or invention over transparent meanings. Moreover, he shows us the writing which is appropriate for such an era: "It suffices to manipulate," he says, referring to the model post card, "to cut out, glue, and set going or parcel out, with hidden displacements and great tropic agility" (*Carte Postale,* 121). The image on the card (the one he found in the Bodleian library, depicting Socrates taking dictation from Plato) by means of *collage* becomes "articulate," "is capable of saying everything."

Such texts represent or mime not by means of signs but by signing—the signature. What remains of "identity" in a post-critical text is constituted by the new mimesis—the contamination between language and its user, the effects of which may be seen in the fact that the man who composed "Music of Changes," who composes all his productions by means of the "Book of Changes" (*I Ching*) in order, he hopes, to change society, is named *Jo Change* (John Cage).

References

1. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Johns Hopkins: Baltimore, 1978), pp. 42-3, 45-7.
2. See Richard Kostelanetz, ed. *Esthetics Contemporary* (Prometheus: Buffalo, 1978).
3. Edward Fry, *Cubism* (McGraw-Hill: New York, n.d.), p. 27.
4. Eddie Wolfram, *History of Collage* (MacMillan: New York, 1975), pp. 17-18.
5. Group *Mu,* eds., *Collages* (Union Générale: Paris, 1978), pp. 13-14.
6. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *Modern Culture and the Arts,* eds. James B. Hall, Barry Ulanov (McGraw-Hill: New York, 1972), p. 427.
7. *Collage et Montage au Théâtre et dans les autres Arts durant les Années Vingt* (La Cité: Lausanne, 1978), p. 98.
8. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* eds. A. Arato, E. Gebhardt (Urizen: New York, 1978), p. 266.
9. Roland Barthes, *Critique et Vérité* (Seuil: Paris, 1966), pp. 68-9. Also see Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," in *The Structuralists: from Marx to Lévi-Strauss,* eds. R. and F. DeGeorge (Doubleday: Garden City, N.J., 1972), pp. 148-54.
10. The most recent statement of this generic conflation of literature and criticism is Rosalind Krauss's notion of "paraliterature." "If one of the tenets of modernist literature had been the creation of a work that would force reflection on the conditions of its own construction, that would insist on reading as a much more consciously *critical* act, then it is not surprising that the medium of a *post*modernist literature should be the critical text wrought

into a paraliterary form. And what is clear is that Barthes and Derrida are the *writers*, not the critics, that students now read." See Rosalind Krauss, "Poststructuralism and the 'Paraliterary,'" *October* 13 (1980): 40.

The insight of paraliterature is that although by the 1960s the collage revolution seemed to have run its course, it was in fact being renewed in critical discourse, which was itself finally being affected by experiments with representation. Indeed, as Elizabeth Bruss proposes in *Beautiful Theories* (concerned with the criticism of Susan Sontag, William Gass, Harold Bloom and Roland Barthes), theory is not only the most interesting of contemporary literary forms, it is the mode best suited for moving out of the impasse reached by the modernist movements in the arts.

11. See S. Doubrovsky, *Pourquoi la Nouvelle Critique?* (Mercure de France: Paris, 1966).
12. Derrida, "Living On: Borderlines," in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (Seabury: New York, 1979), pp. 94-5.
13. This is the topic of *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatari Spivak (Johns Hopkins: Baltimore, 1976).
14. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (University of Chicago: Chicago, 1981), pp. 41-2.
15. Philip Lewis, "The Post-Structuralist Condition," *diacritics* 12 (1982): 16.
16. Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (University of Chicago: Chicago, 1981), p. 26.
17. Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Glyph* 1 (1977): 185.
18. Elsewhere Derrida writes: "What is in question here, this time at last, finds itself not displayed but given play, not staged but engaged, not demonstrated but *mounted*, mounted with a confectioner's skill in some implacable machinery" (*Dissemination*, 291). The verb is *monter*, from which "montage" derives. In a later text Derrida, playing on the meanings of *monter*, introduces the image of *passe-partout* or matting (used to frame pictures) as an analogy for the way a critical text "mounts" its examples. See Derrida, *La Vérité en Peinture* (Flammarion: Paris, 1978), pp. 5-18.
19. See Derrida, "Title (to be specified)," *Sub-Stance* 31 (1981).
20. This is the strategy used to deconstruct Kant in *La Vérité en Peinture* and Saussure in *Glas* (Galilée: Paris, 1974).
21. Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Glyph* 7 (1980): 206.
22. "Dissemination" is written using the same montage technique practiced in *Numbers*—indeed, *Numbers* is selected as a tutor-text for just this reason—so that what is "remarked" here (the term Derrida prefers to "represented," "illustrated," "displayed," etc.) in the critical version is the structuration of the object of study: "We will hence be inscribing—simultaneously—in the angles and corners of these *Numbers*, within them and outside them, upon the stone that awaits *you*, certain questions that touch upon 'this' text 'here,' the status of its relation to *Numbers*, what it pretends to add to 'that' text in order to *mime* its presentations and representations, in order to seem to be offering some sort of review or account of it. For if *Numbers* offers an account of *itself* then 'this' text—and all that touches it—is already or still 'that' text. Just as *Numbers* calculates and feigns self-presentation and inscribes presence in a certain play, so too does what could still with a certain irony be called 'this' text mime the presentation, commentary, interpretation, review, account, or inventory of *Numbers*. As a *generalized simulacrum*, this writing circulates 'here' in the intertext of two fictions, between a so-called primary text and its so-called commentary" (*Dissemination*, 294).
23. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (University of Chicago: Chicago, 1978), p. 296.
24. The very repetition that permits a sign to be a sign—to be recognized as the same as what it signifies—also produces a difference, as Saussure emphasized (the sign is not the referent itself). The temporal oscillation generated in this play between presence and absence is what Derrida terms *differance*, naming that which is opposed to the rigid first-second

ordering between signifier and signified dictated by logocentric semiotics from Plato to Saussure.

25. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Northwestern University: Evanston, 1973), p. 128.
26. Derrida, *La Carte Postale* (Flammarion: Paris, 1980), p. 317.
27. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. Anscombe (Blackwell: Oxford, 1968), p. 105.
28. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (1980): 84.
29. Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse (Part 2)," *October* 13 (1980): 79-80.
30. See Stephen Melville, "Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory," *October* 19 (1981); and Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Cornell University: Ithaca, 1983).
31. Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* (Cornell University: Ithaca, 1979), pp. 30-3.
32. Owens, "(Part 2)": 64, 66. Cf. Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Post-modernism," *October* 15 (1980), for a discussion of Sherrie Levine, Benjamin.
33. Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage* (Praeger: New York, 1970), p. 115.
34. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (Hill & Wang: New York, 1977), p. 90.
35. Stanley Mitchell, "Introduction," in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (New Left Books: London, 1977), p. xiii.
36. Rainer Hoffmann, *Montage im Hohlraum zu Ernst Blochs "Spuren"* (Grundmann: Bonn, 1977), p. 92.
37. Benjamin, *"One-Way Street" and Other Writings*, trans. E. Jephcott, K. Shorter (New Left Books: London, 1979), p. 62.
38. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Little Brown: Boston, 1973), pp. 176, 200. Jay mentions Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body* as perhaps a realization of Benjamin's plan.
39. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. J. Osborne (New Left Books: London, 1977), p. 184.
40. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (MacMillan: London, 1977), p. 56.
41. In Benjamin, "Short History of Photography," trans. Phil Patton, in *Artforum* 15 (1977): 50.
42. Derrida, *Spurs, Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (University of Chicago: Chicago, 1979), p. 41.
43. In this case, Derrida appropriates the materials of a debate between Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro regarding the ownership of the shoes figured in Van Gogh's paintings—a theme which emblematizes the whole question of property and the signature involved in collage writing. Like the umbrella borrowed from Nietzsche, Van Gogh's shoes are detached from the critical argument and remotivated as a model for the gram—an act which by itself refutes the attempts of the critics to fix the shoe-signifier to a specific signified, to determine whether the pictured shoes were owned by a peasant woman (Heidegger) or by Van Gogh himself (Schapiro). Indeed the fact that the shoes are depicted as partially (un)laced is the clue to the process by which the gram-coupling works. "Like a lace, each 'thing,' each mode of being of the thing, passes inside then outside the other. We will often avail ourselves of this figure of the lace: passing and repassing through the eyelet of the thing, from outside in, from inside out, *over* the outer surface and *under* the inner one—and vice versa when this surface is turned inside out like the top of the left shoe, the lace remains the 'same' on both sides, shows itself and disappears (fort/da) in the regular crossing of the eyelet, insures the thing of its resemblance, bottoms tied to tops, inside fastened to outside, by a law of stricture." Derrida goes on to mock those who insist on viewing language in terms of the sign, seeing pairs (signifier-signified) everywhere, in the way that Heidegger and Schapiro assume they are looking at a pair of shoes. On close inspection of the paintings, Derrida argues wryly, it is not at all clear that the shoes are

matched; rather, they appear to be two left shoes—left behind, in any case, like Nietzsche's umbrella, for the next user, or writer. See Derrida, "Restitutions of Truth to Size," trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., in *Research in Phenomenology* 8 (1978): 32 (a partial translation of "Restitutions, de la vérité en pointure," in *Vérité en Peinture*).

44. J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (1977): 439.
45. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence Schehr (Johns Hopkins: Baltimore, 1982) —Schehr's introduction, p. x.
46. John Cage (in conversation with Daniel Charles), *For the Birds* (Boyars: Boston, 1981), p. 151.
47. John Cage, *Silence* (M.I.T.: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961, 1970), p. 194.
48. Cage, *M: Writings '67-'72* (Wesleyan University: Middletown, 1974), p. i.
49. Cage, *Empty Words* (Wesleyan University: Middletown, 1981), p. 3.
50. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Hill & Wang: New York, 1974), pp. 184-85.
51. For a discussion of Mycology, see G.C. Ainsworth, *Introduction to the History of Mycology* (Cambridge University: Cambridge, 1976).
52. John Cage, *A Year From Monday* (Wesleyan University: Middletown, 1969), p. 150.