

an extract from

Questions of the Liminal in the
Fiction of Julio Cortázar



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LEGENDA

European Humanities Research Centre
University of Oxford

2000

This Internet-published extract consists of the title, imprint and contents pages together with part of the introduction. The complete book is published in paperback: www.ehrc.ox.ac.uk/legenda

*Published by the
European Humanities Research Centre
of the University of Oxford
47 Wellington Square
Oxford OX1 2JF*

*LEGENDA is the publications imprint of the
European Humanities Research Centre*

ISBN 1 900755 20 3

First published 2000

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

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*LEGENDA series designed by Cox Design Partnership, Witney, Oxon
Printed in Great Britain by
Information Press
Eynsham
Oxford OX8 1JJ*

Copy-Editor: Dr Jeffrey Dean

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INTRODUCTION (EXTRACT)

*In medias res***The Demand of/for Deconstruction**

Virtually all critics of Julio Cortázar's work, both fictional and critical, have emphasized that its most salient characteristic is the unstinting drive to expose, denounce and consequently escape from what he perceived to be the stultifying and oppressive domain of Western metaphysics and its *supposed* ontological, socio-political, sexual and—perhaps most critically—linguistic modes of classification, organization and restraint. Scarcely any, however, have paused to question the intrinsic validity (both practical and, coextensively, theoretical) of this vast project, or to ponder over the enormous, perhaps (in a certain formal sense, which I will endeavour to elucidate throughout this book) boundless difficulties which the question of the limit of metaphysics and the nature of its 'beyond' engenders. Their precipitousness is almost certainly a consequence of the passion and obduracy of Cortázar's own proclamations and exhortations in this regard, since, although he remained far more sensitive to the obstacles and impasses to which this undertaking gives rise than many of his admirers and critics (so sensitive, I will argue, that he finally, if perhaps inadvertently, pursues them to a barely imaginable threshold at which metaphysics is made to shudder, if not actually collapse), he professed an unflinching faith in the crusade throughout his literary career, from the surreal disturbances of the stories of *Bestiario* (1951) to the more recognizably political gestures of *Libro de Manuel* (1973) and beyond.¹

Most commentators have preferred to catalogue or typologize the various literary-philosophical strategies through which this presumably liberating egress might be achieved, as if it were simply one emancipatory strategy amongst others, effectively acknowledging its mere affirmation as a mark of its success, whether actual or potential, and tacitly assuming their own critiques to be relatively unproblematic mappings of the process—as if one could calmly and without

contradiction argue the case for an unreason wholly alien to that very logic which one has employed to elaborate and justify it. More worryingly, they have frequently outlined the task in generic and often almost Manichaeian terms—as a struggle of freedom (subjective and communal) against repression (of the State and its modes and methods of policing), of a yearned-for human authenticity against socio-political ‘artifice’, spontaneity against ankylosing custom, unfettered desire against arbitrary and violent (sexual) prohibition, timeless, naked ‘being’ against the grotesque masks and masquerades of ‘history’—as if such strategies and evaluative procedures were not themselves beholden to and informed by the ethico-political principles of Western thought, and as if freedom, selfhood, impulse, desire, Nature and Being were wholly extra-metaphysical ideals which had once existed and effectively continued to exist in a now barely intuited free state prior to their incarceration within the crippling irons of logic. Here too they received their cue from Cortázar, whose belief in the primordially and ineradicability of these notions, and in their anteriority and extrinsicality with respect to metaphysics, never wavered, despite the complex and often conflicting ways in which they figure and are figured in his writings.

The principal aim of this book (although it is an aim which, from the first, is multiply diffracted) is to examine as rigorously as possible the vertiginously complex problems to which the often exasperatingly (not to say conveniently) nebulous idea of the ‘limit of metaphysics’ gives rise, to assess how and where its effects might be detected and gauged, to attempt to determine whether or not it might be successfully surpassed, how far anything can coherently be said to lie beyond it, and what role language and in particular the literary text might play in the anticipated exodus. Above all, it seeks to provide a revaluation (or perhaps, after Nietzsche, a transvaluation) of the ethical status and import of Cortázar’s work in terms of its relation to this infinitely strange frontier, and to suggest how this emergent ‘ethicality’ (the term is purposefully vague, for reasons that I will outline as my study progresses) is inseparable from what I term *liminality* (from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold, or *limes*, meaning border or limit). I will argue that unless this general pre-liminary questioning is undertaken (and necessarily pressed to its own interrogative limit, however infuriating, ‘obscure’ or unpalatable this may prove to be in terms of traditional/rational demands for comprehensibility and clarity), and regardless of its findings, every unambiguous assessment of the failure, success or indeed the desirability of

Cortázar's literary-existential enterprise will not only fall short of that very critical mark (which, I will aim to demonstrate, *cannot* simply be one mark amongst others) which that venture silently yet inexorably invokes, but will risk at worst buttressing and at best leaving intact those supposedly repressive discourses and schemas to the subtly coercive effects of which it naïvely believes itself immune. When it is a question of the (presumed) totality of Occidental metaphysics, of the very logic of logic, all 'solutions' which leave that logic and its informing assumptions untrammelled will, it would seem, 'logically' prove insufficient, even (in a sense apparently scandalous to reason, even to the sort of 'reasoned unreason' that typifies the writings of so many of Cortázar's critics) obscurantist. Rather, this logic must, if this is possible, first be pushed to its own limit.

It would therefore seem apposite to analyse Cortázar's œuvre in the light of a thinking that has, perhaps more searchingly and uncompromisingly than any other, addressed the problem of limits, boundaries and thresholds in general, and the question of the limit(s) of Western or 'logocentric' metaphysics (a metaphysics based on the principle of truth as perfect self-presence, on the ultimately transparent and immediate presentation of thought to itself) in particular, as well as the (onto)logical, ethico-political, sexual and linguistic/semantic issues to which their positing and strategic shiftings give rise—I am referring to a still burgeoning (perhaps disconcertingly so; see the Preface) corpus of work that has, in many respects misleadingly, been classified under the general heading of *deconstruction*. I will be drawing most extensively on the writings of Jacques Derrida, but also on those of a number of recent thinkers (Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and certain feminist writers, such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva) whose work has also attempted to probe and unsettle what were previously the virtually unquestioned presuppositions and founding principles of Western thought, not only evincing its hidden 'internal' tensions and suppressed inconsistencies, but also scrutinizing the feasibility and ethical consequences of attempts to pass beyond it, and of the idea of the extraneous/other in general.

I will provide a detailed summary (as far as this proves possible: the philosophical commonplace of conceptually reducing vast arrays of heterogeneous phenomena and/or propositions to monolithic theses or categories—that is to say, of conceptualization itself—is one of deconstruction's principal targets) of Derridean deconstruction as and

when it emerges in Cortázar's works, especially in relation to *Rayuela* (see Chap. 1). Equally, I will outline in successive chapters (most extensively in Chap. 4) what I believe to be its possible ethical dimensions and, crucially, *practices*. However, given the frequency and vehemence (especially in the wake of the 'Paul de Man affair')² of the charges levelled (often both unfoundedly and hysterically)³ at deconstruction (those of nihilism, absolute moral impotence/indifference, the denial of phenomenality, paralogy and, most recently, of simple exhaustion), I will preface my own engagement with Derrida's work if not simply by refuting these accusations (the notions of *absolute* confirmation or refutation are in any case inimical to deconstruction) then at least by considering them in a less violently antagonistic context. In the first place, whether one ultimately embraces his contributions or rejects them, Derrida, particularly since the mid-1980s (although in fact all of his writings have implied as much), has not only addressed moral, ethical, political and religious issues in deconstructive terms, but in addition has endeavoured to demonstrate that ethics, responsibility, and even faith and hope would actually be redundant, even stillborn, if they were not actively pulsed by a certain deconstructive indeterminacy and structural unendingness.⁴ I will explore this critical claim at length in Chapter 4.

Secondly, although for essential reasons one cannot definitively say what deconstruction 'is'—precisely because, as Derrida says in the now notorious introduction to *Of Grammatology*, deconstruction 'arises' in/by simultaneously breaching but thereby opening the question of the 'What is ... ?' (OG, 19—I will return to this in Chap. 1)—it will help to clarify, although in no way reduce the complexity of what follows, if I briefly describe some of the things which deconstruction *is not* and *does not do*. For one thing, it does not, as many have naively (not to say opportunistically) claimed, contend that there is nothing 'real' beyond the endless and ultimately pointless play of language and textuality. Derrida has denied this from the very first. If deconstruction questions the relationship between reference and its objects, the interface between language and 'external reality' to a point at which their separability becomes irremediably problematic, thereby hindering the 'progress' of those who would insist on the ultimate unambiguousness of this threshold (and simultaneously questioning the ethical and indeed political motivation underlying the very notions of progress and clarity), that is a very different matter, and one that will prove crucial to the

present investigation.⁵ Deconstruction does not, indeed cannot, inhabit a philosophical terrain entirely heterogeneous to that of logocentric metaphysics; nor has it ever claimed to do so.⁶ It is neither a self-contained philosophical or literary (meta)theory, nor a regulated critical practice that can be innocently applied from without by an independent agent (Derrida stresses that deconstruction ‘does not exist somewhere pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflictual and differentiated contexts’).⁷

Strictly speaking, therefore, there can be no such thing as a deconstructionist, and consequently I will not be employing deconstruction as a ‘method’ with which to interpret or explicate Cortázar’s work, or endeavouring to show that the latter is ‘really’ deconstructive, consciously or otherwise. Such an approach would merely replicate the anaemic and essentially blind gesture of passively matching up theory and practice, hypothesis and proof, which is wholly in accord with classical analytic procedure, and which distinguishes some of the least incisive and most metaphysically ‘compliant’ literary criticism.⁸ Rather, deconstruction “‘is” only what it does [...] there where it takes place’ (‘Afterword’, *LI*, 141). That is to say, it is always precipitated in singular ways in specific textual arrangements, when the latter’s internal logic undergoes a unique moment of absolute crisis or *aporia* (literally ‘unpassable path’), and it does not unequivocally transcend the context in which it occurs. Derrida has sought to convey this agentless, even what one might term ‘structurally unconscious’ ‘independence’ of deconstruction by referring to a ‘neutral modality’ which can perhaps only be spoken of, or speaks itself, in a sort of middle voice (*Moscou aller-retour*, 141, my trans.). No monitoring subjectivity can ever *entirely* account for or encompass its effects (which is not to say, as many have assumed, that it simply randomizes signification) as its working precedes subjective intervention, perhaps even making it possible.⁹ Hence Derrida prefers the term ‘deconstructions’ (he refers to the ‘proliferating lexicons of deconstruction’) since these only ‘occur’ in what he designates as a ‘quasi-transcendental’ series of *events*.¹⁰

Finally, deconstruction is to be confused neither with destruction as it is generally understood (a peculiarly common misapprehension, given the frequency with which Derrida has denied this¹¹), nor with the various brands of ‘constructivism’ or anti-*Gestalt* philosophy, which seek to reveal the primarily ‘constructed’ nature of the universe

and its contents and their inherent capacity for disassembly and rearrangement. The most meticulous and painstaking de-structuring or dissection has nothing to do with deconstruction if it operates only according to the stipulations that underpinned the original act of composition (although many experts in fields other than philosophy who have borrowed deconstruction's terminology and rhetoric have (mis)applied it as if this were the case). The idea that things are always made up of other things is as old as philosophy itself—in fact, deconstruction is precisely what dislocates the relation between the whole and its parts (see Chap. 4). This is because deconstruction, before considering the way propositions and/or phenomena are related within a given system, first questions the systematicity of that system, its founding precepts and its (logical) incapacity for perfect self-reflection and absolute self-validation.¹² It is precisely this 'warping', this hollowing out of the rules in the very act of their application, this tireless insistence on uncovering every node of inconsistency, every unsubstantiated presupposition and conveniently subl(im)ated contradiction—even its 'own'—, this suspicion of all purely programmatic recourse to theory (Derrida calls it a ceaseless 'deconstruction of critical dogmatics')¹³ which bears the stamp of deconstruction, and which ultimately, I will contend, lends it its insistent, if 'monstrously' uncontainable ethical force.

Yet no special pleading is required for a deconstructive reading of Cortázar's work. There are clear zones of both convergence and divergence in Cortázar's effort to abandon metaphysics and Derrida's highlighting of the ways in which metaphysics is deconstructed or deconstructs itself. Both aim to expose the prejudices, incoherencies and often latent violence of the logocentric tradition; both have much to say about the various 'others' whom that tradition has destroyed, annexed or banished from its sovereign territory; both accord language a central role in their inquiries; both repeatedly question the nature and attainability of (pre/post-metaphysical) origins, endpoints and authenticity/purity. If they eventually fail to concur in their reappraisal of the nature and limit(ation)s of this tradition and of how, if at all, they might be exceeded, it is perhaps 'within' this almost imperceptible interrealm of difference and conflict that deconstruction does its work. Moreover (and despite the fact that biographical circumstance is *ultimately* insufficient either to confirm or to invalidate a deconstructive reading), Cortázar's immersion in the French artistic-philosophical scene from the 1950s to the 1980s, and

his unflagging enthusiasm for the avant-garde (from the surrealists to the *nouveaux romanciers*, to the new music of Boulez, Stockhausen, Xenakis, Nono and others, to the painting of Klee, Magritte, Chagall, De Chirico, Mondrian, Picasso, etc., all of which, in certain senses, are deconstructive) testify to a direct influence.¹⁴ Indeed *Rayuela*, *Libro de Manuel*, and a number of earlier texts (most strikingly the recently published *Teoría del túnel* of 1947) demonstrate his familiarity with a number of thinkers whose works were subsequently to become the focus of deconstructive studies (for example Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and most importantly Heidegger), and, in interviews and elsewhere, he would often refer (usually in playful fashion) to the structuralist revolution which reached its zenith during his early years in Paris.¹⁵ His admission that, as the years went by, he was increasingly drawn to read anthropological, psychoanalytical and philosophical works rather than literature,¹⁶ makes it difficult to believe that he was not far more conversant with the theories of Barthes, Foucault, Lacan and so on than he ever cared to admit publicly, and it is certain that he had read a number of works by Derrida, one of which serves as the principal intertext for his last published story (see Chap. 2). Given that for Cortázar writing and ethics were inextricable,¹⁷ an analysis of his fiction based on the work of such thinkers cannot but engage itself with questions of value, even if these might not (indeed must not) automatically be answered through the application of time-honoured categories and codes, do not promise any instantly reassuring cohesion or resolution, and are not necessarily transferable to contexts other than those in which they arise.

This ‘ethicity’ is inextricable from, indeed activated by and in a critical sense coterminous with a rethinking of what I will refer to as ‘framing’, although, as in the case of deconstruction (to which it is indissolubly linked) this framing does not exist conceptually above and beyond the particular sites at which it occurs or is implemented. Again, it is what Derrida would describe as ‘quasi-transcendental’. I initially borrow the term from Heidegger’s notion of *Ge-stell* (Chap. 1), which he uses to describe the West’s unbending endeavour to fix, sectionalize and regulate ‘Being’ (phenomenologically, epistemologically, politically, technologically, etc.). By extension, it comes to designate all those schemes, discourses and idiolects that, in the name of logocentric truth, have sought to effect an *absolute circumscription* of different fields or strata of phenomena, knowledge and experience, unambiguously dividing inside from outside, self from other, essence

from accident, good from evil, both characterizing and reinforcing the series of hierarchically organized binary oppositions that have structured and supported Occidental thought. Such framings range from the loftiest philosophical enterprises (Plato's realm of Ideas, Hegel's epistemologically omnivorous Spirit, the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body) to those of sexual classification (Freud's reduction of destiny to biology, and his determination of all sexuality in relation to masculinity), political organization (nationalism and internationalism, ethnic 'grouping', etc.) and aesthetic and literary theory (the strict separation of form and content, text and context/subtext, etc.), yet they share a common underlying principle: the assumption that, whether empirically or according to the least verifiable ideal, there exists a frame, phenomenal or imaginary, that can unambiguously establish the above distinctions, and which itself remains unaffected by and ideologically/ethically neutral with regard to what it distinguishes. It is these binary framing mechanisms that are displaced (but not simply demolished) and reconfigured in the event of deconstruction. Indeed, deconstruction might provisionally be described as a general theory of the frame.

However, as will become evident, deconstruction does not eradicate every frame and meaningful coordinate (as many of its early opponents claimed¹⁸), but instead lays bare every unqualified impulse and conjecture that have led to their construction, and unremittingly exposes the suppressed undecideabilities which their installation involves ('Afterword', *LI*, 136–7, 141 ff.). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the totalizing project of metaphysics 'as a whole' which would, of course, constitute the frame of all frames. According to what criteria does this limit come to be imagined, let alone situated? Exactly how is one to determine where metaphysics ends, indeed if it ends, and whether this end actually belongs to metaphysics? If one can even intuit an outside or an 'Other' to metaphysics, can the latter be said to lie wholly beyond the confines of thought? Yet if the 'Other' exists, can the metaphysical project ever be deemed complete? These are some of deconstruction's most potent questions, and they do not, despite initial appearances to the contrary, belong only to the arid and 'unreal' sphere of cerebral abstraction, since what is theoretically played out on the margins of philosophy is, often imperceptibly, indeed unconsciously, at work in *all* decisions, even the most apparently 'natural', 'spontaneous' and subjectively determined ones, which involve framing—which is to say every

de-cision.¹⁹ Andrés Fava, the central character in *Libro de Manuel*, eloquently sums up this complex notion (that the entire game of metaphysics is at stake in every move, the whole seemingly inhabiting the part):

El problema es que a lo mejor [...] cuando yo elijo una conducta liberatoria [...] a lo mejor estoy obedeciendo a pulsiones, a coacciones, a tabúes o a prejuicios que emanan del lado que quiero abandonar. (*LM*, 168)

Given that this liminal tension between the space of Western metaphysics and that which seems to remain extrinsic to it, the stifling and seemingly unshakeable hegemony of the former and what is at once the maddening proximity and yet seemingly unreachable distance at which the latter withholds itself, fuels virtually all of Cortázar's writing, it would seem not only plausible but necessary to re-examine it deconstructively—or, more accurately, to trace the ways in which it performs this operation 'on itself'.

Notes to the Extract

1. See for example his interview with Luis Harss, 'Julio Cortázar, o la cachetada metafísica', in *Los nuestros* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1973), 252–300 at 288, where he says: 'La cuestión es ésta: ¿Se puede hacer otra cosa, llegar a otra cosa? Más allá de la lógica, más allá de las categorías kantianas, más allá de todo el aparato intelectual de Occidente [...] ¿es posible un avance? ¿Llegaríamos a tocar un fondo más auténtico? Por supuesto, no lo sé. Pero creo que sí.' *Rayuela*, chap. 71, constitutes what amounts to a manifesto of his belief in this project.
2. In 1987 a Belgian research student called Ortwin de Graef discovered ostensibly pro-Nazi/antisemitic articles written by De Man for *Le Soir* in 1941–2, thereby, according to its detractors, exploding the deconstructive myth of the death of the author and subjective intentionality. A popular account of the drama is provided by David Lehman in his *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (London: André Deutsch, 1991). In what is effectively a work of investigative journalism, Lehman offers a salutary critique of the worst excesses of self-styled 'deconstructionist' criticism (particularly as it has been 'developed' in the US), but paints a skewed and highly inaccurate picture of deconstruction as expounded and practised by both Derrida and De Man, thereby exacerbating an already polarized and misrepresented debate.
3. As Derrida has pointed out, the often undisciplined attacks on deconstruction in the name of 'decency', 'common sense', 'basic human values', etc., have often been far more violent and ethically unjustified than any of his own writings. In the revealing interview 'Afterword: Towards an Ethic of Discussion', *LI*, 111–54 at 153, he poignantly asks, 'Why do such methods often so strikingly resemble what they claim to denounce but also begin to imitate (summary show trials, denial, falsification, incapacity to acknowledge what is said, done, or written by

those under attack and with whom accounts are to be settled etc.?)' Here Derrida is referring to two spiteful and philosophically threadbare pieces by John Searle: his review of Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, in the *New York Review of Books* (27 Oct. 1983); 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Jacques Derrida', *Glyph* 1 (1977), 198–209, the latter of which was written in reply to Derrida's 'Signature, Event, Context', originally published *ibid.*, 172–97. Other examples include Abrams's essay 'The Deconstructive Angel', in *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 237–52; David H. Hirsch, *The Deconstruction of Literature: Criticism after Auschwitz* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press; Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991); and the inflammatory letter sent to *The Times* (9 May 1992) and co-signed by a number of 'mainstream' philosophers, which publicly ridiculed (as well as misquoted) Derrida. More balanced and scrupulous critiques of deconstruction are to be found in John Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), and Sean Burke's excellent *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1989). Introductions to Derrida's thinking are now legion, but the most eloquent remain Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982) and *Derrida* (Fontana Modern Masters; London: Fontana, 1987), and Jonathan Culler, *In Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1981) and *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1982).

4. See especially 'Afterword' (*LI*); 'Force of Law: The "mystical foundation of authority"', *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, David Gray Carlson and Michael Rosenfeld (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 3–67; *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); *Specters of Marx and The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996); and *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997). Derrida's increasingly publicized incursions into these domains have inevitably spawned a glut of politically-oriented deconstructive criticism, the most provocative and forceful of which includes Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992); Geoffrey Bennington, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso, 1994); Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994); and Richard Beardsworth, *The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1996). A very brief but useful introduction is provided by Morag Patrick in her *Excess and Responsibility: Derrida's Political Thinking* (Manchester: Department of Government, University of Manchester, 1995).
5. The debate here concerns deconstruction's links with Kantian/post-Kantian transcendentalism, and with the whole of idealist philosophy. Derrida himself contests this accusation everywhere, perhaps most explicitly in 'Afterword', *LI*, 136–7. Norris offers a clear and succinct overview in *Derrida*, 142–71, whilst Valentine Cunningham's eloquent and thorough *In the Reading Gaol: Post-modernity, Texts, and History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994) provides a comprehensive if ultimately sceptical account of Derrida's extended application of the term 'text'.

6. Again, from *Of Grammatology* onwards, Derrida has never done anything other than strenuously deny this claim. In a relatively recent interview he states, ‘The deconstruction of logocentrism is something more methodical and complex, and you cannot simply say “down with” language. I never say such a thing. I love language, I love “logocentrism” [...] I am well aware that we need metaphysics. I’ve never said that it was necessary just to bin it.’ Interview with Valery Podorga, Natalia Avtonomova and Mikhail Ryklin, in *Moscou aller-retour* (Paris: Editions de l’Autre, 1995), 105–55 at 130; my trans.
7. ‘Afterword’, *LI*, 141. In this regard too Derrida’s statements are unambiguous. In this same passage he adds that ‘Deconstruction, in the singular, is not “inherently” anything at all that might be determinable on the basis of [a] code and its criteria. It is “inherently” nothing at all; the logic of essence [...] of the proper [...] hence of the “inherent” [...] is precisely what all deconstruction has from the start called into question [...] [it] cannot be simply “appropriated” by anyone or anything ... Anyone who believes that they have appropriated or seen appropriated something like deconstruction in the singular is a priori mistaken’, whilst in ‘Letter to a Japanese Friend’, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 269–76 at 275, he is more (provocatively) blunt: ‘All sentences of the type “deconstruction is X” or “deconstruction is not X”, a priori, miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false.’ Indeed, when asked outright ‘Is there a philosophy of Jacques Derrida?’, he simply replied ‘No’ (‘A “Madness” Must Watch Over Thinking’, *Pts*, 339–64 at 361). See also ‘Some Statements and Truisms About Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms’, in *The States of ‘Theory’: History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 63–94.
8. One should recall the origin of the word ‘critical’ here (Greek *krinein*—to cut) as a reminder that the textual commentator is no mere onlooker but a participant in the production and transmission of readings. Derrida himself contends that “‘Good” literary criticism [...] implies an act, a literary signature or counter-signature [...] an inscription of the act of writing in the field of the text that is read’. See “‘That Strange Institution called Literature”: An Interview with Jacques Derrida’, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 33–75 at 52.
9. In ‘Letter to a Japanese Friend’, 274, he says, ‘Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. It deconstructs it-self. It can be deconstructed [Ça se déconstruit]. The it [ça] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some egological subjectivity [...] And the “se” of “se déconstruire”, which is not the reflexivity of an ego or of a consciousness, bears the whole enigma.’ It is always already underway, ‘whether one likes it or not’ (*Moscou aller-retour*, 126; my trans.).
10. ‘A “Madness” Must Watch Over Thinking’, *Pts*, 356. In *Moscou aller-retour*, 125, he says, ‘I frequently stress that there isn’t a deconstruction [...] there are deconstructions at work everywhere and they are dependent on local, specific, idiomatic conditions’ (my trans.).
11. Much of ‘Afterword’ (*LI*) is devoted to this subject, but it is in “‘There is No One Narcissism””, *Pts*, 196–215 at 211 that he states the case most plainly:

‘Deconstruction [...] is not demolition or destruction. Deconstruction—I don’t know whether it is something, but if it is something, it is also a thinking of Being, of metaphysics, thus a discussion that has it out with [*s’explique avec*] the authority of Being or of essence, of the thinking of what is, and such a discussion or explanation cannot simply be a negative discussion. All the more so in that, among other things in the history of metaphysics that deconstruction argues against [*s’explique avec*], there is the dialectic, there is the opposition of the positive to the negative. To say that deconstruction is negative is simply to reinscribe it in an intrametaphysical process.’

12. ‘Deconstruction concerns, first of all, systems. This does not mean that it brings down the system, but that it opens onto possibilities of arrangement or assembling, of being together if you like, that are not necessarily systematic, in the strict sense that philosophy gives to this word’; “‘There is No One Narcissism’”, *Pts*, 212.
13. ‘Ja, or the *faux-bond II*’, *Pts*, 30–77 at 54.
14. Klee and Mondrian play interesting roles in this respect in *Rayuela* (see Chap. 3), whilst in *Libro de Manuel* Stockhausen’s music is cited as an example of the dividing line between the old order and a postulated existential break.
15. See Ernesto González Bermejo, *Conversaciones con Cortázar* [interview] (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1977), 96, where he refers to Barthes. It might also be recalled that Umberto Eco’s *Opera aperta* is a relatively important intertext in *Libro de Manuel*. See Steven Boldy, *The Novels of Julio Cortázar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 170, 172, 180.
16. See Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Cortázar por Cortázar* [interview] (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1975), 42.
17. Here he takes his cue from the Bretonian amalgamation of Rimbaud and Marx (‘Transformer le monde’/‘Changer la vie’) in *Position politique du surréalisme* (Paris: Société Nouvelle des Editions de Pauvert, 1971), 95, as well as from the existentialist notion of ‘engagement’, confirming in one of his own works that ‘entre vivre y escribir nunca admití una clara diferencia’; ‘Del sentimiento de no estar del todo’, in *VDOM*, i. 32–8 at 32.
18. Both Abrams and Lehman make this assumption, and it is this ‘nihilistic’ misconception of deconstruction that has been broadcast in the more popularized accounts of it.
19. Again the etymology (Latin *decisio*—a cutting off) is crucial here, as it renders the notions of decision and framing inextricable, and hints at the working of a certain (necessary) violence in the creation and modification of context.