Modern transformations of German Romanticism: Blanchot and Derrida on the fragment, the aphorism and the architectural

In their work on German Romanticism, *The Literary Absolute*, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy reaffirm the consonance between contemporary literary theory, as it manifests itself in the texts of Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot, and the avant garde group that formed around *The Athenaeum*.[1] Certain traits stand out: the persistent concern of literature with questions of its own essence and its problematic relation to philosophy; the concomitant break-down of any rigorous distinction between the theory and the practice of literature; the advocacy of radical experimentation. There is a danger, however, that the broad nature of these analogies may foreclose detailed attention to the way in which certain texts of Blanchot and Derrida bring to a precise and peculiarly deconstructive fulfilment questions of form and fragmentation as a practice in *The Athenaeum*, especially in the work of Friedrich Schlegel. The texts I have in mind are Blanchot's *Le pas au-delà*,[2] *The Writing of the Disaster*[3] and, above all, Derrida's essay on aphorisms and on architecture, 'Cinquante-deux aphorismes pour un avant propos'.[4]

The importance of this German Romantic context to Blanchot may be borne out by the following consideration. Writers who concern themselves with Blanchot's literary practice invariably write about his *récits* or narratives. However, during the past several decades Blanchot has not, to my knowledge, written any new work in this form. His two most notable works since the 1960s, *Le pas au-delà* and *The Writing of the Disaster*, are in quite another mode altogether. They make up a *series of fragments*. Both also contain a great deal of meditation upon the fragmentary and on writing in fragments, and explicitly differentiate themselves from Friedrich Schlegel's exercises in this mode.

In this context, an earlier essay, 'L'Athenaeum', takes on a new interest. This appears in a section of *L'Entretien infini* (1969) subtitled 'Le neutre, le fragmentaire' ('The neuter, the fragmentary').[5]

Blanchot argues that one of the tasks of German Romanticism was 'd'introduire un mode tout nouveau d'accomplissement et même une

véritable conversion de l'écriture' (*EI*, 518) (to introduce a totally new mode of completion and even a veritable transformation of writing). Moreover, contrary to certain received ideas about the Romantics, their work is characterized not by a denigration of the value of conscious thought but by a reckoning of poetry as a movement of consciousness in the act of (self) conception. While these ambitions, *prima facie*, seem at the opposite pole from Blanchot's conception of that 'oblivion' or negativity inherent to writing, this distance should not obscure a shared attention to the import of the *act* or practice of writing:

> voici le trait frappant: ce sont les écrivains romantiques eux-mêmes qui, parce qu'ils écrivent, se sentent les vrais philosophes (. . .) liés à l'acte d'écrire comme à un savoir nouveau qu'ils apprennent à ressaisir en en devenant conscients. (*EI*, 519)
>
> (The striking characteristic is this: it is the Romantic writers themselves who, because they engage in writing, feel themselves to be the true philosophers (. . .) bound to the act of writing as to a new form of knowledge which they learn to grasp in the process of becoming conscious of it.)

The human subject of German Idealism grasping itself in act, elaborating itself in the work-of-art as its self-presentation—this is the supreme work towards which the Romantic project directed itself. It is not a matter of producing so many fine, determinate works of art, but of the (self) presentation of the conditions of representation, making and showing in general. Literature's seizure of itself as act, as *poiesis*, 'conduit la littérature à revendiquer non seulement le ciel, la terre, le passé, l'avenir, la physique, la philosophie—ce serait peu—, mais tout, le *tout* qui *agit dans chaque instant, dans chaque phénomène* (Novalis)' (leads literature to claim not only the sky, the earth, the past, the future, physics, philosophy—that would be little enough—but everything, *the whole* which *is active in each instant, in each phenomenon* (Novalis)) (*EI*, 521). This embracing totality is the transcendental subject, 'la pure conscience sans contenu' (pure consciousness without content) (*EI*, 523). The new literary work would be the poetry of poetry as the consciousness of consciousness. Transcendental poetry is simultaneously the self-transcendence of the poet as a finite individual and the self-affirmation of the subject's fundamental freedom and transcendental status. This is, among other things, the Romantics' answer to the philosophical demand, most realized in Hegel's encyclopaedic project, that human knowledge be articulated as a *system*. 'System', here, as Heidegger argues in a study of Schelling,[6] does not name only an organized presentation of the possible objects of cognition. It names a work whose systematicity would itself embody the internal

relation and essential nature of its objects and concepts, *viz.* its architectonic would be the systematicity of being itself.

Why the fragment as the response to the transformations of concepts of the work and the totality which this extraordinary project entails? The inherent incompletion of a fragment renders it a sign of the movement beyond itself whereby it would be completed. It thus (to condense a more detailed analysis) instantiates the ideal of a Romantic or transcendental poetry as always in a state of *becoming*, its own auto-production in process. ('The Romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected.')[7] In a movement homologous with dialectics, the perfected essence of *poiesis* is the continual affirmation of its lack of perfection in the form of its striving *towards* it. In Schlegel's *Critical Fragments* (1797) no. 14, we read, 'In poetry too every whole can be a part', yet, correlatively, 'every part can be a whole'.[8] The form is thus notable for setting the reader to work. Consciousness is engaged in a ceaseless transcendence of its finite determinations, a process undergone *as the very movement of reading*.

At the close of his essay on the German Romantics and *The Athenaeum*, Maurice Blanchot, criticizing Schlegel, lists three ways in which the fragment, as the basis of a literary composition, may be conceptualized. Firstly, it could be considered as a concentrated text in its own right, apart from the field it shares with other fragments. This would be to render the fragment a kind of *aphorism*, a closed form which Blanchot treats (repeatedly) with some disdain. He takes issue with the aphoristic element in Schlegel's definition of the fragment as a sort of hedgehog, turned in upon itself. Secondly, one might wish to consider the fragment in terms of the overall structure it forms with other fragments in the text. As with the first option, this is essentially to embrace the fragment in terms of a notion of aesthetic coherence that finally eschews *the fragmentary* itself. Thirdly, one can affirm the fragment in terms of a practice of writing that conforms neither to the concept of unity nor to that of totality implicit in the first two options.

It is no surprise to gather that it is the last possibility that most interests Blanchot. In *The Writing of the Disaster* he argues that the third possibility 'is what F. Schlegel sensed, but it is also what finally escaped him, though in such a way that one cannot reproach him with his misunderstanding' (60). This possibility can *only* be affirmed by a meticulous working-through of the concepts at work in the first two. In effect, the third possibility emerges out of the realization, or the exhaustion, of the others. One cannot merely write a series of fragments that explicitly beg not to

be read as a totality; it is rather a matter of effects that arise, *of themselves*, when the exigency to totalize or unify is fulfilled and yet, in that very success of the systematic, something discrepant emerges as the insistence of a certain lack or excess that cannot be accommodated:

> The correct criticism of the System does not consist (. . .) in finding fault with it, or in interpreting it insufficiently (which even Heidegger sometimes does), but rather in rendering it invincible, invulnerable to criticism or, as they say, inevitable. Then since nothing escapes it because of its omnipresent unity and of the perfect cohesion of everything, there remains no place for fragmentary writing unless it comes into focus as the impossible necessary: as that which is written in the time outside time, in the sheer suspense which without restraint breaks the seal of unity by, precisely, not breaking it, but by leaving it aside without this abandon's ever being able to be known. (*Dis.*, 61)

Blanchot barely elaborates on what is meant by the System's being exceeded by the very impossibility of its failure (47). One possible reading here would open up a tautology implicit in the concept of unity at work in Schlegel's notions of interpretation or reading, and of the fragment and its relation to the series of fragments. A fragment, he argues, provokes the reader to a consciousness of its possible completion, thus positing 'unity' as the teleological goal of reading. One can argue then, that the concept of unity as transcendental synthesis, as an activity-of-consciousness, is *necessarily* affirmed in the reading of the fragments themselves. The success of the fragment-form is assured in a merely circular way, for Schlegel (a) defines the process of understanding as the perception or construction of unity, and (b) valorizes genuine unity in terms of becoming, as the process or activity of its endlessly formulating, seeking and approaching itself.[9] This argument is merely self-justifying—what Schlegel affirms in or as the text is merely the formal structure of the notion of understanding or reading applied to it. For Blanchot, however, fragmentary writing must be conceived not as breaking this 'seal of unity' but as lying 'aside' from, unclaimed by, this 'omnipresent unity' and 'perfect cohesion' (*Dis.*, 61).

The circularity of Schlegel's conception would be grounded in the Romantic version of the German-idealist concept of the subject. Fragmentation and Romantic irony, affirming self-negation as self-transcendence, would be incoherent without a notion of continuous form. The subject in process is continuous and one—the negated self is fundamentally at one with the self in the process of transcendence, just as the very concept of *becoming* is incoherent without the possibility of an unchanging substratum. The movement between the fragments which

irony both invites and affirms takes place then within this continuous horizon of subjective freedom. Blanchot's conception of the fragmentary exigency forms, correspondingly, part of the modern philosophical argument with the Cartesian notion of the subject, *subjectum* meaning literally that which retains identity as it *lies under* varying predications. In contrast to the German practice, in which an idealist conception of consciousness seems self-verifying as a consequence of fundamental precommitments to certain notions of totality, continuity, reading and interpretation, for Blanchot fragmentary writing 'is risk'. He adds: 'it would seem risk itself. It is not based on any theory, nor does it introduce a practice one could define as interruption. Interrupted, it goes on' (*Dis.*, 59). Yet it does not go on as a continuous project binding itself to a synthetic totality. The form or process of synthesis is *at issue* in the movement between fragments, it is not the ground of that movement.

The circularity in Schlegel may serve to gloss Blanchot's essay on *The Athenaeum* when it claims, again somewhat obliquely, that in the project of transcendental poetry we find expressed 'the non-romantic essence of Romanticism'. He argues that to write is to make of language a work, but this work is itself an 'unworking' (*désoeuvrement*). To speak or write poetically is to

> rendre possible une parole non transitive qui n'a pas pour tâche de dire les choses (. . .) mais de (se) dire en (se) laissant dire, sans toutefois faire d'elle-même le nouvel object de ce langage sans objet. (*EI*, 524)
>
> (make possible a non-transitive language whose task is not to speak of things (. . .) but to speak (itself) in letting (itself) speak, without however making itself the new object of this language without an object.)

Blanchot's notion of *unworking* might be read in the hiatus marked by the brackets in this citation, a *lacuna* or *interruption* in the very movement of the fragments and in the ideally reflexive (self) manifestation of the work. In *The Literary Absolute*, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe also suggest that the Romantic concern with the fragment portends Blanchot's notion of *désoeuvrement*. This is not because of the fragment's inherent affirmation of incompletion (for this is a dialectically secured working-out of a concept of totality), but because of the movement of *self-interruption* that the fragment cannot elide in its tendency to closure. The *désoeuvrement* is in excess, it does not belong to the work which is yet only made possible through that very interruption. Correlatively, the Romantic ambition to realize the text as the poetry of poetry, as literature's affirmation of its essence as a genericity that embraces and grounds all determinate genres, may again be said to 'fail' in its very 'success'.

This transformation in the very concept of fragmentation whereby any putative System becomes a fragment without, paradoxically, thereby dialectically affirming a unity or whole, is what Blanchot calls the 'disaster': 'I call disaster that which does not have the ultimate for a limit, but bears the ultimate away in the disaster' (28). The 'limit', or the totality of the work, is neither transgressed nor affirmed; it is transformed, both with regard to the limit or bounding form that might seem affirmed by an ensemble of fragments as their mutual ground and also with regard to the limit that closes or rounds off one fragment from another:

> I return to the fragment: while it never is unique, still it has no external limit—the outside toward which it falls is not its edge—and at the same time no internal limitation (it is [*contra* Schlegel] no hedgehog, rolled up and closed upon itself). (*Dis.*, 46)

Thus the identity of each fragment is not determined in itself nor does it find determination in the ensemble of fragments toward which it delivers itself. It maintains a singularity that both exceeds and resists subsumption in the network of fragments, yet by this same token this singularity falls short of a determined identity and constitutes a lack in any putative totality. Blanchot's own practice, in *Le pas au-delà*, makes up a series of fragments that both (dialectically) *step* beyond the limit they constitute, yet do so only as a transformation (a *désoeuvrement*) of the topology or space of writing itself.

Le pas au-delà and *The Writing of the Disaster* follow German Romanticism in affirming literary practice as a form of criticism and *vice versa*. The literary form, for Schlegel, affirms itself as its self-transcendence in irony or criticism. Nevertheless, there is the most minute yet decisive difference between this affirmation of the work as transcending its finitude by ironic acknowledgement of it and Blanchot's notion of a work's inherent incompletion: 'Plus une oeuvre se commente, plus elle appelle de commentaires' (The more a work comments upon itself, the more it calls for commentaries) (*EI*, 572). Blanchot's fragments acquire an oddly repetitive quality that yet never exhausts the reader's sense of novelty and strangeness. While Schlegel's fragments affirm an excess to any finite determination, Blanchot's, as they move through a series of related meditations upon what he terms 'the neuter', 'the anonymous', 'the nameless' and 'the fragmentary exigency', generate themselves out of the attempt to let speak a lack whose insistence intensifies in proportion to the writing that might seem to complement or fill it. This is the *fragmentary exigency*, the demand of/in writing, 'beyond' or 'behind' any subjective desire of expression or any conscious calculation.

The *fragmentary exigency*, for all its singularity in Blanchot, retains nevertheless basic structural affinities with the Romantic notion of *poiesis*. It names, as does *poiesis*, the impulsion to write or to make and it does so in reference primarily to the active status of the work-being of the work. This exigency retains as it revises much of the status it posesses for the Romantics: it remains a matter of the articulating of the conditions of language. The impulsion-to-write is drawn, in its essence, not to the representation of any entity or any writer, but to an affirmation of itself as a work that would make up a staging of its own work-being. For Blanchot this is not a *poiesis* of *poiesis* but a fragmentary (self)-presentation of the work in its repeatedly affirmed failure to present itself in any determinate form. Notions of completion, totality and determinancy cannot encompass the fragmentary exigency which, precisely because it pro-jects them, always *interrupts* their scope, falling to one side of any putative closure. The fragments are:

> morceaux qui ne se composent pas, ne font partie d'aucun ensemble, sauf pour le rendre morcelaire, non pas séparés ou isolés, toujours au contraire multiples sans multiplier, effets d'écart, écart toujours ecarté, la passion du fragmentaire, effet d'effets. (*Le pas*, 71)
>
> (pieces which do not form a composition, do not form part of any totality except to splice it up, not separated or isolated but, on the contrary, always multiple without multiplication, effects of a skewing movement itself always being skewed further, the passion of the fragmentary, effects of effects.)

Knowledge of the fragment as an issue in Schlegel and Blanchot is indispensable to any reading of a short but highly innovative text by Derrida, 'Cinquante-deux aphorismes pour un avant-propos' (1987) ('Fifty-two aphorisms to serve as a foreword'). This text acts as a preface to a collection on architecture and philosophy. More loosely, it prefaces an institution, the then recently formed *International College of Philosophy*, of which it is also a product.

This brief and seemingly unobtrusive series of aphorisms is one of Derrida's most forceful, difficult and experimental texts to date. As the inauguration of a non-thetic practice of philosophical writing it remains more challenging in some ways than the novel reconfiguration of dialogue-form in texts such as *Glas*,[10] 'Pas',[11] *The Post Card*[12] and elsewhere.

The concern is that already traced through Schlegel and Blanchot—the question of form, the articulation and presentation of thought. The possibility of *System* (or its conditions of (im)possibility as is now

frequently argued) has always been prominent in Derrida's work, notably in a concentration on and transformation of the concept of the book. In this series of aphorisms it takes the form of a meditation on the complicity of architecture, with its defining terminology of construction and habitation, and basic concepts of metaphysics—'l'architectonique est l'art des systèmes, dit Kant' (the architectonic, says Kant, is the art of systems) (516). Derrida's concern is the configuration of concepts or metaphors that intertwine artistic or conceptual construction with notions of totality, organization, coherence, habitation. The concern is thus 'analogy':

> L'analogie a toujours procédé dans les deux sens, ce livre-ci le démontre: on parle de l'architecture d'un livre mais on a souvent comparé telles constructions de pierre à des volumes offerts au déchiffrement. (512)
>
> (The analogy has always proceeded in two senses; this very book demonstrates this. We speak of the architecture of a book but at the same time such constructions of stone are often compared to volumes open to a decipherment.)

Derrida is once again putting into practice the Heideggerian argument that any transformation of metaphysical traditions of thought must proceed by a transformation of language. The specific focus upon the mutual implication of the metaphysical and the architectural arguably gives Derrida's work more leverage and effectiveness than Heidegger's experiments with language (his dialogues in the 1950s, for instance).[13] It also grants the work an immediate force in debates on the nature of the institution, for the series of aphorisms partly concern the form, or architectonic, of the new institution, the *International College of Philosophy* itself. Correspondingly, the analogy between matters of rhetorical, literary and architectural form engages Derrida in ways in which a transformation of writing may equally be read as a transformed manner of inhabiting or 'constructing' space.

To the obvious objection that the broad concept of 'form' is being used here too unquestioningly to justify these relations of language, metaphysics and architecture, one must answer that it is in or as a series of analogies and catachreses between the metaphysical, the rhetorical or the literary and the architectural that the very concept of *form* acquires its history, identity and effectiveness.

The essay is an *invention* in the rather precise sense outlined in 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other'.[14] It is a matter of bending, or breaking, the rules of a domain *with respect for the rules themselves* 'in order to allow the other to come, to announce its coming in the opening of this dehiscence' (59–60). This is also the formal structure of a concept of

'interruption' that Derrida has employed in the 1980s[15]—the rendering unclosed of a seemingly self-contained topology—in this case the realm of analogy between the rhetorical, the architectural and the metaphysical. It is as if it were a matter of tracing, in a familiar dimension, its inherence in other modes of space which cannot yet be conceptualized except in terms of their interruption of domains which once seemed self-consistent and cogent. The inventiveness thus comes to seem inseparable from what looks like a remorseless cultivation of intellectual paralysis, as even the most familiar minutiae of thought emerge as bound up in the realm of the analogy described. This movement of inventive transformation can be exemplified by the movement between aphorisms 1 and 10.

One cannot, first of all, say that the analogy between the rhetorical and the architectural is a problem, for 'problem' already conceals a set of concepts and assumptions bound up with the language of architecture. 'Problem', aphorism 5 argues, always sketches 'les lignes d'une construction' (the lines of a construction). It lays out, one might say, a ground plan, an architecture that is protective against other ways of thinking. It closes off; it has dualistic and military connotations; '*Problema*: ce qu'on anticipe ou ce qu'on se *propose*, *l'objet* qu'on place devant soi, l'armure, le bouclier, l'obstacle, le vêtement, le rempart, la saillie, le promontoire, la barrière. On se tient toujours et *devant* et *derrière* le problème' (*Problema*: something one anticipates or proposes to oneself, the object placed before one, armour, shield, obstacle, garment, rampart, projection, promontory, barrier. One always holds oneself both *in front of* and *behind* the problem) (510).

The very movement between aphorisms 4 and 5 instantiates the complex movement of the series as a whole. The *problem* of analogy outlined in the fourth aphorism gives way, *not* to a confident advance into the field delineated as 'problematic' but to a step back into a more minute examination of the labyrinthine configuration of thought at work in the terms with which one has come to think by following the series through aphorisms 1–4. The next aphorism (no. 6) transmits a similar movement of reflexive transformation, submitting the notion of a *project*, and above all that project now underway, to the same form of attention as 'problem'. The project (the *International College*) to which this series of aphorisms forms a preface, must be wary of the nexus of conceptual relations at work in the term project itself, *viz.* mapping out in advance the space and paths of a thought (see aphorism 14). This issue is doubled up on itself yet again in the way the concept of a preface or an 'avant propos' is homologous, in many ways, with that of a project. Hence, once more, the questions and thought to be institutionalized, somehow,

in the college, are already at issue in that prefatory writing already underway *as* the fifty-two aphorisms. This series must repeatedly turn back on itself to consider its own configuration in various concepts of space (metaphysical, political, architectural etc.). Aphorism 7 continues:

> Un texte qui se présente comme un simulacre d'avant-propos, une série discontinue, un archipel d'aphorismes, voilà une composition intolérable en ce lieu, un monstre rhétorique et architectural.
>
> (A text which presents itself as the simulacrum of a foreword, as a discontinuous series, an archipelago of aphorisms, this would be a composition intolerable in this place, a rhetorical and architectural monster.)

The 'invention' of something 'monstrous': this neatly encapsulates the movement of thought at issue, the teasing out of unforeseen configurations of thought that redefine the complicity between our notions of the rhetorical, the architectural and the metaphysical. This is already happening in the ambiguity of the analogy at work in the phrase 'in this place' in aphorism 7. Accordingly, two provocatively 'self-referential' aphorisms (8 and 9) give way to number 10, which reads as concerning the relation to have just emerged between the series of aphorisms themselves and seemingly broader questions about the putative institution. Both are to invent new 'paradigms'; indeed one may seem to be exemplary or paradigmatic for the other. Yet what is a 'paradigm'?

> *Paradeigma* signifie 'plan d'architecture', par exemple. Mais *paradeigma*, c'est aussi l'exemple. Il reste à savoir ce qui arrive quand on parle d'un paradigme architectural pour d'autres espaces, d'autre techniques, arts, écritures. Le paradigme comme paradigme pour tout paradigme. De jeu de mots en architecture—et si le *Witz* y est possible.
>
> (Paradigm means 'plan of architecture', for example. But *paradeigma* is also example. It remains for us to know what happens when one speaks of an architectural paradigm for other spaces, other techniques, arts and writings. The paradigm as paradigm for every paradigm. A certain play of words in architecture—if witticism (*Witz*) is possible in that field.)

In a twist of now monstrous convolution and difficulty, the very relation (the paradigmatic) whereby the series of aphorisms seems to instantiate questions of institutional form is itself an architectural term. It must therefore also be reconfigured within the space of the analogy at issue and remobilized in the as yet unforeseen configuration!

One touches here a 'double bind' which Derrida has delineated in the relation of the architectural to the architectonics of Western thought. Architectural terms do not bear a merely metonymic relation to basic

metaphysical concepts—they give the general architectonic its consistency and seeming solidity (*Psyche*, 483). It would be stupid (for obvious reasons) to describe this situation as a prison (as in the cliché 'prisonhouse of language'). Rather, the series of aphorisms enacts the process of a careful analysis and reinscription of concepts, working at times as a step by step desynonymization in which terms are teased into a novel 'placement' in respect of their familiar 'positions', as in the phrase 'the paradigm as paradigm for every paradigm'.

It is this 'repetition' that aphorism 10 calls a 'play of words', as it were, in architecture, or a *Witz*. The term *Witz* brings us usefully to a point of comparison with the practice of the Romantic fragment where it bears an important conceptual load.[15] A piece of wit, a joke, is often effective as a conjunction of apparently incongruous or discordant elements. Schlegel argues that 'Romantic poetry is in the arts what wit is in philosophy' ('Athenaeum Fragment', no. 116).[16] As such, *Witz* is employed by the Romantics to name the principle of linkage and unity between fragments.[17] *Witz* comes to name a concept of knowledge and the mode of consciousness in its synthetic activity. *Witz* names the systemacity of the series of fragments.

The problematic systematicity at issue in 'Fifty-two aphorisms' is quite different. In an essay on the architecture of Bernard Tsumi,[18] Derrida writes:

> Such then would be both the task and the wager, a preoccupation with the impossible: to give dissociation its due, but to implement it *as such* in the space of assembly.

The desynonymization that skews the term 'paradigm' from itself would be one mode of dissociation. Another would relate to Derrida's use of the aphorism itself as the mode of his inventive trans-formation.

Considering Blanchot's repeated denigration of the aphorism as a form of (falsely) coherent fragment and his criticisms of an aphoristic tendency in F. Schlegel, Derrida's concentration on the aphorism seems at first surprising. It emerges as an inventive reconfiguration of the issues already to be found in the relation of fragment to its work or architectonic in German Romanticism. The aphorism is precisely that form of language that claims to speak the truth, prophetically, authoritatively yet asystematically, in an unanswerable and trenchant unity of meaning and expression. The aphorism, Derrida writes in a different essay, 'sépare, il marque la dissociation (*apo*), il termine, délimite, arrête (*orizô*). Il met fin en séparant, il sépare pour finir—et définir' (separates, it marks dissociation (*apo*), it terminates, delimits, halts (*orizô*). It makes an end

in separating, it separates in order to make an end—and to define) (*Psyche*, 519). For Blanchot, a fragment is an 'unfinished separation' (*The Writing of the Disaster*). However, if any aphorism presents itself (impossibly as we know) as a *finished* separation, may this not render it, by a version of dialectical thinking, *more truly fragmentary*, since incorporation or determination in a wider work seems excluded in advance?

The Literary Absolute emerges as a probable mediator between the differing arguments of Blanchot and Derrida here. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe think through the paradox inherent in the relation of the hedgehog fragment to the totality within which it appears. To the extent to which the fragment is organic and fulfills the Romantic ideal of auto-formation, it must resist, by its aphoristic separation and separability, the organic nature of the 'whole' in which it participates. ('The organicity of the fragment also designates the fragmentation of the organon' (50).) This must lead to the conclusion that only the aphoristic fragment is truly fragmentary, precisely because of its hedgehog-like self-containedness. The System is thus threatened with becoming a chaos of *membra disjecta*. The *Organon* is 'the always-already lost', foredoomed, one might argue again, by the very condition of its success.

The tensions at work in the term 'paradigm' instantiate such a dialectic at work. It not only names a 'problem' in the relation between the rhetorical and the architectural, but also between the aphoristic and the totality. (The inverted commas around 'paradigm' and 'problem' here serve to mark out further inventive passages that might be followed from these intersections; yet another route would be to think through the way in which the aphorism, with its ideal self-containment, its oracular pronouncement of a first and last word, emerges as a 'paradigm', or parody, of absolute knowlege or the System.) In contrast to the relation of complementarity between part and whole at work in the Romantic fragment ('In poetry (. . .) every whole can be a part and every part can be a whole'), the concepts defining part or whole are at issue at every point in the inventive reconfiguration of the series of aphorisms.

This exhaustive working through of the concepts of aphorism and the architectural, using each to de-form or re-form the topology of the other, is an operation of thought that becomes in many ways an inverse of Romantic irony and fragmentation. Whereas Romanticism would affirm the transcendence of consciousness to any finite determination, Derrida's procedure leads the reader to a point at which thought can no longer pro-ject where it is going, nor formulate this difficulty even as a *problem* familiarly understood. The result is the discovery of a certain *finitude* or contingency within the realm of what once seemed self-evident or basic.

Thought does not transcend the framework of concepts whose limits and implication in thought's very self-understanding have been traced. It begins the difficult task of redefining itself, its responsibilities and its finitude in terms of the inherence of its basic concepts (of form, habitation, purpose . . .) in an emergent (non) structure it cannot comprehend nor yet comfortably inhabit. Neither an affirmation of totality nor of disjunctiveness would be sufficient—the aphorisms affirm both their separation *and* their potential seriality without being vulnerable to criticisms of self-contradiction. It is a matter of affirming their interruption of or separation from the ensemble *as* their very relation to it, their mode of belonging in a 'relation without relation', to employ the peculiar alogical syntax that Derrida takes from Blanchot. This peculiar syntax also instantiates another transformation at work in Derrida's series of aphorisms—the exploitation of language in terms of its *eventhood*, as opposed to constative representation. The phrase 'relation without relation' does not annul itself in, say, the way of '$-1 \times -1 = 1$'. It affirms a form of relation nevertheless: it does merely self-negate. It takes place as an *event* that retains a sense of sorts despite being self-annulling if considered solely as a representational proposition. It takes place as the self-affirmation or self-interruption at issue—the mere 'point' toward which the aphorism tends, an event that ends as soon as it begins.

Un aphorisme n'enjoint jamais. Il ne s'exclame pas, il n'ordonne ni ne promet. Il propose au contraire, arrête et dit ce qui est, un point c'est tout. Un point qui n'est pas d'exclamation (513).

(An aphorism never joins up. It does not exclaim itself, it never prescribes nor promises. On the contrary, it proposes, fixes and speaks the case, a point that's all. A point but not an exclamation point.)

Derrida's inventive cultivation of the monstrous bears similarities to Blanchot's practice in *Le pas au-delà* and elsewhere. It, too, is a movement of writing and thought that would seem to step beyond the limits of a conceptual space, yet do so only as a transformation (a *désoeuvrement*) of the topology of that space. However, whereas Blanchot's practice remains focused on *general* features of this movement (concepts of lack, the fragmentary exigency and unworking), Derrida's invention is a transformation at work in the very minutiae of thinking. It effects thereby both, paradoxically, a more complete sense of paralysis, and yet, by the same token, also a greater sense of the multiplicity of possible passages that thinking may—in its self-interrupting movement—'follow' or 'explore' (a further inventive thinking through of terms like 'passage', 'follow' or 'explore' would be only one instance here). The aphorisms

maintain their seriality as a force of interruption or openness to the unforseen. Each is part of a series that interrupts or involutes the one before. The continuity of the text is continually broken off, but never in a merely arbitrary manner, for the rupture is inventive in the precise sense delineated.

As an 'event' taking place in the spaces of analogy between the rhetorical, the architectural and the metaphysical, the series has no meaning as such. It can be compared to the architectural *event*, a making space or place for meaning or sense, such as fascinates Derrida in the work of Bernard Tsumi. This is a mode of architectural construction that leaves room for the unforeseen and for combinatory transformations. Tsumi's 'project' for an urban park, La Villette, suggests itself as a 'paradigm' (term to be redefined) for 'fifty-two aphorisms', consisting partly, as it does, of a series of follies at intersecting points of a putative grid:

> Each point is a breaking point: it interrupts, absolutely, the continuity of the text or of the grid. But the inter-ruptor maintains together *both* the rupture *and* the relation to the other, which is itself structured as both attraction *and* interruption, interference and difference: a relation without relation. ('Point de Folie', 17)

Each folly serves a possible multiplicity of activities, finalities and meanings. Their literary 'analogue' would be the paths not taken in, for example, this essay itself, with its inevitable proliferation of spatial and architectural figures. Analogously, the *International College*, as an institution, would bear upon the question of institutionality in a similar way, rendering it, in its way, an *event* as opposed to a pedagogic edifice embodying received knowledge or scholarship. The college would meditate on the *eventhood* of its institutionality, not in any cosily self-reflexive way, but in the mode of ceaseless trans-formation and openness to alterity inaugurated in Derrida's 'avant-propos':

> Le Collège international de philosophie s'est donné pour tâche de penser l'institutionalité de l'institution, et d'abord la sienne, notament en ce qui conjoint l'architecture, la signature et la préface (question des noms, des titres, du projet, de la légitimation, du droit d'accès, des hiérarchies, etc.). Mais chose étrange, s'il a pu *donner lieu* à telles rencontres et à un livre comme celui-ci c'est peut-être dans la mesure où il n'a pas encore de lieu ni de forme architecturale qui lui soit propre . . . (Aphorism 26)
>
> (The International College of Philosophy is dedicated to the task of thinking the institutionality of the institution, its own to start with, notably in the relation to the issue of what relates architecture, the signature and the preface (questions of names, titles, of the project, of legitimation, right of access, hierarchies etc.).

But the striking thing is this: if it has been able to *give space* to such encounters and to a book like this one, it is perhaps insofar as it has as yet no place, not an architectural form that would be proper to it . . .)

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NOTES

1 *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (translated by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester) (Albany, NY, SUNY Press, 1988). Originally published as *L'Absolu Littéraire* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1978).
2 *Le pas au-delà* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1973).
3 *The Writing of the Disaster* (translated by Ann Smock) (Lincoln, NB, University of Nebraska Press, 1986). Originally published as *L'Ecriture du désastre* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1980). Henceforth *Dis*.
4 In *Psyche. Inventions d l'autre* (Paris, Editions Galilée, 1987). Originally published as a preface to *Mesure pour mesure. Architecture et philosophie, Cahiers du CCI* (Paris, Centre Georges-Pompidou, 1987).
5 *L'Entretien infini* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1969). pp. 515–27. Henceforth *EI*.
6 *Schellings Abhandlung Über das Wesen der Menschlichen Freiheit* (1809) (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1971).
7 'Athenaeum Fragments' (1798), no. 116, in *Friedrich Schlegel's 'Lucinde' and the Fragments* (translated by Peter Firchow) (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1971), pp. 160–240 (175).
8 'Critical Fragments' (1797), *Friedrich Schlegel's 'Lucinde'*, pp. 241–56 (242).
9 See Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Organic Unity and Interpretative Boundaries: Friedrich Schlegel's Theories and their Application in his Critique of Lessing', *Studies in Romanticism*, 19 (1980), 163–92 (p. 175).
10 *Glas* (Paris, Editions Galilée, 1974).
11 'Pas' in *Parages* (Paris, Editions Galilée, 1986). First published in *Gramma*, 3/4 (1976), 111–215.
12 *The Post Card* (translated by Alan Bass) (Chicago, Il, University of Chicago Press, 1987). Originally published as *La Carte postale* (Paris, Aubier-Flammarion, 1980).
13 'Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking', in *Discourse on Thinking* (translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund), (New York, NY, Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 58–90. ('A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer', in *On the Way to Language*, (translated by Peter D. Hertz; San Francisco, CA, Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 1–54.)

14 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other', translated by Catherine Porter, in *Reading de Man Reading* (edited by Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich) (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 25–65.
15 See Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarriére, *Altérités* (Paris, Editions Osiris, 1986), pp. 82.
16 See, for example, 'Athenaeum Fragments' no. 116, 'Critical Fragments', nos. 34, 90, *Friedrich Schlegel's 'Lucinde'*, p. 175, p. 146, p. 153.
17 See *The Literary Absolute*, 52–8.
18 'Point de Folie—Maintenant l'Architecture', translated by Kate Linker, in Bernard Tsumi, *La Case Vide, La Villete* (London, The Architectural Association, 1985), pp. 4–19.