3
The Other Body of Man in Derrida, Levinas, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy and Borch-Jakobsen

Upon comprehending their words, I hastened and delayed not, and I fulfilled their beckonings . . . And I rendered it from the dismal language of Kedar to the language of glorious gold.

Alharizi

(De)construction is deconstruction with a significant difference. Depending on one's orientation, this difference could be described socio-historically in terms of a difference of generation, location and political climate, or theoretically as a redeployment of deconstruction for (re)generative work. Deconstruction was a transatlantic phenomenon issuing from Derrida's kabbalistic revisions of Heidegger in the late '60s and early '70s in direct or indirect response to an international mood of rebellion against the 'system'. (De)construction is a still largely untranslated French phenomenon of the later '70s and '80s, which issues from a more or less cohesive intellectual group that includes Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida and Levinas; and it speaks to those who understand why a return to the hierarchical, humanist, man-centered status quo ante is unacceptable, but not why it must remain impossible to affirm an other self, an other truth, an other ethics or a God other than the conventional patriarchal figure of institutionalized religions. Lacoue-Labarthe marked this change when he observed
in 1975 that: 'What should be practised is something like a (de)construction, (something) less critical than positive, or to put it this way, not very negative . . . What should be upheld all the way is the philosophical thesis itself according to which there must - always - be truth and knowledge’ (1975; 254). (De)construction could be described as deconstruction affirming that truth and knowledge can again be born(e) to language and to Man, as long as it is clear that these terms - truth, knowledge, language, Man, affirmation - are to be understood other-wise.

For after deconstruction, truth cannot return in her traditional logocentric forms. Truth cannot unveil herself and display her naked charms to the rapacious gaze of man or present herself as a clear and distinct idea to the mind’s eye. She cannot be laid out in philosophical propositions or adequately represented in language or in sensuous form. Savoir (knowledge) can no longer be identified with sa-voir - literally, his seeing; homonimically (ça-voir), seeing it. And speculation therefore has to lose its specularity. If knowledge is 'I see', if it represents a subject’s identification, determination or com-prehension of what an object presented to it 'is', then, like deconstruction, (de)construction must be called a non-knowledge. For (de)construction affirms a truth and knowledge which is always other than historical concepts, identities, ideologies and languages - a truth and knowledge which infinitely exceed presence, the word and the finite mind of man, and which, as a consequence, are no longer properly speaking truth and knowledge at all. And, as Levinas points out, to try to contain what infinitely exceeds finitude in 'a savoir which assimilates' or an 'apprehension and a grasp' is to restore it to immanence and to the 'I think' and to blot out 'the-idea-of-the-infinite-in-us' (1982: 8).

On the other hand, unlike deconstruction, (de)construction neither inhabits nor privileges the negative - even in the sense implied by the now popular but inaccurate term 'negative theology'. Its pas-de-plus, its further step and further negation, is a negation of negativity, a denial that negations of the metaphysics of presence can take philosophy a step beyond metaphysics or beyond the evidence of presence. As Levinas pointed out, with a gentle reproachful glance at deconstruction, negation may open what is onto a void; but since it remains within the dialectic of being and non-being as a determination of being, it can always be recuperated by being as being: there is a void. (1974: 3) 'Nothing' can become present.2 Nancy argued more aggressively that 'indexes of decomposition,