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BUSHWHACKING DERRIDA:
PERCEPTION" ▲ CONTEXT OF CONTEXT ▲ "THE HUNTER AND THE
HUNTED"

"What must "thought" *defer* in order to...*think*? What must "philosophy" hide in order to remain philosophy?"¹

After Derrida, how can philosophy continue to think critically, and for our task here, *ontologically*?...? Can a critique of the context of perception via its textual traces render insight into the presumed meta-context of perception itself, of how we perceive our world? What occurs when perception, or its textual thought, *defers*? Is the question of the "nature of being," or ontology, merely a metaphysic, or can an internal critique of perception render a revised working "order" of the context of perception and its textual thought? If so, where does that hunt lead us?

Derrida observed, "...*there is nothing outside the text*," and appeared to disrupt and annoy philosophy's hope for critical method, even "truth." A minimal implication is that homo sapiens' perception is *con-* textual, and that perception's thought occurs partly in a text—the text occurs "with" or as part of the "*con*"- text" of perceived experience. A maximal implication, however, is that perception specifically, and textual thought in general, are always *deferred*.

So, what is Derrida deferring in order to *think*? How might we situate the *context* of Derrida's claim in particular, or perceived thought's context, more holistically?

That is, we can minimally observe that perception must limit its focus on a "this," a foreground, while deferring, suppressing a "that," or a background, of this limited, or "focused," foreground. I look out my window, I see the Continental Divide of the Rocky Mountains. Not to pun the textual play—OK, *I am punning it – it's a play after all...*—but the point is that my perception appears as "divided," deferred by the focus on the edged-image of the mountainous Divide, which rises up *against* a horizon. I want to "say," and so enter into textual play, that "I see the Divide," while I also defer that which my perception suppresses, or temporarily hides, that is, everything that I am not at the moment focused upon—so the valley and foothills (lower frame background) and blue sky (upper frame background), etc. More broadly, even the choice to look "west," towards the Divide, and not "east," towards the Great Plains, is a perceptual divide, a deferral.

¹ Alan Bass, *Translator's Introduction* to Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, x-xi.

² Ontology refers to "The branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being." (<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/ontology>); or "The science or the study of being; that department of metaphysics which relates to the being or essence of things, or to being in the abstract." (cf., OED, Compact Edition, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 1992.) In contrast to these definitions, here we are treating "ontology" as a small "o" question of the epistemological meta-order of perception, and hence we are not trying to define a big "B" being but rather the practical order of perception and its expression in text.

So far, we remain in Derrida's context. We defer, suppress, in order to perceive, and this deferral carries into our wordplay of that event. That's all. Derrida appears to leave us in this context, this *difference*.

We say that perception frames, it defers one "something" (the Continental Divide) versus another something (the valley-sky as background). A *remainder* – a deferred something – remains for our context. But we can then continue to inquire "What is the background of this "something v. something" context, what we might call the "**equation of difference?**" **What is the context of the context, the equation of difference?** Granted, we cannot escape the equation-as Derrida observed in the text, we are always stuck in the context of language-in this "equation of perception" (presented as text), in the context of "...this foreground/ background...this something/something..."

Yet, again, pressuring context, how to frame the context of *the context* itself...? We are not critiquing "being" as such, but rather we are asking an internal question as to the immediate nature of our perception through its narrative or text, so we are performing a *meta*-narrative of the act of perception. No big deal here, just the small deal of the nature ("deal" here as play, the *playing order*) of perception and its text – our deal stays within the context of perception.

We can be satisfied with or *decide* to remain situated there. By "decide" we infer, literally, from the Latin "dēcidere, to cut off, to cut."³ We can decide to cut off the context of perception and its thought from an interrogation of a "total" or meta-context. We can remain satisfied in and with the divide of the continents of perception, its field or fielding, its play. But the game does not let us avoid this dividing, this cutting – that's what Derrida's navigation exposes, that's its rule and order.

So if we decide to continue to pressure the context, and *its* context, it would appear that we are now bushwhacking Derrida's trail – maybe we even left the trail (or the trials) of logocentric tradition, which is to say that we have left the logic of purely textual *representation* – the text cannot frame itself. That is, just as the text cannot step outside itself, perception's contextual order is also unable to step outside itself, and so come up with a back-look or purely objective framing, outside itself. Yet while we cannot leave the order of the context, the context itself leaves a remainder. We are stuck in the frame, the context, the text, yet their backgrounds haunt and, we sense, having left the beaten trail, now hunt us. We do not mean to, indeed, we *cannot*, claim any ontological status or authority to perception, or its "contextual equations" – in fact, we're on Derrida's scent here that there is no ontological foundation to perception or thought, or to this proposed "bushwhacking of perception" – *we're stuck in the context*. So we are not claiming that perception or thought's context of it have any claim on "truth."⁴ We are simply starting with the *remainder* of the context with

³ American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright © 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/decide>

⁴ "...with the notion of the general text, Derrida transcends the opposition of text and textuality of appearance and essence, by paradoxically denying all ontological status to the general text." Gasché, Rodolphe, *The Tain of the Mirror*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 211, 283.

which Derrida's critique leaves us. But this observation of the order of perception and its meta-context changes the deal, the play, the game: *we are no longer the hunter hunting the order of things; we are the hunted, hunted by the "remainder."*

So might it be something like the case that Derrida's trail brings us to Kierkegaard's choice, to an irrational, equivocal, and *emergent* either/or, to a divide in the road, to Wallace Stevens' angelic portal?

One of the countrymen:

There is

A welcome at the door to which no one comes?

The angel:

I am the angel of reality,

Seen for a moment standing in the door.

I have neither ashen wing nor wear of ore And live without a tepid aureole,

Or stars that follow me, not to attend, But, of my being and its knowing, part.

I am one of you and being one of you
Is being and knowing what I am and know.

Yet I am the necessary angel of earth, Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,

Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set, And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone

Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
Like watery words awash; like meanings said

By repetitions of half-meanings. Am I not, Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,

A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man Of the Mind, an apparition appareled in

Apparels of such light look that a turn
Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone? ⁵

We can choose (or not!): "*Either* we bushwhack this off-limit hunt, this haunt, in incredulity, or terror, to become ourselves the hunted, to deal-play, speak, (celebrate?), this unbridled equation of reality's context, *or* we don't. Period." We may pack along the arrows of text. But now, like the needles of a compass that has lost its magnetic bearing, the text has a new play, a new target, an emergent, serendipitous query – "...rising liquidly in liquid lingerings, like watery words awash...such light...too quickly...gone..." It's not a matter of questioning the nature of Being, a big "O" ontology – it's rather the case that a small "o" ontology now has turned on us, and we (perception) have become the hunted, the interrogated.

⁵ Wallace Stevens, "Angels Surrounded by Paysans," *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, ed. Holly Stevens, New York: Vintage Books, 1990, p. 354.

Derrida celebrated the gaming of contextual thought, the logo-centric textual context. But of course deconstruction cannot *de-context* its own context—it's stuck...it can merely play, or, here, *be played*. The deconstructive play itself establishes, even celebrates, an incomplete, improvising discipline, a play that reveals, however, its "...apparition apparelled..."

While we cannot deconstruct the context of the context without arriving at a new *meta*-context...OK...still, at least two emergent suspicions haunt, hunt. First, in the "real," supposedly empirical, touchable, readable objects of thought, and consequently in their textual expressions, we now observe the constraints and incompletions of context...in the metaphorical texture of what we call "creation" we discover black holes,—black holes that are themselves nonetheless "cosmoi" of the real, still "somethings"—our presumed "normal" references of observation are sucked into an internal vacuum of reality. The cosmos, as perceived, is unsteady, unreliable, unreadable and unspeakable at the margins, yet even here we remain *in context*. The black hole remains a context—our bushwhacking here is not a cosmological matter. And so secondly, and alternatively, having recognized that we are now ("stuck") in the working mode ("play") of the incompletable, insoluble, breakable, context of difference, nonetheless we may choose to suspect ("or not!") difference's own shadow of itself. At the margins, perception and thought complete in the suspicion of their remainder...in a *contextual emergency*—an "emergency" that is, however, not an emergence. That is, we must observe, this suspicious, countering status does not transcend, because it's still stuck in the context, even if off trail, bushwhacking.

That is, we cannot claim that the meta-order we intuit or must posit in order to textualize the holistic context of perception constitutes a new context or a new level of complexity which derives from its lower hierarchical order, i.e., the perceptual context. The "context of the context" is still a context. A meta-order (small "o" ontology) of the "context of the context" does not render a "truthful," even a meta-tale of the real—rather, its tale has turned on us, it's now hunting the hunter, the inquirer: we are not doing ontology any longer, ontology is doing us. We have left Derrida's trail and are now on Sören's trail tracking Abraham and Isaac.

That is, in this play, this *serio ludere*, what might we say about being the hunted rather than the hunter? Tracking Winquist, we are suggesting that we cannot, for example, turn to Kant's compass and simply assert a new "transcendental schematism," we cannot refer or *defer* to "the background of a permanent substratum" as the "backgrounding context."⁶ We're in a

⁶"The first analogy used for time as duration is: "in all change of appearance substance is permanent."*[*Critique*, 212] He says that time must be seen against the background of a permanent substratum. Substances are the substrata for all time determinations.*[*Critique*, 213, 217] If we had only a bare succession, existence would never have any magnitude or duration.*[*Critique*, 214] Kant sees duration as a magnitude marked off against a substratum. This is a reduction of the concept of duration to a spatial imagery characteristic of Newtonian mechanics. The question which we must present to Kant is whether this spatialization of time, which is considered to be an a priori necessity, is commensurate with our experience of time in the immediacy of consciousness as well as in reflective moments?" [My emphasis.] Winquist, Charles, *The Transcendental Imagination*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972, p. 20.

different kind of problem – for Kant, perhaps the approach to the problem of the “thing in itself.”

No, bushwhacking with Derrida we are left in new terrain. Derrida leaves us *in* the context, but now the context is itself *a remainder*...in fact, it's *the* remainder. Even though we are tracking via a language game we cannot use language, or a new term or textual reference, to get out of the context. No: the perceptive field has turned on us, and we are “left” with this counter, non-methodological, even now existential, strategy: *We have become, indeed, we have always been, the trapped remainder.*

Here again, we don't have to leave the original trail. To quote Hawking's sense of the cosmos, “We don't need God to explain the Big Bang.” OK. We can stick with the image of the cosmos and its cosmoi, Kant's “substratum of substance.” (Either) we can choose to be satisfied with a provisional arrangement of perception, stay in the well-lighted places, on the terra firma, even imagine the radical image of the black hole. After all, we're still looking out at the Divide – the perceptual field, as such, has not changed. We're still in the image. We can celebrate that image. We might celebrate the fullness of the image, this perceptual arrangement. It's beautiful, after all, what with the blue sky, the snow-covered mounts.

(Or) we might track the Great Divide, we might track with Sören, and so ask a different question, nay, indeed, realize that we have become, always were, the question itself, ourselves, no? To live in the remainder, to in fact *be* the remainder, proffers Abraham's dilemma. Such a choice, like an “angel of reality,” would appear then as a terrifyingly beautiful and, it would seem, a wholly homo sapiens kind of thing. Indeed, it might be the most uniquely homo sapiens thing of all, it might be *the* differentiating sense of what it means to be homo sapiens.

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