

READING SALLIS: AN INTRODUCTION

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This gathering of essays, marking its domain with the subtitle “Unfolding the Work of John Sallis,” has a very specific intention: to provoke us to rethink the meaning of the word *continental* in “contemporary continental philosophy.” Specifically, it raises the question: Can we still today define “continental” geographically? Or is it incumbent upon us “contemporary” thinkers to define the word *continental*, no longer geographically, but now historically (*geschichtlich*)? We need to recognize original continental works in English—and other non-European languages—to understand better and more fully what that movement means today.

Regardless of the stand that one takes on the work of John Sallis—whether it is one of enthusiastic acceptance, critical acceptance, serious questioning, or outright rejection—still Sallis’s work is near the center or at the forefront of the movement called “contemporary continental philosophy.” This book intends to advance just this claim—advance it, not as fact to be proven, but as an enigma to be thought.

This book of essays has as its intention, therefore, a critical and in-depth reading and appropriation of the texts of John Sallis. Each essay is devoted to a direct encounter with Sallis’s writings. As such, the volume is above all a philosophical *Auseinandersetzung*—in the various and deep connotations of that word—with

contemporary continental thought as it is practiced today, both in Europe and in the United States.

The collection of essays presented here sets out, each in its own way, to disclose the philosophical writing, reading, and thinking of John Sallis—distinguishing and gathering, commemorating, confronting, questioning. The essays mark a pathway *from* where Sallis's work has come and *to* where it might now go—this “from” and “to” understood, not chronologically and in a linear sense, but rather spiraling and in the sense of doubling-back.

This volume is original, in several senses. First, it is original in that it is the first of its kind—the first book to deal directly and seriously with Sallis's texts and his work. Secondly, this volume is original in that all of the essays were written for this volume. Not a single one has appeared in print elsewhere.

Thirdly, this volume is original in that, in the issues raised and in the manner of presentation, these essays make manifest the relationship between Sallis's thinking and “origins.” Sallis's work does this in the following ways:

- a. it takes each text seriously, not as a tractatus or scholarly work that lies dead within the history of philosophy, but as a node of resonance for the enlivening questions put perennially to philosophy;
- b. it gets underneath the layers of interpretation and commentary (that always find the “solution” and thus cover up the *question*), in order to let the *questionableness* in each node of issues re-emerge for thinking (thus: archaic thinking);
- c. it brings the text being read to life in such a way that those very nodes of resonance, nodes of central tension for the original authors (Plato, Kant, Fichte, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty), show a renewed possibility; and
- d. it continually delves into those nodes with a mathematical clarity and precision, even though the issues at each node are often themselves imprecise by their very “nature,” withdrawing from thinking's purview.

Fourthly, this volume is original in that it shows how Sallis's thinking includes an abiding concern for origins. This is imaged in the phrase “archaic thinking” that I have chosen for the title of this book. Whether it is the beginnings to which phenomenology always returns for its sustenance (*Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, 1973); or whether it is the mythos to which Socratic logos inevitably turns in the play of concealment (*Being and Logos: The Way of Platonic Dialogue*, 1975); or whether it is the return to an originary phase of a thinker's thinking, to a beginning phase wherein something decisive happens, an “unsettling openness” (*The Gathering of Reason*, 1980); or whether it is the limit which encloses metaphysics, but also grants, preserves, and sustains it (*Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*, 1986); or whether it is the spacing that “opens reason beyond itself”—to what? (*Spacings—of Reason and Imagination. In Texts of Kant*,

Fichte, Hegel, 1987)—in each case Sallis's thinking is embedded in and always turns/returns to origins, beginnings, the limit or boundary of reason and thought, the boundary that enables, the beginnings which already determines all philosophy, the boundary that instigates and allows all root-unfolding in thinking.

In a way the originality of Sallis's work can be envisioned as an unrelenting attentiveness to the irresolvability and inviolability of this beginnings, this limit/boundary, and of thinking's own, necessarily ongoing tension with the beginnings/ boundary that sustains it but cannot be de-fined. Sallis's originality also shows itself in the excitement that is engendered when he reads a text of philosophy. This excitement emerges, in large part, because Sallis holds each text that he reads (interprets, opens up) to the fire of the inviolability and irresolvability of the beginnings/boundary. Sallis's focusing on and staying with the questionableness that is introduced into philosophical thinking when thinking attends to beginnings/boundary is exciting in the way that it—at its best—moves within the unbinding bounding of that beginnings. This dimension of beginnings *and* of thinking's ongoing grappling with it—necessarily ongoing, for it can have no determinable end, no point of rest—is manifested throughout Sallis's texts. For example, early in *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings* (1973), he writes:

What makes Merleau-Ponty's philosophy so germane to the question of the return to beginnings is the fact that he lets this recoil assert itself with all the questionableness which it introduces rather than resorting to some sham attempt to mask it. (PR 42)

And he circles back to the same issue later, in *Spacings—of Reason and Imagination* (1987):

Imagine, then, a spacing of closure that would exceed closure, that would perforate its covering, rending and riddling its sphere, opening it ever so minutely toward beginnings that would exceed the end, that would pluralize and defer it, endings. (S 132)

In short, a core part of the original dimension in Sallis's work of thinking, in its heeding the claim of beginnings and boundary, is how it calls into question any notion of an original as an independent substance, which would stand over against any reproduction or copy (image). Thus, at root the original character of Sallis's work is not in its standing there as "original," but rather in its continual and unrelenting attentiveness to beginnings.

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Most recently we find, almost everywhere, the thematizing of reading—from "deconstructive reading" to "hermeneutics as reading" to "Derrida's readings"—and we begin to understand ourselves as "readers." It is almost as if today "doing philosophy" is reading.

But what is reading? Or, with Heidegger, *Was heißt Lesen?*¹ I know of at least two places where Sallis himself publishes his translation of this Heidegger text.² At least four questions emerge for us at this juncture: What *is* reading? What does reading mean for Sallis? How does Sallis *do* reading? And how are we to read Sallis? Let me embark on a journey through each of these questions.

(1) What *is* reading? I look to Heidegger's brief text *Was heißt Lesen?* The last line of this text reads: "Without proper reading we cannot see what turns its gaze to us [Sallis: what has us in sight]." For Heidegger what turns its gaze to us—or has us in its sight—is variously said as *das Zudenkende*, *die Sache des Denkens*, *die Stille*, *Ereignis*, *die Sage als Zeige*, *Anwesen anwesend*, and most importantly: ἀλήθεια. It is always that with which thinking does not so much have to wrestle or come to terms, but rather that to which thinking needs to correspond. Without proper reading we are not open to what emerges or unfolds for thinking.

Do we know at all any more how to read? What do we read toward—and where from? Why do we read at all? What is called forth and evoked in proper reading? *Was heißt Lesen?* These German words can be alternately rendered and thought as: What is called reading? What does reading call for? What calls forth reading? What takes place in the root-unfolding of reading? What *is* reading? According to Heidegger:

The sustaining and guiding element in reading is (the) gathering. To what does it [the gathering] gather? To what is written, to what is said in the writing. In the manner that is appropriate to it, reading is gathering unto that which has already laid its claim on us in our own deepest way of being [the emergence of what we are in our ownmost] (*unser Wesen*) without our knowing it—regardless of whether we comply with it or renounce it.³

Reading is gathering. Gathering is primarily a gathering of "staying within the truth" (*Inständigkeit in der Wahrheit*). This "staying within" in gathering in turn gathers to the said in the writing. To read a text is to be gathered in truth/ἀλήθεια and to be gathered in what is said/shown in the writing.

Reading the text is doing the work of thinking by awakening in us how it is that we stay within truth/ἀλήθεια and by following in thinking how this staying-in is enacted.

In opening up what proper reading is, we find ourselves entangled within the web of ordinary grammar. In our usual comportment we allow grammar to give us the definitive word on how language speaks. Proper reading, on the other hand, cannot be held back by grammar. Proper reading calls for a dismantling (*Abbau*) of grammar and its hold. Sentences in their sentence-structure cannot reach far enough into what turns its gaze to us, because this gaze comes from within our *Inständigkeit*. Though having grammatical shapes, words and sentences always carry an imaging that is not bound to that grammar. Words then

become guidewords for imaging beyond grammar; this imaging is evoked by the way in which we stay in truth in what turns its gaze to reading. Thus we are called to be more attentive, more gathered, for what lies deeper in the words, though not deeper *than* the words.⁴ If we hear the saying of language within the deeper saying of the word, only then is reading on the mark—and the affordance of what lies “deeper” than grammar evocatively hints and haunts it. The gathering of reading gathers unto the evocative saying of what has already laid its claim on us “in our deepest unfolding (*unser Wesen*).” Evocative saying does not show a ready-made content, but rather carries an appeal which draws and carries the reader to a transformation of thinking.

Reading, then, is a sounding of the text, “striking” the text—as one strikes a bell—to emit a tone. The sounding of words has a power by which what is gathered in the text falls upon us. Thus the imaging of words flows from the text; words do not stand apart from thinking. The reader intones the text and thus brings to light—or sound—the underlying “truth,” being, or disclosure that binds thinking. Thus reading is both an invocation and an evocation.⁵

How to read or sound a text? is the same question as How to say in thinking? For both “reading/sounding” and “saying in thinking” are a gathering to what claims us in our deepest way of being in what is written or said. Thus this “manifold of thinking does not require a new language, but a transformed relationship to how the old language unfolds in its core.”⁶

(2) What does reading mean for Sallis? It seems appropriate to respond to this question by turning to Sallis’s own ruminations on reading. These remarks directly follow his translation of Heidegger’s *Was heißt Lesen?*

Sallis names a number of aspects that belong to reading. I want here to cite Sallis, to take him at his word, and to move into a close hold on his words—so that those certain aspects of reading that he mentions will come forth. According to Sallis, what Heidegger writes, “literally,” is: (a) gathering is reading’s sustaining and guiding element—what belongs to reading centrally, (b) reading *as gathering* gathers to what is written or said in the writing, which (c) has (always) already laid its claim on us. Interpreting this Heidegger-text, Sallis writes:

Two points are to be underlined. First, reading essentially involves coming to be *gathered* to what is *said* in writing, in the text. Second, reading, thus understood, is *responsive*—that is, the gatheredness of reading is not something that one simply initiates; rather it is a response to a certain claim, a demand, already made upon the would-be reader.⁷

Gathering from this Sallis-text, we note that (a) reading involves coming to be gathered (b) to what is said in writing or in the text—and that reading is thus responsive. Reading, Sallis then says, might be “responsive gatheredness.” Doubling back to the Heidegger-text, the responding in this “responsive gatheredness” needs to be bedded in the *Sammlung*/gathering.⁸

One might then say that the gatheredness is “akin to hearing” and the responding of “responsive” is the engagement that reading calls for. Such a reading reengages

those texts with the *Sache* that they would let sound, letting them resound, even if in a tongue that cannot but sometimes sound somewhat strange. Reading may take the form of questioning, for instance, a questioning that would reenact or translate the questioning enacted in those texts; or a questioning that would use the very resources of those texts in the effort to locate within them certain blind spots, residues of dogmatic assertion.⁹

Here Sallis lets come forth a dimension of his own way of reading—which we will address shortly—by referring to “certain blind spots” and “residues of dogmatic assertion.” This way of reading works in such a way that—as Sallis says earlier in this Introduction—Heidegger’s texts “somehow efface themselves.”¹⁰ Thus reading involves for Sallis a honing in on and keeping a close hold on the text, so that and until these “blind spots” and “residues” emerge into light. With that emergence is mirrored the text’s self-effacement: The texts undo themselves when reading holds them to this reengagement that makes the effort to locate blind spots and residues of dogmatic assertion.

Sallis is, of course, fully aware of the ongoing discussions on the “privilege of the question in Heidegger.” Noting this discussion, he quotes what he calls “Heidegger’s explicit denial of that privilege,” a sentence from *Unterwegs zur Sprache*: “The proper bearing of thinking is not questioning, but rather listening to the promise of that which is to come into question.”¹¹ Sallis adds: “Not questioning but, first, listening, hearing—akin to reading, responsive gatheredness, commemoration.”¹²

After reading Heidegger on reading, Sallis puts forth here—more “thematically” than anywhere else that I know of, and yet hardly thematically—that reading

involves coming to be gathered to what is said in writing, is responsive, responding in gatheredness to the said, and *thus*,
is an *engagement* which reengages the texts, letting them resound,
is (perhaps) a questioning which reenacts the question for the sake of locating the text’s “certain blind spots,”
is commemoration.

(3) How does Sallis *do* reading? First, let me mention what appears quite manifest to me, that—at least until quite recently—reading for Sallis meant reading texts in the history of philosophy or in the circle of those who “count” as philosophers. (Note that his works, in the order of their appearance, deal with: Merleau-Ponty, Plato, Kant, phenomenology and the end of metaphysics—Plato,

Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida—Heidegger, Nietzsche.) But his reading of these texts is always in a very specific direction, namely toward that place in the texts where things become crucial, where the *Sache* emerges “in tension,” where the thinking of the text reaches an unresolvability (e.g., the transcendental imagination in Kant, the “silent cogito” in perceptual consciousness in Merleau-Ponty, the crossing of the tragic and the Socratic in Nietzsche, ἀλλήθεια as the limit of presence at the end of metaphysics in Heidegger).

Earlier I referred to these crucial, unresolvable tensions as “nodes of resonance.” *Node* (from the Latin *nodus*) is akin to *knot* (from ME *knotte*, AS *cnotta*, Dutch *knot*, German *knoten*, IE *gn-eut*: to press together) and akin to *knit* (ME *knitten*, AS *cnyttan*, German *knütten*). Knots are (a) swellings, lumps, emerging protuberances, (b) clusters, comings-together, crossings, intertwinings, meeting-points (of lines, of nerves), aggregates (of particles), and (c) points of concentration, “centers.”

Thus one might call these nodes of resonance that Sallis’s reading holds to and opens up “knots”—knotty issues, entanglements. Taking this image one step further—and hearing the non-static, effervescent character of these “nodes”—I might suggest that what Sallis’s reading does is to let loose entrenched structures and concepts, letting them become “decisively unsettled” (GR 176). Thus these nodes are not so much knots as knottings. The nodes of resonance that Sallis’s reading lets emerge in a renewed questioning, letting their unresolvability be manifest, are really knottings or knotting images. *Knottling* is emerging swelling up, clustering intertwining, tightening centering. These knotting images are converging points. They bring forth the crossings that tighten the grip of the text—tighten the grip on the text—not letting it go, drawing them tight and holding them to their various entanglements (both their entrenchments and their possibilities). Hermann Paul in his *Deutsches Wörterbuch* says that a knotting (*knoten*) is “a riddle hard to solve, a question hard to resolve, a hindrance hard to get around.”¹³ Knotting images manifest the enmeshment, the *Sache*, the unresolvable. In physics, a node is the point or surface of a vibrating thing where there is no vibration—a stillness. In a curious sort of way, when the knotting image is reached in Sallis’s reading, it is as if one “holds one’s breath” and does not move, as if a subtle, refined stillness sets in. The question then is: unto what?

Sallis’s way of reading is exemplarily mirrored—though never quite schematic and thus never fully exemplary—in the strategy for reading that he outlines and uses in *The Gathering of Reason*. In leading the reader into that text, Sallis distinguishes four “differently structured spaces,” four “interpretive strategies.” I read these as four levels of reading (GR 11–13):

- a. Duplex interpretation or commentary. This reading doubles the text, but in the simplest doubling, staying within the horizon of the text’s original—and traditional—conceptuality, staying with the author, so to speak.

- b. Projective interpretation. This reading gathers (Sallis: assembles) the horizon in which the text is “restored” to what is in the text, but “submerged”—and presumably hidden from the author himself or herself at the time of writing. Thus this reading is a matter of “freeing a level of discourse submerged in that text and of establishing its unity by reference to a certain subordinate reflection. . . .” (GR 18) It is a matter of assembling, from within the text, a horizon that is not overtly at work in the text.
- c. Inversive interpretation. This reading shows “various texts as inversions . . . of the focal text.” This reading brings other texts by the same author into conjunction with the focal text, so that, as these various texts “bump into one another”—get knotted—a concealed layer of the focal text gets “unearthed.”
- d. Subversive interpretation. This reading brings the text being read into its larger context within the history of thought, re-installs the text within the questionings that are perennial to philosophy, questions that in their unresolvability need to be “decisively unsettled” (GR 176), such that the knotting comes forth in full force.

Whereas these four horizons or “aspects” of reading appear schematic, in enactment they break the bonds of their own schematism. And yet there is a certain hierarchy—not as if one is less a reading than the other, but as if one reading is more prevalent (or even more appropriate) as thinking/reading takes place today. (This prevalence might, of course, be itself a knotting and bring to convergence a certain unresolvable, a tension, the *Sache*.) Thus (perhaps) the work of reading as commentary (the first strategy) is ever and always centrally important; and yet, it would seem, Sallis’s work focuses more and more on the inersive and subversive ways of reading. Sallis’s reading seems to have moved from reading as projective interpretation (in *Being and Logos*) to, more recently, reading as subversive. Thus he speaks of reading that locates “certain blind spots” and “residues of dogmatic assertion” (in his “Introduction” to *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*) and of the “phantoms that haunt” Heidegger’s text and that “reproduce within it precisely what the text would submit to *Destruktion* or commit to overturning” (E 11) and of Nietzsche’s text “as a theoretical text [that] crosses itself out, places itself under erasure, indeed placing under erasure the very placement with which it commenced” (C 148).

The question, of course, emerges: Is there a way of reading (namely, reading as gathering in *Inständigkeit* in ἀλήθειᾶ) that is not accounted for in these four ways? Or: Which of these four ways names the evocative saying that reading as gathering gathers unto? In his essay “Voices” Peperzak points out how Sallis distinguishes hermeneutical echo from simple mirroring or repetition, in that hermeneutical echo resounds as an original sound—“an original divergence from

an original" (E 5). Something is happening in the echo that does not happen in the text itself, "originally." Thus the "responsive gatheredness" in Sallis's reading is a re-engaging with the text, for the sake of ecstasy, i.e., displacing "the responsibility of our listening from the 'human speech' . . . to the 'speaking of language.'"

Gasché alludes to the elusive possibility that the reading that Sallis does of imagination might, in its radicality, lead to the impossibility of any delimitation of it—so radical "as to exceed being regathered into the circle of self-presentation" (S 153). Thinkable, but somehow not graspable? Questionable, but somehow not? A reading of texts of imagination that frees imagination to its excessiveness—and thus "toward a withdrawal from presence," broaching "a wonder that one could never aspire to surpass" (words that bring *Spacings* to its close and the same words that Sallis has put as title to his essay at the end of this volume).

Scott says that Sallis works "in yoked, unreconciled opposites and in breakage of connections." Sallis's logic is one of "monstrosity" . . . "a logic that holds opposites together in aporetic structures that lack a synthesis of higher identity." This logic of monstrosity that "breaks connections" is always "in an historical context," Scott says.

Scott makes another, significant knotting in how Sallis reads: the knotting of forethought, exacting precision, a seemingly non-elusive premeditated abstraction and the disorder, derangement/madness¹⁴ that comes hand-in-hand. Scott opens his essay by saying:

John Sallis draws the lines of his thought with a fineness that reminds me of the lines in a Japanese painting. There appears to be no excess. Each mark is exacting, exactly meant, placed with a very fine brush, leaving aside clutter and wasted movement. Among us who premeditate everything, he stands out for his precision and clarity of purpose, for his forethought that demands quiet patience and elimination of each word and innuendo that do not count towards a presentation of precise meaning and simple determination.

Towards the end of his paper Scott then offsets this remark with the other side:

I have followed Sallis in the serenity of his ordered images; and at the apex of his account, like the single note of an oboe into which my hearing enters, comes suddenly an opening so harsh, a playing out of the presence of the previous order so stark, that I hear in it the collapse of the order of Sallis's thought. That he might have planned it this way does not diminish the strangeness of the sounds that emerge, for in *this* mimetic moment the abstractness of Sallis's thought, its descriptive accuracy about imagination's holding opposites together, its synthetic power to join together the opposites of appearing and disappearing,

all collapse in an unhinging movement that is not unlike “dithyrambic madness.”

(4) How are we to read *Sallis*? First, there are those words that belong to Sallis’s discourse—poignant words: spacings, hoverings, tunnelings, enroutings, tremorings, crossings, delimitations, twisting free, meaning adrift. Then there are the knotting images that emerge in Sallis’s reading/thinking. These knotting images are fairly easy to find, if one reads at all carefully. Their names include:

- the dove of metaphysics who, at the end of metaphysics, must learn to hover between heaven and earth, “resisting the lure of the emptiness above and the illusion of fullness below” (D 16)
- beginnings that calls forth thought and sustains it, but itself withdraws
- the interplay of ἔργον (enactment) and μύθος (withdrawal) with λόγος
- from image-original to imaging
- reading as hermeneutical echo and the history of philosophy
- mimesis and imagination
- doubling and echo, coincidence and doubling
- intelligible and sensible and their collapse
- reason’s eccentricity, imagination, madness
- space and spacing(s)
- Apollinian and Dionysian tragedy
- monstrosity
- imagination: freed from the intelligible, the sensible, and the subjective
 - as the play of imaging
 - as the original ecstasy
 - as abysmal imagination
 - as excessive imagination
 - as eikastic imagination
 - as opening us “beyond ourselves and beyond what can ever be, even ideally, present” (D 28).

If there is a single thread that runs through all of Sallis’s work of thinking, it is this last thread, this knotting of imagination. In his first book, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, the issue pops up, as somewhat of a surprise to the reader, in the last lines of that text:

One of the names that the tradition has given to the power of persisting in that strife [the strife of thought’s calling forth the beginnings, while at the same time being repelled by beginnings—thought’s awareness of the finitude within its conceptuality] is imagination. The question is whether there can be a philosophy of imagination which is not also a philosophy of the *cogito*. (PR 116)

From there to his recent book, *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy*, this knotty image of imagination comes up again and again. Imagination is, in a sense, the dragon that Sallis needs to slay in order to claim his prize at the haunt of Dionysos and Apollo. There is a hint in *Crossings* that he has some more work to do before he can claim that prize. A series of questions marks the pathway of where his reading/thinking on imagination might now go:

What must be the constitution of imagination if it has the capacity to engage images that are disclosive of a higher truth? Does it suffice to term it *phantasy*? How, then, would one need to reformulate the distinction between imagination and phantasy, a distinction that in constantly varying forms runs throughout the entire history of metaphysics? Furthermore, if, in its productive engagement with shining images, imagination effects a disclosure of truth, then what must be the character of disclosure and of truth that they can be so linked to imagination? How extensive is Apollinian imagination? Do all other forms simply produce illusion or are there other forms that bear upon truth? Is there a Dionysian imagination, a form of imagination that comes into play in tragedy? (C 29–30)

Beyond these just-mentioned clues or markings, I do not presume to be able to answer the question of how to read Sallis. It feels more fitting to let the various essays of this volume show how to read Sallis, i.e., tell it by enacting a reading. And because of the peculiar configuration of how contemporary continental philosophy takes place today—in its seemingly endless differentiations—how to read Sallis cannot be defined by this volume and will not stop unfolding.

Whereas I do not presume an answer to the question of how to read Sallis, what does come to me is a series of questions: Does reading Sallis take a special skill, background, training? Is reading Sallis any different from reading Heidegger, reading Derrida, reading Plato, reading Haar, reading Gasché? In any reading, what is the character of the text being read? What does the context of any text bring to bear on the reading? How does the reading of a text take into account the texture of the text? Texture, text, context.

If reading is of *written texts*, then reading a text also has a context, a specific epochal-historical situation within the history of thought in which the text takes place. For example, a text on Plato today has a context different from that of a text on Plato from the fourteenth century. Or a text on Kant written today will differ from a text on Kant written in 1830. Specifically, how we read Kant today has been irreversibly altered—and perhaps advanced—by the thinking of the past two hundred years in general, and by Heidegger's reading of Kant in particular. Or put differently, reading Hegel within the context of metaphysics is different from reading Hegel within the context in which the limit of metaphysics is thought.

If reading a text takes place and is influenced by the context, then reading a text in context also has a texture, the intertwining of the text with the originary *Sache*, or phenomenon. The texture of the text is the weaving of the text, in its saying, with the whole of what is said/shown, namely the *Sache*/phenomenon: what self-shows in showing, what comes forth in coming forth. This is—to use Heidegger's words—what turns its gaze to us in proper reading.

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Finally, then, at the end of this introduction, I come back to where I started, to focus on contemporary continental philosophy. At the beginning I suggested that we need to redefine contemporary continental thought historically rather than geographically—so that, whatever contemporary continental philosophy is, it belongs more to a time (epoch) than to a given place. One could argue that the epoch—at the end of metaphysics, where non-philosophy emerges for philosophy—requires the movement of contemporary continental philosophy to be called “contemporary continental thought.”

This moves to a deeper issue: the contemporary way of “doing philosophy.” In a way this book and the work of John Sallis mirror the contemporary *πόλεμος* of philosophical thinking itself. *Πόλεμος*: *Auseinandersetzung*; the place of con-tention, tension; where the issues come to a head; drawing the “battle-line” for thinking—where one does battle. I locate that tension—or nodal point, knotting—in the relation of text to texture. The central question is: How does reading, as it is done in contemporary continental philosophy, deal with and heed the texture, the intertwining of the word/text with the *Sache*/phenomenon, with what turns its gaze to us? This *πόλεμος*—of the work of the text (and reading it) in its tension with the phenomenon (and heeding it)—comes forth as one unfolds the work of John Sallis; and this *πόλεμος* is continually held open therein. *The* tension for contemporary continental thought today is mirrored in the work of John Sallis.

How shall we name the con-tension—the line that gets drawn—in contemporary continental philosophy, which is imaged in the knotting of “text” in Sallis? This line is very complex, yet there is a general tone that staying to the “fire” of this reading/thinking allows to emerge.

One might say that there are two roads that run through how contemporary continental philosophy works, reads, or “plays with texts”: (a) reading the text at the boundary/limit of metaphysics, a boundary within the context of the text and (b) reading the text for the texture, staying with the phenomenon at the boundary—letting boundary emerge as opening: boundary as phenomenon which, when tended, carries within itself its own capacity to open out onto the texture, intertwining with the phenomenon in its unfolding. The story of contemporary continental philosophy is in the con-tension of these two.

More precisely: It is the joining or unjoining of these two roads that makes up the story of where thinking today is, at the end of metaphysics, in phenomenology, in contemporary continental thought, and in the move from one to the other.¹⁵

In *Positions* Derrida describes what happens in his books as a “textual operation . . . which . . . is entirely consumed by the reading of other texts. . . .”¹⁶ He goes on to speak of the double gesture, marked by an “erasure that allows what it obliterates to be read,” a kind of reading that makes the “philosophemes and epistememes” on the one hand “slide . . . to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure.”¹⁷ In that sliding another text opens up, on the other hand: that which exceeds, which gives us to think beyond the closure. But this excess, too, is inscribed (as trace) within the text as it “points in the direction of an entirely other text.”¹⁸

To read the text in this sense, then, is to inscribe the text in such a way that every position is confounded.¹⁹ Any opening is made “only according to lines of force and forces of rupture that are localizable in the discourse to be deconstructed.”²⁰

Deconstructive reading tries to hold out in front the character of otherness (heterogeneity) in philosophical discourse—deferring, differing—not seeing beyond or underneath/over this otherness (the inner difference of philosophy’s texts), insisting that there *is* no legitimate “beyond” or “deeper than.” Deconstructive reading, then, begins and stays with paradoxes—all aporias in general—that belong to conceptualization and to philosophy’s discourse-character: “One is simply dealing with greater or lesser syntactical units at work, and with economic differences in condensation.”²¹ Reading is a kind of writing, a double gesture, that opens up the text that is present to its excess, which in turn is opened up in the rupture of “writing the fissure”—writing toward “an entirely other text.”²² Reading never leaves the image or context of the text.

Sallis mirrors this way of reading texts that inscribes—or reinscribes—such that every position is confounded, that gestures such that “philosophemes and epistememes” slide to their exhaustion, that opens up, finally, an excess, which in turn is inscribed as it points to “an entirely other text.” Sallis writes that “every text is exposed to the possibility of differing with itself” (E 11). Here, too, fits what he says about reading as a questioning “that would use the very resources of those texts in the effort to locate within them certain blind spots, residues of dogmatic assertion.”²³ In this context he speaks of “texts that efface themselves.” But unto what?

Deconstructing the opposition between the sensible and the linguistic lets in a drift that is not securable, Sallis writes of Heidegger. “It will be a matter, then, of a reading adrift among various sorts of echoes. There will be, of course, as always, textual echoes, that is, echoes of semantic or syntactic elements within a text or between texts” (E 12–13). At this point Sallis makes a turn to what I am calling the “texture”: “But there will also be echoes among the things themselves, that is,

among *die Sachen*, that are to be thought . . ." (E 13). This turn would show that Sallis's work is sensitive to the two roads that I have outlined and to the πόλεμος involved in coming to terms with the tension.

But can this turn be made, given the character that text has for Sallis? This is the crux, the knotting—now not the knotting that Sallis sets to and thinks, but rather the knotting that comes along with his reading. For he says, a bit later, "My concern will be, then, to reinscribe several of Heidegger's texts so as to draw them toward the limit, to mobilize the figure of echo in order to free those texts to say what they can say, now, after Heidegger" (E 13). Is this "limit" in which the texts are "freed up" to say what they can say "now"—is it a matter of text, context, or of texture? Or: Whereunto (in the interweaving of text, context, and texture) is this "reinscribing of texts"? More specifically: How does deconstructive reading of the text get to the texture?

The dilemma—the πόλεμος, tension—is even more sharply laid out in *Crossings*:

This reflection serves notice that Nietzsche's text *as* a theoretical text crosses itself out, places itself under erasure, indeed placing under erasure the very placement with which it commenced. And yet, on the other hand, it goes ahead with its series of rigorously ordered analyses, goes ahead with making its contribution to aesthetic science; that is, the erasure, the displacement from the theoretical pole, remains largely unmarked, unreflected in the text, even though what comes to be said only furthers that displacement and renders the erasure more indispensable than ever. In other words, the text remains at variance with itself, remains divided from itself, lacking identity. One could describe it even as a text that exceeds itself by saying what it could not as such (as the theoretical text it purports to be) say; thus thematizing its proximity to the Dionysian, one would begin to sense the complexity of its inscription. (C 148)

What must reading bring to bear on the text, in order that such a text might "exceed itself"—or more precisely, unto what might a text exceed itself? Is this "exceeding" an opening unto the texture, the *Sache*?

Earlier Sallis says that for Nietzsche "what will have been written" interrupts the "contemplative delight" with which it was to have been written—what will have been written "double crosses that delight" (C 13–14). I have elongated Sallis's sentence and turned it from a passive to an active voice, in order to free up what is submerged in it—namely that the text and the writing of it carries a certain agency, if it is to do anything at all!—as if the text had hands. The difficulty is that, by being "merely" textual, reading is closed off to the texture of the text, to the text's "saying" of and within the ambience of the phenom-

enon; and a certain arbitrariness sets in, because the measure—even of the boundless, i.e., the non-measurable—is/gets unbound (unconnected) from the phenomenon.

The intertwining (Sallis: crossing) of the various texts that emerge in Sallis's reading is bound by the textuality; but is it given over in enactment to the texture? In *Crossings* Sallis crosses Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* with related texts of Nietzsche—earlier drafts (some of them given as public lectures), smaller, published texts that bear upon *The Birth of Tragedy*, and notebook entries—and crosses this in turn with Heidegger's reading "and all that it has opened up" (C 7). Sallis calls these a double crossing. Then he writes:

But then writing across it still another text, reinscribing it but also crossing it out, erasing it, adding to its saying the unsaying that what is said requires. Producing, then, a text that is something of a double of *The Birth of Tragedy*, a phantom, a spirit, that has already begun to haunt it. (C 8)

Is that which haunts *The Birth of Tragedy* another text, or the "phenomenologically" unfolding texture?

Sallis in his reading comes very close to opening out onto the texture. It is almost as if the anticipatory gaze that proper reading has is ready for his reading/thinking to break out of the text-enclosedness. (Indeed it seems as if he has broken out when he speaks of the "echoes among the things themselves.") One is tempted to hear him using the word *text* in a broader, deeper way. But this anticipation is thwarted with the realization that "text" seems not to have this deeper connection to texture. Indeed at times the "piece of writing" takes on a "life" of its own—e.g., when Sallis works through the intricacies of the various letters (or letter-drafts) from Nietzsche to Wagner and the unbound character of the volume when Wagner received it, to raise the issue of what it would have been like, *textually*, if the supplemental texts (read: letters and drafts of letters) had been bound in with the unbound book, "sixteen years later." Indeed, the text becomes above all a written text!

The question is: How does one measure what is a proper reading of texts after deconstructive reading has taken hold? If one is thinking at the core—and not simply engaged in a kind of commentary or scholarly treatise—then deconstructive reading comes up against the call for a transformed way of reading. How is this transformation enacted and where does it take place? Wherein lies the basis for this new reading? In deconstructive reading's strategy of disruption, in what direction does it go?

Let me dwell for a moment on a specific textual moment in *Spacings*, where Sallis speaks of an unparalleled "outbreak of metaphor" in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Almost openly it betrays that text and through its betrayal offers an opening upon certain questions that secretly govern that text while remaining systematically suppressed therein. (S 69)

What is this betrayal? One way to say it is that reason cannot become totally present to itself, even as it tries. Now, where does this betrayal take place? In the text or in the texture, the phenomenon? Is it a betrayal of the text? Is it the text's betrayal? Is it a betrayal that takes place textually, even as the text suppresses it? OR is the betrayal in the *phenomenon* of reason's critical reflection on itself—and thus open to further unfolding by reading within the texture?

If the betrayal is of the text, then deconstructive reading will hold open the fissure of the betrayal—will displace in such a way as to keep open the place of contradictions, paradoxes, differences. If the betrayal is of the phenomenon (textural), then proper reading will stay with the movement of withdrawal inherent in the betrayal, stay with even as it opens itself up—the shimmering expanding of boundary.

On the one hand Sallis indicates that this betrayal is indeed textual: “the outbreak opens upon the question of the spacing of the text itself, the question of its textuality” (S 69). On the other hand Sallis hints that the betrayal exceeds the text: What holds reason back from total self-presence (which is the movement of the text of the *Critique of Pure Reason*) is “another articulation, one which, belonging to a different order, has a certain priority over the text and to that extent governs it—in short, a prearticulation” (S 70). With that there seems to be a joining of deconstructive reading with the texture, i.e., the *Sache*/phenomenon. What enables the creative engagement with the text is not intra-textual, but is the *Sache* itself.

To what extent does Sallis in his writings stay within the textual movements of disruption and displacement? And to what extent does he move out from the *textual* play to the play that is *offered* in the text but goes out beyond, to the texture, to the phenomenon, to the phenomenon-showing, to the emergent emerging?

Do texts exceed themselves? If so, under what rubric? The subversion within the texts—is it an opening one which enables thinking's transforming engagement with the texture? If so, does the text itself *as* text enable that enabling subversion?

To the extent that Sallis's work deconstructs texts within texts, to the extent that it is a play of textual forces, an intervening that gets texts to move (head-on or obliquely) into the fissure, the other text, to the extent that Sallis's texts on texts bring forth displacement and disruption essentially *within* that text—to that extent that work cannot touch the deeper movement of the phenomenon. *That* is simply not textual in the way that deconstructive reading hears “text.” What exceeds the closure of metaphysics and what exceeds the text (e.g., in Sallis's “excess of imagination”) is phenomenologically not nothing, but rather withdrawal. The unfolding of the withdrawal from representation and meaning and presence at the end of metaphysics is not textual, but rather textural, or phenomenological.

Thinking, writing, and text need the withdrawal for their own rooting. But as phenomenon, this withdrawal engages thinking while it may escape writing.

I have worked on this collection of essays out of gratitude for what Sallis's work has enabled and opened up. For I share with him, what I take to be his challenge also, a reading that re-engages the text in an original way, such that thinking is transformed. For we need to move away from our usual understanding of "what is" and of the "true" to a transformed way of the "true" and of being "what it is."

Here I am reminded of Scott's "guest" in his paper, the Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien:

In a true war story, if there's a moral at all, it's like the thread that makes the cloth. You can't tease it out. You can't extract the meaning without unraveling the deeper meaning. And in the end, really, there's nothing much to say about a true war story, except maybe, "oh."²⁴

I am also reminded of a struggle of which I have only heard and in which I have not participated, indeed cannot fully participate: the struggle of Black women, whose literary tradition, in the words of Katie Geneva Cannon, "is the nexus between the real-lived texture of Black life and the oral/aural cultural values implicitly passed on from one generation to the next."²⁵ That is the texture of their text. She goes on: "In essence, there is no better source for comprehending the 'real-lived' texture of Black experience and the meaning of the moral life in the Black context than the Black women's literary tradition. Black women's literature offers the sharpest available view of the Black community's soul."²⁶ This offers a rich notion of texture—and clearly opens up the difference between what is textual and what is textural.

What is the texture of philosophy's texts—or non-philosophy's texts—here, now, at the end/limit of metaphysics? How can we read the text within its context and texture?

Sharpening the lines of this knotting, let me juxtapose two Sallis texts on reading. First, from *Being and Logos*:

The demand is for a restraint against letting the matters of the *Republic* fall into the molds prepared for them by the tradition and for a playfulness sufficiently lawful and evocative to allow these matters the free space in which to reform themselves. (BL 312)

Then a text from *Reading Heidegger*:

Reading may take the form . . . of a questioning that would use the very resources of those texts in the effort to locate within them certain blind spots, residues of dogmatic assertion.²⁷

Are these two descriptions of reading compatible? Is reading that questions texts for the sake of blind spots and residues of dogmatic assertion in any way alien to reading that allows the matters the free space in which to reform themselves? More succinctly, do both ways of reading take into account that which turns its gaze to us: the *Sache*/phenomenon, the self-showing unfolding itself, that is textured within the text?

I believe that there is a difference between a reading that restrains “against letting the matters [of a text] . . . fall into the molds prepared for them by a tradition,” a reading that is sufficiently playful and evocative “to allow these matters the free space in which to reform themselves” (BL 312) and a reading that “uses the very resources of . . . texts in an effort to locate within them certain blind spots, residues of dogmatic assertion.” Both readings may be subversive. But then: Does the one, the other, or do both ways of reading constitute the clarion call of the πόλεμος that meets us today, on the road of contemporary continental philosophy?

What is the texture to which each way of reading calls us? Does each call us to a different texture? Does the texture have a calling power of its own? Can thinking image that dance of text and texture whereby reading the text moves to and is sustained by the texture that is within it (the text), but deeper, as it (the texture) embraces the text?

Certainly the echoes of the text emerge for thinking. Certainly hearkening to the text and staying to the “fire” of the text’s various levels reveal doublings and doublings-back, blind spots, and self-effacements. But how is the text *attached*? Where is its texture? One can certainly grasp the complexity of texts and their textuality—the “textual echoes”—but these “echoes of semantic and syntactic elements within a text or between texts” (E 13) may run the risk of becoming “formalizations.” These formalizations (in the words of *Being and Time*) “level off the phenomena to the point that their proper vigor as phenomena is lost,”²⁸ or the point where the texture is lost.

Finally is it possible that “deconstructive reading,” which may intend to be within and be shepherded by the texture of the *Sache*/phenomenon, *in its enactment* is actually contrary to that intention? I see contemporary continental philosophy itself at such a crossroads—and Sallis’s work as mirroring this dilemma.

This dilemma, enigma, or knotting is imaged and highlighted when Derrida, in his essay in this volume, pinpoints the “Sallisian operation”—and Sallis’s contribution—as one of

broaching a procedure of the deconstruction of metaphysics, which by way of a certain genealogy of the imagination leads us by assured steps toward a radical dislocation of the very identity of metaphysics, an identity that certain types of deconstruction at least provisionally seem to presuppose. From this point on, it is a certain idea of deconstruction that is at stake, perhaps ‘deconstruction itself,’ as if such a thing existed that could claim for itself the stable identity of a project.²⁹

What “dislocates” so radically the project of “deconstruction itself”—or at least “a certain idea of deconstruction”? If Sallis’s genealogy of imagination “leads us by assured steps” to such a radical dislocation of the very identity of metaphysics that is prerequisite for certain types of deconstructions, to where does thinking turn? At the heart of deconstruction is this “menace”—as Derrida then calls Sallis’s “thoughtful and vigorous vigilance.” What becomes possible in this menace? What does such a thinking enable?

What if this dislocation, when seen phenomenologically—for what it is from out of itself—calls for an inevitable shift to the phenomenon/*Sache*? What if deconstruction is called upon to leave its designated—and to itself unquestionable—arena in the loss of the identity of metaphysics? What if herein is an invitation to thinking to move out from the self-enclosure of the text—to the texture, the *Sache*?

Once again the question is: What is this “freeing of texts” that Sallis speaks of in *Echoes* (E 13)? And what is the “exceeding” that texts do, according to Sallis in *Crossings* (C 148)? Who among today’s thinkers dares to stay with *that* domain/phenomenon, until it shows itself from out of itself in its self-showing?