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**Paradoxical Structure of the *Parergon* in Kant and Derrida  
and its Relation to the Mystical and Artistic Revelation**

**Abstract**

*Starting from the stake of the Kantian philosophy to enclose everything within the firm limits of the system of reason and to exclude the external, threatening rest that is outside these limits, Jacques Derrida tried to deconstruct the effort of metaphysics to build artificial bridges over the ruptures of the philosophical systems, usually caused by the intrusion of this uncontrollable external remainders that does not submit to the authority of the metaphysical logos. Given that in the Kantian system this external remainders received the name parergon, we followed this paradoxical structure of parergon, first on the ground of mystical-religious experience, and then on the ground of aesthetic-artistic experience. We point out that Derrida reverses the metaphysical perspective and argues that the parergon is rather a reliable, permeable, undecidable border structure, irreducibly involved between everything that is enclosed within formal limits and the a-formal rest that escapes outside. The original Derridean argumentation deconstructs the ergon / parergon distinction and the entire suite of metaphysical oppositions and rather leads us to an undecidable parergonal border.*

**Keywords**

Jacques Derrida, Immanuel Kant, *parergon*, mystical experience, artistic experience

**1. The Circle and the Abyss, or the Bridge and the Gulf**

Beginning with Immanuel Kant's famous issues from *The Conflict of the Faculties*, *Critique of Judgment*, or *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Jacques Derrida questions the status of a Kantian paradoxical structure, the *parergon*.<sup>1</sup> The term *parergon* (*parerga* in the plural) comes from the Greek language and was used by Kant in the sense of *ornamentation*, *decoration*, *adornment*, *embellishment* (*Zierathen*). The *parergon* represents the excluded remainder that is left outside a work, "ergon", because in fact it only frames it, beautifies it, as an accessory, a foreign element that is added to the work itself. Derrida highlights the Kantian paragraph in the *Critique of Judgment* that explains this external structure of the *parergon* that captured his attention:

"Even what is called ornamentation (*parerga*), i.e. what is only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object, in augmenting the delight of taste does so only by means of its form. Thus it is with the frames of pictures or the drapery on statues, or the colonnades of palaces. But if the ornamentation does not itself enter into the composition of the beautiful form – if it is introduced like a gold frame merely to win approval for the picture by means of its charm – it is then called *finery* and takes away from the genuine beauty."<sup>2</sup>

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Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, transl. James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, p. 57.

2

Ibid.

Derrida focused on this oppositional structure *ergon* / *parergon* because his analysis specifically follows Kant's preoccupation to enclose everything within the firm limits of the system of reason, to protect us from confusion, the misleading, simulacrum, and thus to exclude all the external, threatening rest, called by Kant *parergon*, which would remain outside these rigorously drawn limits.

Derrida begins with Kantian philosophy, as he explains, because we do not have much choice while advancing along the lines of the famous distinctions established by Kantian philosophy. We are manoeuvring an inherited philosophical language that already predetermines our way of approaching the issue. So, we thus come to face two great risks, two dramatic philosophical extremes, which we have not yet learned to avoid in philosophy. Derrida called these philosophical extremes the problem of the "bridge" and the "abyss", the cantonment either in the extreme of the "bridge" which connects everything in a unitary system, or in the extreme of the "abyss", which separates, the obsession either for "pure and decidable limit" or for the "the empty gorge".<sup>3</sup>

Derrida explains that Kant and even Hegel remain trapped in the circuit of metaphysical pre-judgments because they simply tried to build metaphysical "bridges" over the "ruptures" of philosophical systems. Kant tried to reduce and enclose in a formal metaphysical system any possibility of opening, any rupture that an excluded, informal, irreducible remainder can cause from outside the system. These metaphysical attempts to delimit in fixed limits, in fixed boundaries, in classical structures of rigid oppositions such as inside / outside, closure / disclosure, form / matter, finite formal system / infinite a-formal remainder, etc., are eloquently called by Derrida the extremes of metaphysical perspective of *the circle and the abyss, of the bridge and the gulf, or of the frame and the break*. In contrast to the metaphysical argument, Derrida constructs his own remarkable argument that seeks to dissolve these prejudices of oppositional approach, to draw our attention to a completely different interpretation of the paradoxical structure of *parergon*, as actually being undecidable, reliable, contaminated.

Thus, for Kant, the *parergon* is only an additional remainder that is added from outside to a work, *ergon*, which remains at the edge of the work like an accessory that only delimits and borders it, enframes, and gives margins to it. *Parerga* are only *ornamentations, decorations, and fineries* with beautiful forms, external to the work, which are only added to a work of art, for example, such as *the frames of pictures, the drapery of statues, or the colonnades of palaces*. They appear to us as beautiful but they deceive us because they are just ornaments that provoke emotion, a pleasure of the senses. The ornaments, *parerga*, are only adornments that are based on "sensation as a matter of aesthetic judgment" and do not belong to "the beautiful form",<sup>4</sup> they are added from outside and thus deceive and damage the work of art.

In Derrida's interpretation, the *parergon* receives a completely different status than that assigned to it by Kant. We therefore discover the reversal of perspective that Derrida puts forward, promoting a completely different interpretation of the *parergon*, as rather an ambivalent, permeable, reliable structure, irreducibly involved between anything that is confined to formal limits and the rest that escapes outside. For Derrida, the *parergon* actually takes this paradoxical status, emblematic of Derridean thinking, of what is neither *outside* nor *inside*, or at the same time *outside and inside, outside ergon, inside ergon*.

We therefore specify that the theme of our analyses is the Derridean concern for the excluded remainder, called in this Kantian context *parergon*, and we will follow the paradoxical structure of the *parergon*, of the excluded, supplementary remainder, in two major contexts: in the field of mystical religious experience and in the field of artistic aesthetic experience.

We will begin by examining two emblematic examples of Derridean confrontation with this Kantian metaphysical problematic of the “circle and the abyss”,<sup>5</sup> given that it anticipates and foreshadows our analysis. The first example concerns the problem of university responsibility, the university circle and the abysmal extra-university remainder, and the second example concerns the problem of truth in painting, the formal circuit of the authority of the logos and the abysmal excess of the revelation of beauty in the work of art.

### 1.1. The Problem of University Responsibility

In his work *Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties*,<sup>6</sup> Derrida elucidates how the current issue can be approached through the lens of classical Kantian distinctions. These include the separation of theory from experience, the distinction between reason and empirical finality, the delineation of scientific competence from utilitarian practice, and the differentiation between disinterested fundamental research and applied, usable research. As Derrida highlights, it is no longer possible to maintain the distinction between these concepts and the systems of opposition that define our thinking and language. The Kantian distinction between the “pure rational scheme”, oriented toward the essential purposes of reason, and the “technical system”, oriented toward empirical ends, is no longer tenable.

“... one can no longer separate knowledge from power, reason from performativity, metaphysics from technical mastery.”<sup>7</sup>

We can no longer dissociate between reason and technique, as Heidegger has argued, because these fields are in fusion, interlaced. We need to find the new ways of relating between oppositions such as inside / outside, closure / disclosure, internal content / external frame, and effectively, says Derrida, to listen to a “double bind”,<sup>8</sup> to make a “double gesture”,<sup>9</sup> to place ourselves practically in a paradoxical place of thinking and to assume in fact “a new kind of a responsibility”<sup>10</sup> that escapes the supervision of the principle of reason. Derrida advises us to assume both approaches, the “bridge” that connects and the “the gulf” that separates, the closure above the abyss, as well as the abysmal opening between all these systems of opposition. As always,

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Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, transl. Geoff Bennington – Ian McLeod, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, pp. 36–40.

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I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 57.

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J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 24.

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Jacques Derrida, *Eyes of the University. Right to Philosophy 2*, transl. Jan Plug *et al.*,

Stanford University Press, Stanford (CA), 2004.

7

*Ibid.*, p. 95.

8

*Ibid.*, p. 168.

9

*Ibid.*, p. 150.

10

*Ibid.*, p. 110.

Derridean way of thinking places us *in-between*, between any two terms of an opposition, in such a way that we can pay attention simultaneously to both *binds*, *bridges*, *connections*, but also *ruptures*, *gulfs*, *abysses*. Because we cannot barricade ourselves in rational, determined, controllable, conditional programs, and ignore the abysmal, uncontrollable, unconditional dimension of thinking. A new kind of responsibility must guide us to reach both the solution of closure in the system and the solution of opening to the outer abyss, so that we are always in-between, in a place of passage as Derrida says, both on the “bridge” of tradition’s connection and on the chance “to break” due to a singular event.

For example, in this case in which Derrida raises the question of *raison d’être* of the institution of the University, of the foundation or finality of the University, it becomes clear that it cannot be situated in the sphere of its own interior, it cannot be confined within the university circle, despite Kant’s attempts to draw strict boundaries “between its inside and its outside”.<sup>11</sup> Kant discovered that he can no longer confine the interior of the university within the firm limits of rational, scientific, university research and has excluded what seems to threaten it from the outside, the reminders outside the university. We must therefore recognize that University is simultaneously “authorized (*berechtigt*) by a non-university instance or agency”,<sup>12</sup> such as the state and the criteria of the everyday practical world outside the university, such as performativity, technical and economic progress, utilitarianism, etc. The *raison d’être* of the university, the foundation or the finality of the university cannot be reduced only to the intra-university circuit. On the contrary, we discover that the university circle is continuously threatened by the uncontrollable intrusion of non-university courts.

But the problem is much deeper. In fact, Derrida argues, any attempt to question any foundation, not only the foundation of the University, always faces the problem of an abyss, infiltrated, disguised within any attempt to explain and to frame the foundation in firm theoretical frameworks. Simply put, Derrida repeatedly points out that:

“An event of foundation can never be comprehended merely within the logic that it founds [...]. The origin of the principle of reason, which is also implied in the origin of the university, is not rational.”<sup>13</sup>

The university is founded on the principle of reason, it is a construction based on reason, a rational construction therefore, but this foundation is placed above an abyss in which dwells what remains inaccessible to us:

“But all this is elaborated above an abyss, suspended over a ‘gorge’ – by which we mean on grounds whose own grounding remains invisible and unthought.”<sup>14</sup>

Kant also feels threatened by this “outside”, Derrida explains:

“Threatened, as I said a moment ago. By an invasive margin, since non-university research societies, public, official, or otherwise, can also form pockets within the university campus [...]. In tracing the system of the pure limits of the university, Kant wants to track any possible parasitising. He wants to be able to exclude it – legitimately, legally. Now, the possibility of such parasitising appears wherever there is language, which is also to say a public domain, publication, publicity.”<sup>15</sup>

Derrida is therefore challenged by Kant’s concern to enclose everything within the firm limits of our reason and to exclude everything else that threatens

from outside these strict limits, that can interfere, disturb and uncontrollably parasitise our rational system.

### 1.2. *The Problem of the Truth in Painting*

Derrida awakens our interest in this interpretation of the metaphysical dilemma of the “circle and the abyss” also in the commentary *The Truth in Painting*, which we will deepen in the second part of our analysis, because there it brings to the fore the Kantian analytical discussion of aesthetic judgment. This time Derrida follows the roots of the problem in the aesthetic field and, as usual, tries to open us to a completely different perspective that goes beyond metaphysical prejudices, Kantian analytics or Hegelian criticism. In this field, one of the eloquent examples for the deconstruction of metaphysical prejudices may be the case of our encounter with artworks, because at such a moment we can experience *the beauty as such*, or as Derrida says, we can have the experience of revealing the truth in a work of art. Beauty as such is revealed to us as an infinite a-formal gift that we cannot enclose in the formal, finite circuit of our knowledge and language because it is actually given to us beyond any conceptual, determined circuit. Derrida makes us notice that there are “remainders”<sup>16</sup> of the revelation of beauty as such in the work of art, of the exposition of truth in the singularity of the work of art, remainders which, he says, are not exposed and not translated into the framework of conceptual, universal language. Appealing to these “remainders” outside the metaphysical logos, Derrida wants to deconstruct the classical metaphysical prejudice, the possibility of building a “bridge over the abyss”,<sup>17</sup> a prejudice that in this case led to the submission of the work of art under the authority of the logos. In *Economimesis*<sup>18</sup> Derrida also draws our attention to the violence of the frame, to the violence of parergonal framing in Kantian rhetoric. Kant tells us about the privilege of the poetic word that is produced in the fullness of the interiority of thought and gets rid of any external sensitive content, producing the most disinterested pleasure. According to Derrida, poetry remains subject to the logo-phonocentric system, idealizing the interiority of thinking and speaking (in “hearing-oneself-speak”), and excluding the exteriority of the sensible world. But Derrida challenges us with the deconstructivist problematisation:

“What is the (internal and external) border which traces its limit and the frame of its *parergon*? In other words, what is it that does not enter into this theory thus framed, hierarchized, regulated? What is excluded from it and what, proceeding from this exclusion, gives it form, limit, and contour?”<sup>19</sup>

11  
Ibid., p. 93.

12  
Ibid., p. 86.

13  
Ibid., p. 109.

14  
Ibid., p. 140.

15  
Ibid., p. 95.

16  
Ibid., p. 4.

17  
Ibid., p. 36

18  
Jacques Derrida, R. Klein, “Economimesis”,  
*Diacritics* 11 (1981) 2, pp. 2–25.

19  
Ibid. pp. 20–21.

What is not included within the parergonal frames of the hierarchized logophonocentric system and remains excluded? Derrida posits that it is impossible to answer this question, as it is entirely different, irreducible, unrepresentable, unintelligible. The excluded from the system that cannot be assimilated by the system, “the vomit”, says Derrida, gives shape to the system, “the vomit” actually functions “as a parergon”.<sup>20</sup> We cannot name it, determine it. In the context of logocentric system, it is not possible to pose the question of “what it is” since this philosophical question already functions as a frame, a *parergon*, which inadequately captures the energy of “the other” irreducible and unassimilable.

In the aesthetic context, the metaphysical metaphor of “the circle and the abyss”<sup>21</sup> invoked by Derrida refers to the inscription and subordination of art within the great circle of logic and the history of philosophy. The problem is that, the revelation of beauty as such in the work of art, be it plastic or musical, was in fact submitted to the authority of the metaphysical logos. The whole endeavour of metaphysics has been to throw “a bridge over the abyss” and to validate this metaphysical prejudice:

“It is again a question of the immense ‘abyss’ which separates the two worlds and of the apparent impossibility of throwing a bridge (*Brücke*) from one shore to the other [...]. The analogy of the abyss and of the bridge over the abyss is an analogy which says that there must surely be an analogy between two absolutely heterogeneous worlds, a third term to cross the abyss, to heal over the gaping wound and think the gap.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus the metaphor for metaphysics

“... will be the metaphor of the artificial work securing the passage over the natural gulf, the bridge (*Brücke*) projected over the great abyss (*grosse Kluff*).”<sup>23</sup>

The attempt of metaphysics is to reach a “foundation”, a “bridge” that allows a formal connection, in order to close any uncontrollable abyss in the formal circuit of the logos.

Derrida’s insistent questioning is therefore about the metaphysical attempts to formally close and reduce the abyssal, a-formal remainder, in this case the excess of revelation of beauty and truth in painting, in the work of art. Thus Derrida cannot refrain from endlessly asking whether it is possible “to cross the abyss” and “to heal over the gaping wound”.<sup>24</sup> Because Derrida is confused by this dilemma: why does Kant, although he admits that the realm of beauty is non-conceptual, a-formal, infinite, and the beauty as such is given to us only “inadequately” by unravelling all our formal, conceptual, and finite frameworks, he nonetheless impose by force limited conceptual frameworks?<sup>25</sup>

The challenge of our research is to follow how Jacques Derrida tried to deconstruct metaphysics’ attempt to build artificial *bridges over the abyss* and especially Kant’s concern to enclose everything within the firm limits of the system of reason and thus to exclude the threatening, uncontrollable external rest, which does not submit to the authority of the metaphysical logos: does Kant manage to exclude this *external, parergonal rest*, be it of religious mystical revelation or of artistic revelation? Or is Kant forced to admit that this supplementary structure of the parergon cannot be removed? How does Derrida challenge us to question this oppositional structure *ergon / parergon*? What kind of paradoxical parergonal structure does Derrida reveal to us instead?

## 2. “The Circle and the Abyss”: Religion within the Limits of Reason and the Outside Remainder of the Mystical Religious Experience

We will explore this parergonal structure, as we mentioned, first in the field of mystical religious experience, and then in the field of aesthetic experience. We place ourselves, in this first part, in the field of religious experience and we follow the Kantian attempt to limit religion within the limits of reason, and, at the same time, the effects of this delimitation on Derrida’s interpretation. We will, therefore, address one of the classical Kantian ruptures and limits, the rupture between the *mystic* and the *reason*, starting from Kant’s preoccupation to frame everything within the limits of reason to avoid the risk involved by the remainder that lays outside in the mystical experience.

It is no surprise to find frequently in Derridean analysis – as Kevin Hart explains in a comment that we follow, *The Trespass of the Sign. Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* – a variant of Gödel’s theorem, adapted to the philosophical field, that Derrida explicitly proposes to us:

“... any metaphysical reading of a text will generate at least one element which cannot be decided within metaphysics.”<sup>26</sup>

In other words, within any philosophical discourse there persist a remainder that cannot be fully accounted for. Derrida is extremely concerned with this “excluded”, the “remainder”, and in countless contexts he invokes it using Gödelian incompleteness to draw our attention to its emblematic paradoxical status. If we place ourselves on the theological ground, it becomes obvious that this outside “remainder”, the “excluded”,<sup>27</sup> the place that cannot be named neither by philosophical discourse nor by theological discourse is the element of mystical religious experience. This “excluded” of philosophical and theological discourse is therefore the mystical element. About this element of mystical experience, we can only say that it claims to be an immediate experience of God’s presence:

“Upon Kant’s understanding, the *sine qua non* of mysticism is immediate contact with God. [...] Thus the mystic’s characteristic claims to enjoy immediate experience of God, to hear God’s voice, and to pass beyond the confines of human concepts [...]”<sup>28</sup>

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Ibid.

21

J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 24.

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Ibid., p. 36

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Ibid., p. 40.

24

Ibid., p. 36.

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Ibid., p. 75.

26

Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign. Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2000, p. 173.

27

Ibid., p. 174.

28

Ibid., pp. 188, 209. Of course, in this context we emphasize the “uneasiness” that Jacques Derrida frequently confesses, for example in *How to Avoid Speaking. Denials*: “My uneasiness was nevertheless also directed toward the promise of that presence given to intuition or vision. The promise of such a presence often accompanies the apophatic crossing,” “toward that contact or vision, that pure intuition of the ineffable, that silent union with what remains inaccessible to speech.” – Jacques Derrida, *Psyché. Inventions of the Other*, vol. II, transl. by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University, Stanford University Press, New York 2008, pp. 148–149.

In this context, however, Jacques Derrida provokes a reversal of classical or contemporary perspectives on the mystical experience, given that all these comments insist on the distinction, on the declared rupture, between mystic and reason. Derrida intervenes in these discussions because, even in this context,

“Derrida locates a complicity between ‘rationalism and mysticism’.”<sup>29</sup>

### ***2.1. The Status of the Parergon in Kant: the Revelation of the Truth in Mystical Experience***

Of course, the debate on this excluded status of mystical experience starts with Kant, who condemned and denied mysticism, placing it on a margin, beyond philosophy, beyond the limits of reason. Kant places religion within the limits of reason and excludes the mystical religious experience as a supplementary form of *parergon*. Truth is established on the universal ground of human reason and no longer appeals to external means such as supernatural divine revelation or the religious experience of mystical reality. Kant places religion under the universal authority of reason in order to show us the eternal rational truths and to reject the revealed religions of the historical churches, which are based on particular, historical revelations that are not accepted by everyone. Only moral belief in the observance of moral duties can claim to be universal, but not the belief of particular churches in miracles, because these are private experiences that occur outside the sphere of the universality of human reason. Rational moral religion excludes and makes useless the occurrence of supra-rational miracles and any mystical experience, which are therefore reduced to the status of *parergon*.

True religion is religion within the limits of reason alone and within the limits of morality, while the other forms of religion, worship, ecclesiastical, or historical, has no authority unless it is verified by supernatural revelation, grace, miracles, mysteries. The stories and interpretations of the worshipping religions need these auxiliary means, “remedies”, which are mysteries, miracles, the grace, the revelation. But we, Kant insists, must be careful not to turn these auxiliary means, “remedies”, into a component of religion. Because, Kant explains, the term “miracles” designates events, “they are events in the world”, but with this particularity,

“... of whose cause laws of operation absolutely are and must remain unfamiliar to us.”<sup>30</sup>

Belief in miracles cannot be the basis of our rational explanations or the regulation of our actions. This belief cannot be tolerated in the territory of reason, and overcoming all the limits of the territory of reason only mean for Kant pride and lack of modesty.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike theoretical reason, practical reason tells us only what we can *think* about God, and not what we can *know*, opens us to an *a priori* that could not be demonstrated theoretically, but only believed. God cannot be a phenomenon of our knowledge, it can neither be affirmed nor denied by theoretical reason, it remains only a regulatory principle, which leads us only to practical, pragmatic, existential answers. This is the reason why Derrida intensively exploits the famous distinction that Kant imposed, between *knowing and thinking* (*Wissen und Denken*), and acknowledges in countless contexts that, in this regard, he remains indebted to this tradition of interpretation.<sup>32</sup>



But with all this Kantian orientation towards a belief of practical reason, the problem of mystical experience finds no anchoring point. The mystical cannot claim even a pragmatic belief. The mystic has access only to his singular, absolutely private mystical experience. Mystical experience thus lacks the universal moral pragmatic ground for anchoring its singular faith and action, and in fact it risks isolating itself in fanaticism. To prevent such an escape Kant keeps the religious system within the limits of reason.<sup>33</sup>

We note, therefore, the surprising fact that there is a “lack” within the religious system framed within the limits of reason. Mystical experience, the occurrence of mystery, grace, revelation, occupies this marginal position of “supplements”, of “parerga”, says Kant, a secondary position to the moral law, but which actually supplement a “lack”<sup>34</sup> within the pragmatic system of morality. Kant acknowledges, spectacularly, these “supplements” occupy the very transcendental position that makes religion possible, they are at the origin of religion. But of course, for Kant, revelation is not enough for the establishment of religion, we cannot remain in the ineffable place of revelation because the revelation must in fact be universally communicated to all human beings. In order to be communicated, disseminated, understood, and accepted, revelation depends on a pragmatic ground common to all people. For Kant, this ground is the universal moral law.

But Kant also had a surprise in store for us. In order to establish a moral religion, it is necessary for a “miracle” to introduce it, to accompany it:

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Ibid., pp. 187–188.

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Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, transl. Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis – Cambridge 2009, p. 98.

31

Ibid., p. 90.

32

In this context we also refer to the comments of John D. Caputo, for example in *Apostles of the Impossible. On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion*, which support the argument that Derrida advances on Kantian resources: Derridean philosophy “is to be compared to Kant’s ‘thought’ without a concept of an indeterminate *je ne sais quoi*”; like Kant, Derrida is interested in what can be the “object” of thinking without concept, of faith, action, practice, desire, but not of identification, determination and conceptual knowledge, which thus, as Caputo points out, represents the maximum of what we can expect, desire, dream, or credit. See: John. D. Caputo, “Apostles of the Impossible. On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion”, in: John D. Caputo, Michael Scanlon, (eds.), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington (IN) 1999, pp. 185–223).

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We briefly invoke Derrida’s comment on the text *Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy* because Kant insists on this danger. Kant announces the death of philosophy associated with a “mystical vision”, in order to prevent us from adopting such an “exalted vision” which offers us a “supplement”, a “surrogate” of knowledge and represents the true death of philosophy. Kant suspects those who use this tone of pursuing a benefit, a social or political advantage. Philosophy risks losing its meaning as a *rational savoir-vivre* and the mystagogues become impostors who claim to be in immediate and intuitive relation with the mystery and can initiate others into the mysteries. However, this seduction is manipulative and perverts the meaning of philosophy, with dramatic effects on humanity. It is the seduction of rulers, of leaders, for example of the Führer, of those who place themselves above the crowd, and manipulates it by offering direct access, through intuition, inspiration, enlightenment, to mystical secrets. Those who raise the tone like “the voice of the oracle” cover the voice of reason, parasitize it and make it derail and delirious. See: Jacques Derrida, John P. Leavey Jr., “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy”, *Oxford Literary Review* 6 (1984) 2, pp. 3–37.

34

I. Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, p. 60.

“In its time it needed to be introduced through such remedies.”<sup>35</sup>

The necessary conclusion is that at the “origin” of the moral religion there is the auxiliary mean, “adjunct”, “remedies” such as miracles and wonderworks that remain in this marginal position of “parerga”.<sup>36</sup> The singular miracle of religious revelation is therefore a secondary supplement of the universal moral law, but, nevertheless, it actually constitutes the “origin” of religion.

## 2.2. *The Primacy of the Paradoxical Structure of the Parergon in Derrida’s Interpretation*

On the other hand, we cannot fail to notice the fact exploited by Derridean interpretation, through which the universal pragmatic field of Kantian morality enters into a strange relation to the singular mystical experience, according to this paradoxical structure of the *parergon*. On this Kantian interpretative track, Derrida is surprised that, after all, Kant maintains a rapport *parergon / ergon* without separating them rigorously. And of course Derrida will exploit precisely this problematic distinction *parergon / ergon*, *outside / inside*, *accident / essence*. For Derrida, who is so much interested in arguing the lack of distinctions and rigorous boundaries between any conceptual couple of oppositions, it is extremely pleased that Kant’s undecided position assumes the undecided connection between what would be internal to religion and what would remain marginal to religion. For Kant, revelation, mystery, grace, remain secondary, marginal, supplements a lack within the whole. They have the *structure of the parergon*, of marginal supplement, of empty frame, which, however, cannot be removed. But, in fact, surprisingly, as Kant explicitly admits: they are *at the origin* of the Christian religion.

We notice Derrida’s insistence on sending us systematically to this paradoxical place of the founding event which does not belong to the field which it founds and cannot be justified by the logic it opens. The archaic dimension in which the founding event of a religion occurs, although it is at the origin of any given religion and makes it possible, escapes to the field which it founds. We can say that Derrida explicitly pursues Gödel and highlights in countless contexts, for example in *Khôra* or in *Faith and Knowledge*,

“... that the foundation of law – law of law, institution of the institution, origin of the constitution – is a ‘performative’ event that cannot belong to the set that it founds, inaugurates or justifies. Such an event is unjustifiable within the logic of what it will have opened. It is the decision of the other in the undecidable.”<sup>37</sup>

Derrida puts forth new structures of language, of coexisting, complementary, ambivalent, undecidable opposite states. This is analogous to the new language of the complementarity of quantum physics, or the incompleteness of Gödelian mathematics. Derrida highlights the undecidable structures in the Gödelian sense, unveiling an alternative logic, one of “deduplication”, of the “double bind”, of undecidable links that transgress the classical philosophical oppositions. Even from his first writings, such as *An Introduction to Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry*,<sup>38</sup> Derrida discusses the unresolvable nature of these undecidable structures, illustrating that we are situated within a “zig-zag” movement, in a “double band”, in an irreducible “original synthesis”, between origin and becoming, between the process of meaning formation and the sedimentation of meanings. In *Letter to a Japanese Friend*,<sup>39</sup> Derrida warns us about the limitation of the metaphysical epoch, drawing attention to the concealed and repressed aspects of this epoch. Nevertheless,

he is conscious that we do not possess an alternative language that is alien to the history of metaphysics. Consequently, he puts forth these undecidable quasi-concepts of *différance*, *writing*, *trace*, *supplement*, *parergon*, as well as replaceable levers of deconstruction, that open any closed field of traditional differences and oppositions towards a radical and irreducible exteriority. Furthermore, they facilitate our access to the ambivalent terrain of their undecidable connections.

Derrida reveals this paradoxical structure, of *double bind*, of the *connection* and of the simultaneous *rupture*, of the irreducible *contamination* and also of the radical *heterogeneity*, which exceeds classic metaphysical distinctions, including the rupture of which we speak now between mystic and reason, between the event of mystical revelation and the limits of the field of reason.<sup>40</sup>

In Derrida's view, the Kantian structure of the parergon therefore receives a completely different status. Derrida tries to show us that what seems to be just a *parergon*, *supplement*, *remainder*, *trace*, actually works within what borders, affects it and confuses its meaning. Of course, for Derrida, the stakes are to argue that in fact there is no clear boundary between what is delimited in a parergonal framework and the exterior reminders, between what is inside the system and what remains outside, the external context. Because, Derrida consistently exemplifies, the text and the context affect each other, the external context continuously and uncontrollably interferes with any identical meaning constituted inside the frames. The frame, the parergon, therefore no longer occupies a secondary place because, on the contrary, it is the one that uncontrollably influences the content and can significantly affect it. The context can no longer be expelled on a marginal, secondary position. On the one hand, for any meaning to be identified and delimited, the framework, the context in which it functions, is absolutely necessary; and, on the other hand, no context can exhaust the meaning of a text, no framing can definitively delimit the meaning of the text. Any text supports a lot of contexts, any meaning or content can be framed and thus affected in every way by the multitude of contexts from immemorial time. Immemorial textuality precedes and frames any personal, current encounter with the meaning of a text. A multitude of constituent frames envelops immemorially and undecidably any constitution of meaning. We therefore retain the conclusion underlined by Kevin Hart:

35  
Ibid., pp. 95–96.

36  
Ibid., p. 60.

37  
Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone", translated by Samuel Weber, in: Gil Anidjar (eds.), *Acts of Religion*, Routledge, New York and London, 2002, p. 57.

38  
Jacques Derrida, John P. Leavey Jr., *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry". An Introduction*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1989.

39  
Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend", in J. Derrida, *Psyché. Inventions of the Other*.

40  
John D. Caputo's commentary on *After the Death of God* captures the same Derridean deconstructive line of the idol's critique of the nude, prelinguistic, ineffable mystical experience. Mystical experience, like any other experience, as Caputo points out, requires interpretation, since we are not directly and immediately affected by divine revelation. Divine revelation is given to us through words and interpretation. See: John D. Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, Columbia University Press, New York 2007.

“All inscription, even by God, must pass through the realm of *differance* or the *trace*.”<sup>41</sup>

In this context, we invoke Derrida’s argument for the primacy of the structure of supplementarity. This argument warns us that we are always inevitably caught in the endless process of supplementarity. Derrida explains more systematically this system of supplementarity in *Of Grammatology*,<sup>42</sup> where he proposes the deconstruction of the metaphysical distinction and hierarchy between two worlds, between the interiority of meaning and the exteriority of the sign, between the interiority of spoken discourse and the exteriority of writing, etc. The arguments put forth from the grammatological perspective demonstrate that no supposed “interiority”, neither of the meaning, nor of the spoken discourse, can exist in isolation and remain uncontaminated by the “exteriority” of the tissue of signifiers and writing. It is impossible for any entity to exist outside the realm of signifiers, signs, writing. In this original tissue, each term is irreducibly and undecidably marked and contaminated of everything it is not, by the traces of its relationship with the other elements. It is impossible to escape outside the system of supplementary, to “the Supplement of (at) the Origin”.<sup>43</sup> Any presence is contaminated, duplicated, supplemented by an exteriority, by an irreducible absence. Derrida posits that existence and writing are caught “in the same tissue”<sup>44</sup> of undecidable structures, of *differance*, of *writing*, of the *supplement*, of the *traces* that mediates our access to meaning or to reality. When Derrida declares that “there is nothing outside the text”<sup>45</sup> he is actually contending that we lack access to reality, to the experience of art as such, or to the religious experience as such, even to our encounter with God, except through this universal writing, archi-writing, which involves all the structures of language, representation, and culture.

We are thus faced with a lot of questions triggered by the analysis of this supplementary structure of the parergon, which still remain open: Why is a *parergon* needed? Why is Kant adding this supplement for *ergon*? What is actually essential and what is accessory in a work, *ergon*? Can we detect the boundary from where the frame begins and ends? Derrida deconstructs the oppositions *parergon* / *ergon*, *essential* / *accessory*, *first* / *second*, *inside* / *outside*, insisting on the demonstration that *parergon* is as central as *ergon*, as essential, as prime, as interior. In short, Derrida warns us, that in fact the border between *ergon* and *parergon* is fluid, mobile, permeable, undecidable.

### 3. “The Bridge and the Gulf”: the Frames of the Logos and the Outside Remainder of the Aesthetic-Artistic Experience

Derrida focuses on the structure of the *parergon* also in his commentary on *The Truth in Painting* (1987), where he brings to the forefront of the discussion the Kantian analytic of aesthetic judgment, in order to deconstruct in the domain of aesthetic experience, the famous and the classic metaphysical oppositions. Derrida tries to dissolve these prejudices of oppositional approach by pursuing this time in the aesthetic domain the revelation of truth in painting, the occurrence of beauty in the work of art, in a different paradoxical argumentative structure of the *parergon*, of what is neither *outside* the work nor *in the work*, or at the same time *outside* and *inside* the work, *ergon*.

### 3.1. *The Status of the Parergon in Kant: the Revelation of Truth in the Artistic Experience*

If we follow Kant in the domain of aesthetic judgment, we can notice that, at the moment of our encountering with a work of art, we are affected by pure aesthetic pleasure because beauty is revealed to us *as such*. An abyssal gift of beauty *as such* occurs in the work of art and affects us with pure pleasure. And, Derrida insists, this pure pleasure “can only come from a pure outside. Unassimilable”, from where beauty as such is given.<sup>46</sup> I am affected by the occurrence of artistic pleasure *as such*, which I can in no way limit and reduce to the formal frameworks of my knowledge, conceptuality and language. Simply, in the work of art, as in life, we can only relate to an experience that we cannot determine and conceptually limit. The experience of artistic pleasure, as well as the mystical religious experience we referred to above, remain outside the decisive, conceptual judgment. In fact, any experience of mystical or artistic revelation, any experience of our encounter with singularity *as such*, with a singular event *as such*, is given to us before the intervention of our determining knowledge of generality.

Although we are affected by aesthetic pleasure before and outside the formal frameworks of knowledge and conceptuality, Derrida explains that Kant insists on forcibly applying conceptual frameworks, formal conceptual schemes, even in this case of analysing the non-conceptual field of aesthetic pleasure. The analytics of concepts is “transposed” into the analytic of aesthetic judgment:

“Kant exhibits in a sens the forcing – imposing an analytic of concepts on a process without concept [...] a *logical* frame is transposed and forced in to be imposed on a *nonlogical* structure.”<sup>47</sup>

We thus arrive at the paradox of Kantian critique, the framing, the forced transposition of universal conceptual frameworks, into the non-conceptual realm of the beauty that resides in the work of art. Kant recognizes, on the other hand, that a beautiful work provokes pleasure without recourse to the concept and that on the contrary it undoes all conceptual frames, so that the feeling of beauty is actually given by the lack of frames, by the “absolute interruption”, the “pure cut”,<sup>48</sup> which undoes all frames, including conceptual frames. Rather, beauty is given to us only in this “rupture” of determined frames that allows it to wander everywhere, which is why Kant calls it “errant beauty”.<sup>49</sup> Beauty as such is given to us by wandering freely in this “cut” of stable frames, of meanings and conceptual representations. When an absolutely unique and singular beauty is revealed to us, it detaches itself from any determined framework, from any generality, from any interest and use. For Kant, simply an “abyss” separates the beautiful work from any determined

41  
K. Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, p. 287.

42  
Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1997.

43  
Ibid., p. 313.

44  
Ibid., p. 150.

45  
Ibid., p. 163.

46  
J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 48.

47  
Ibid., pp. 75, 69.

48  
Ibid., pp. 87–89.

49  
Ibid., p. 100.

interest or finality. For example, we can notice that a flower, a tulip, imposes itself on us as beautiful, due to the uniqueness and singularity of its beauty, irreplaceable and unframed. The beauty of a tulip, in contrast to the beauty of a building, is pure and free, because it has no general frameworks, no meaning and no concept, no determined purpose. Derrida explains, that by the time we get to talking about it, we are already using the frameworks of conceptual universality of the language, which simply replaces the singular beauty of the tulip with something else. This is what Kant does: he nevertheless resorts to the frameworks of universalizable judgment in order to analyse and explain any singular, unique and independent beauty. Kant recognizes that free beauty that occurs without any limit, shape, board, frame, *exceeds* and *makes possible* the beauty that is exposed to us with a limited, finite form, with a general meaning, under a universal concept. However, Kant uses the frameworks of universal judgment and conceptuality to account for everything that occurs in fact to us as an absolutely singular beauty.

It is easy to see, therefore, how Derridean commentary tends to place us on the same enigmatic frontier this time as well. Derrida shows us that in fact, between the two kinds of beauty, free beauty and beauty adhering to the concept, there is on the one hand “absolute heterogeneity”,<sup>50</sup> as Kant acknowledged, because they have no common framework, no common border. But, on the other hand, Derrida makes us focus on arguing that this very “rupture” is in fact a “frontier”, but an empty frontier, an empty frame:

“And yet this break of contact, this very separation constitutes a limit, a blank, the thickness of a blank – a frame, if you like – which by suspending the relation, puts them in relation in the mode of nonrelation, reproducing here *at the same time* the freedom of vague beauty and the adherence of adherent beauty.”<sup>51</sup>

Derrida’s conclusion is that only in this empty frame, uncontrollable ambivalent boundary, on this border that belongs to no one, can occur *beauty as such, free, errant, vague*, because here any relation with any determining framework, with any objective purpose or conceptual representation breaks down. Derrida cannot but criticize the metaphysical effort that focuses on the saturation of this hiatus, on the imposition of frames and limits, on the forced framing of errant beauty in the frames adhering to meaning, conceptuality, essentiality, or simply in our metaphorical scheme, on the construction of *artificial bridges over the abyss*.

### 3.2. *Overturing the Parergon’s Argument in Derrida’s Interpretation*

Derrida’s interpretation posits that this forced Kantian classification prompts a reconsideration of the status of the *parergon*, of the frame, of the forced import of a general framework. In *The Parergon*,<sup>52</sup> Derrida comments on chapters 16 and 17 of the third Kantian Critique bringing the frameworks of Kantian criticism back into discussion. He draws our attention to the infiltration of the frameworks of anthropology and of a whole theory of history, society, culture and onto-theological humanism in the aesthetic judgment critique. Kant distinguishes between free beauty, without concept, such as the beauty of flowers and, on the other hand, dependent, adherent beauty, such as the beauty of a man, a horse or buildings, which presuppose a concept of purpose. However, Kant notes that something *compromises, damages* the purity of the judgment of taste. In this context, Derrida wonders why we are troubled by the example of the “horse” which can only have an adherent beauty, just like

man. This is anthropological examples. It is necessary to consider the role of man as a subject of aesthetic judgments but also as an anthropological unit. The horse is perceived by man in its adherent beauty, it is at the service of man who recognizes its objective, external purpose. The problem is that the judgment of taste cannot be determined by concepts and then the singular, exemplary product of taste becomes the unique reference that is valid for all. Each individual forms their own, spontaneous judgement of taste. This absence of the concept allows for the historical, cultural, pragmatic, anthropological horizon of taste to be considered.

Conversely, only humans are capable of an ideal of beauty, Kant must admit that this ideal cannot be the object of a pure aesthetic judgment, but of a partially intellectual judgment of taste. This judgement is contaminated by intellectualized judgment, fixed by concept, affected by an idea of reason. Consequently, aesthetic judgment is combined with the ideas of reason, aesthetic satisfaction is linked to intellectual satisfaction, taste is harmonized with reason. Derrida goes further and proposes to overcome this rupture between taste and knowledge, the aesthetic and the logical. He challenges us to take into account rather an “arche-pleasure” that in a time immemorial “governed” and “accompanied” knowledge, in

“... the time of this arche-pleasure welding the imagination (aesthetic) to the understanding (logical).”<sup>53</sup>

We cannot fail to notice that even the Kantian analysis of beauty is interpreted in a formal theoretical framework and therefore the criteria of Kantian analysis

“...dependent on this parergonality” [...] “they are affected by this logic of the *parergon*.”<sup>54</sup>

The big problem is precisely this *parergon* of Kantianism, the formal framework of Kantian interpretation, respectively, explains Derrida, the classical presupposition of the distinction between inside / outside, intrinsic / extrinsic, inner content / outer frame, matter / form, that commands Kantian critique and, moreover, a long interpretive tradition. In the interpretive scheme of this tradition the argument of the *parergon* (*hors d'oeuvre*) is also offered but with a clear role, criticized by Derrida’s interpretation, with the role of formal external framework that is added from outside to delimit the integrity of a content. But although Derrida takes the *parergon*’s argument from Kant, he actually dismantles it and overturns it completely. For Derrida, the *parergon* is completely different, it is a contaminated border structure that no longer allows no rigorous distinction, no stable delimitation, because on the contrary it exposes us to the contamination, reliability, irreducible undecidability of any border between *ergon* / *parergon*.

Of course, at this point in the argument, Derrida tries to tilt the balance in the opposite direction by introducing Hegel into the discussion, since Hegel does not accept the Kantian reduction of *infinite content* to its *presentation in*

50  
Ibid.

51  
Ibid.

52  
Ibid., pp. 104–118.

53  
Ibid., p. 113.

54  
Ibid., p. 73.

*limited and finite forms*. It is true that Hegel, like Kant, considers that infinite, unrepresentable, inaccessible, inexpressible content can only occur to us *inadequately*, but for Hegel the problem is not due to the fact that this *infinite content* is revealed only as an effect of its filtration through our *limited forms*. For Hegel, on the contrary, the major problem is that our forms of receiving, such as unconditional gifts, are in fact finite and limited, and are not able to present it adequately. Therefore, for Hegel, the manifestation as such of an infinite content, of a meaningful infinity can only “destroy”, “break”, “annihilate” all forms, all limitations of signifier and representation.<sup>55</sup>

At this crossroad, Derrida thus highlights the paradox faced by both Kant and Hegel. On the one hand, Kant, although he admits that the singular event of revelation of beauty is an infinite, a-formal, non-conceptual event, which can only be given to us as “inappropriate”, unravelling all formal, conceptual, frames, however, Kant forcibly “imposed” on it, the limited conceptual frameworks. For his part, Hegel also accepts the event of a sublime, infinite, unrepresentable content, but reaches the other extreme and argues that “inadequacy” is due to the overflowing excess of a-formal, unlimited content which, at the moment of its manifestation as such, “destroys” all inappropriate forms that receive it.<sup>56</sup>

We can therefore note that Derrida recognizes the “excess” of the occurrence of beauty as such in our formal conceptual frameworks. He also acknowledges that beauty as such is only given “inappropriately” in these frames. But from his perspective, between the two orders, of the unrepresentable and the representable, *heterogeneity remains irreducible* and the Kantian or Hegelian “bridge” cannot be thrown over the “abyss”. Derrida does not support any of the interpretations, nor the imposition of the finite form, nor the excess of the infinite content, but on the contrary emphasizes the *impossibility of reducing the inadequacy*, and also the *impossibility to escape of the irreducible contamination* between these two extremes. In his vision, it would be preferable to constantly place ourselves on the border between these extremes, to assume at the same time, both the *inadequacy* and the *indiscernibility*, both the *rupture* and the *undecidability* of a revealing of a singular, infinite, unrepresentable event, in the formal, finite, theoretical frames.

Derrida rather directs us to the explanation that the excess, the surplus, the overabundance of beauty as such is given to us only in the punctuality of a frontier and in the point of maximum concentration, which breaks all frames, any limit, any edge, any border.<sup>57</sup> In an imperceptible moment and on an undecidable frontier (according to the logic of this “double bind” that maintains both the *irreducible connection* and the *irreducible heterogeneity*), is revealed beauty as such in its finite formal presentation. Thus, for Derrida the best place for an event to occur is rather *between* these two edges, *between* the infinite *edge* and the finite *edge*, the *external edge* and the *internal edge*, in the undecidable passage from one to another, on the paradoxical parergonal frontier.

Therefore, what is important to mention is that for Derrida the parergon no longer assumes the status of an external frame that is added as supplement to a limited interior. On the contrary, we should note, as Derrida argues endlessly, that between *parergon* and *ergon* there is in fact an “internal structural link”,<sup>58</sup> so we can no longer discern the limit between the essentiality of the work and its accessory:



“But this frame is problematical. I don’t know what is essential and what is accessory in a work. And above all I do not know what this thing is, that is neither essential nor accessory, nor proper nor improper, and that Kant calls *parergon*, for example the frame. Where does the frame take place? Does it take place? Where does it begin? Where does it end? What is its internal limit? Its external limit? And its surface between the two limits?”<sup>59</sup>

This is Derrida’s pivotal quandary. In fact, from the beginning of his commentary Derrida insisted on the analysis of the Kantian *parergon* and warned us about this paradoxical atopic structure of the *parergon*:

“... the insistent atopics of the parergon: neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work (*hors d’œuvre*), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work. It is no longer merely around the work.”<sup>60</sup> We therefore mark his warning: “Tout ce que Kant aura entrevu sous le nom de *parergon* (par exemple le cadre) n’est ni dans l’œuvre (*ergon*) ni hors d’elle. Dès qu’il a lieu, il démonte les oppositions conceptuelles les plus rassurantes.”<sup>61</sup>

Derrida’s broad argument in *The Truth in Painting* has led us sustainably only on this fragile, empty boundary of contamination and indiscernibility between the two borders. Starting from the classical metaphysical distinctions that Derrida invoked in the metaphysical metaphor of *the circle and the abyss, the bridge and the gulf, the frame and the break*, we were oriented towards a completely different structure that involves indistinguishable, ambivalent, permeable, reliable boundaries, which no longer allows us the distinction inside / outside, content / form, *ergon* / *parergon*, as we can observe in other eloquent contexts from *The Truth in Painting*, such as: (a) the structure of the *parergonal frame* which is *nor outside nor inside, neither work nor outside-the-work*; or (b) the structure of the *paradigm or model*, which is also *outside the series in the series*; or (c) the structure of the *stricture of the laces*, which passes at the same time *outside the picture, inside the picture*, etc. In broad strokes we provide the arguments here, as explicated by J. Derrida in *The Truth in Painting*:

- a) The argument of the *parergonal frame (outside the work inside the work)*.<sup>62</sup> Derrida used this argument of the *parergonal frame* in this sense of the empty frame of a painting, for example, which is neither *in* the work nor *outside* the work, or at the same time *outside* the work *in* the work, to explain that, only in this experience of the “parergonal frame”, of the “empty border” between an infinite content and a finite frame, in their “cut”, “hiatus”, “abyss” we can experience the revelation of beauty in the work of art. The beauty of a work of art is revealed only on the paradoxical, ambivalent border, on the border where both, the

55  
Ibid., pp. 132–134.

56  
Ibid.

57  
Ibid., pp. 92–95, 128.

58  
Ibid., p. 59.

59  
Ibid., p. 63.

60  
Ibid., p. 9.

61  
Jacques Derrida, *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, Paris 1978; *avertissement* appears only in the French edition: “Everything Kant has glimpsed under the name of parergon (e.g. the frame) is neither in the work (*ergon*) nor outside it. As soon as it appears place, it dismantles the most reassuring conceptual oppositions.” (my translation, p. 3).

62  
J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, pp. 1–13.

revelation of beauty, infinite as such, and at the same time its revelation in the finite formal frames, takes place.

- b) The argument of *the paradigm or model (outside the series in the series)*<sup>63</sup> is introduced by Derrida to equally support the indiscernibility of the boundary between a supposed original, paradigmatic, and external model and its subsequent inclusion in the series of its repetitions, multiplications, reproductions. For example, the idiomatic style of a painter, although it seems to be the result of the fact that the painter reproduces in series a first paradigmatic work, it is actually the one that produces the paradigmatic series. Thus, paradoxically, Derrida explains, it remains both *in* the pictorial series and *outside* the series, or rather it is revealed only on the indistinguishable empty boundary between the excess of the occurrence of a paradigmatic singularity and its subsequent serial repetition. Derrida uses the argument to exemplify at the same time that the specificity of a painter's style can neither be enclosed *within* his own work of art, nor completely situated *outside* the work of art, in the theoretical field of conceptual understanding. There are *remainders* of the exposition of truth in the singular style of painting specific to an artist, which, however, are not exposed or translated into the linguistic system, in universal-valid conceptual language. We cannot control this ambivalence, this parasitism in a double sense, on both sides of the parergonal border. The idiomatic style of a painter is situated both at the diffuse limit between the singularity of his own work and, at the same time, what is exposed as explicable and expressible in universal language outside his work.
- c) Derrida also uses the argument of *the stricture of the laces (outside the picture, inside the picture)*<sup>64</sup> to develop Heidegger's argument that we can no longer distinguish even between a naked thing that is represented in a work of art and the work of art that represents it, as for example between a supposedly existing external thing such as Van Gogh's shoes and the internal pictorial representation, because a chain-like lace indiscriminately laced up the two worlds. In Derridean's vision, we are no longer dealing with the metaphysical oppositional interior / exterior structure, but with the structure of interlacing, of the texture, of the undecidable *double bind* that simultaneously binds and unbinds, like "the laces" of a "corset".<sup>65</sup> We are no longer dealing with a pair of shoes or just with a work of art, given that the thing as such and the work of art are interlaced, they are undecidably corseted. We live therefore only on such reliable borders between the interior of the work of art and its exterior, we are at the same time *outside* the picture, *inside* the picture, or simultaneously *outside ergon, inside ergon*.

## Conclusions

We conclusively remark that for Derrida all frontiers become undecidable. They are reliable, hybrid, indeterminate parergonal boundaries that can no longer be stabilized in any fixed framework. They can no longer set any limit, neither between the occurrence of infinite and a-formal beauty as such or among our finite formal frames that receive it, nor between the religious mystical revelation and the frames or limits of our universal reason. In other words, it works only in this paradoxical structure of the *parergon*, of the

*ambivalent border* in which both *ergon* and *parergon* are simultaneously and indistinguishably trapped. We come to place ourselves on an empty a-topical frontier, which is not limited to the *work* (*oeuvre/ergon*) but does not remain *outside the work* (*hors-oeuvre/par-ergon*). Rather, we posit that we are situated in an a-topical place that nevertheless “gives place” to the work, *between* inside and outside, content and form, signified and signifier. The parergonal boundary, Derrida explains, is an empty place of frontier, just like the empty enclosure of a *passe-partout*:

“*Between* the outside and the inside, between the external and the internal edge-line, the framer and the framed, the figure and the ground, form and content, signifier and signified, and *so on* for any two-faced opposition. The trait thus divides in this place where it takes place. The emblem for this topos seems undiscoverable; I shall borrow it from the nomenclature of framing: *the passe-partout*.”<sup>66</sup>

Derrida’s original argument on the structure of the *parergon* deconstructs the *ergon* / *parergon* distinction and the entire suite of metaphysical oppositions built on the same scheme of oppositional approach *of the circle and the abyss, the bridge and the gulf, the frame and the break*, and leads us rather to problematic and paradoxical spatiality of the *parergon*, of no one’s frontier, of the undecidable structure of passage, of the experience of reliability between two sides: between a formal, finite, determined, conceptual system and its a-formal, infinite, indeterminate, non-conceptual remainder. On this *reliable parergonal frontier*, Derrida explains, an event of the revelation of truth takes place in artistic experience or in religious mystical experience.

And of course, we cannot fail to notice that this undecidable place of *the parergonal border* sends us to the famous Platonic receptacle of all possible forms and borders, *Khôra*. Derrida draws our attention to the fact that Plato has already told us about the a-formal *Khôra* receptacle of all forms that remains beyond all forms, an abysmal place, an “excess”, a “third genus” beyond the ontological-metaphysical oscillation between two genus, “neither this nor that”, “both this and that”.<sup>67</sup> In countless contexts Derrida invited us to explore this place of *Khôra*’s arch-original matrix, of the archaic spatiality and immemorial time before our time, of the Archaic texture of a language before our language – the abyssal place, we would say, of *Khôra* as *parergon*.

63  
Ibid., pp. 193–202.

64  
Ibid., pp. 335–344.

65  
Ibid., p. 277.

66  
Ibid., p. 12.

67  
Jacques Derrida, “*Khôra*”, in: Thomas Dutoit (ed.), *On the Name*, transl. David Wood – John P. Leavey Jr. – Ian McLeod, Stanford University Press, New York 1995, pp. 89–90.

Livia Georgeta Suciú

**Paradoksička struktura parergona u Kanta i Derridaa  
u odnosu na mističko i umjetničko otkrivenje**

**Sažetak**

*Polazeći od rizika kantijanske filozofije da sve zatvori unutar čvrstih granica sustava uma i isključi izvanjski, prijeteći ostatak onkraj tih granica, Jacques Derrida nastojao je dekonstruirati napor metafizike u izgradnji umjetnih mostova preko pukotina filozofijskih sustava, obično uzrokovanih probojem ovoga neupravljivoga izvanjskoga ostatka koje se podčinjava autoritetu metafizičkoga logosa. S obzirom na to da je u kantovsku sustavu taj izvanjski ostatak nazvan parergon, slijedili smo paradoksnu strukturu parergona, najprije na osnovama mističko-religijskoga iskustva, a zatim na osnovama estetičko-umjetničkoga iskustva. Ističemo da Derrida obrće metafizičku perspektivu i argumentira da je parergon pouzdana, propusna, neodlučna granična struktura, nesvodivo upletena između svega što je zatvoreno unutar formalnih granica i a-formalnoga ostatka koje završi vani. Originalna derridaovska argumentacija dekonstruira razlikovanje između ergona i parergona i cjelokupnost metafizičkih opozicija te nas vodi prema neodlučivoj parergonalnoj granici.*

**Ključne riječi**

Jacques Derrida, Immanuel Kant, parergon, mističko iskustvo, umjetničko iskustvo

Livia Georgeta Suciú

**Paradoxe Struktur des Parergons bei Kant und Derrida  
und seine Relation zur mystischen und künstlerischen Offenbarung**

**Zusammenfassung**

*Ausgehend von dem Bestreben der kantischen Philosophie, alles innerhalb der festen Grenzen des Vernunftsystems einzuschließen und den äußeren, bedrohlichen Rest außerhalb dieser Grenzen auszuschließen, versuchte Jacques Derrida das Bemühen der Metaphysik zu dekonstruieren, künstliche Brücken über die Klüfte der philosophischen Systeme zu bauen, die üblicherweise durch das Eindringen dieser unkontrollierbaren äußeren Reste verursacht werden, die sich der Autorität des metaphysischen Logos nicht unterwerfen. Da diese externen Reste im kantischen System den Namen Parergon erhielten, verfolgten wir diese paradoxe Struktur des Parergons, eingangs auf der Grundlage der mystisch-religiösen Erfahrung und anschließend unter Berufung auf die ästhetisch-künstlerische Erfahrung. Wir deuten darauf hin, dass Derrida die metaphysische Perspektive umkehrt und argumentiert, dass Parergon eher eine verlässliche, durchlässige, unentscheidbare Grenzstruktur ist, die irreduzibel zwischen all dem verwickelt ist, was innerhalb formaler Grenzen eingezäunt ist, und dem aformalen Rest, der nach außen entweicht. Die ursprüngliche derridasche Argumentation dekonstruiert die Unterscheidung zwischen Ergon und Parergon sowie die gesamte Reihe metaphysischer Oppositionen und lenkt uns vielmehr zu einer unentscheidbaren parergonalen Grenze.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

Jacques Derrida, Immanuel Kant, Parergon, mystische Erfahrung, künstlerische Erfahrung

Livia Georgeta Suciú

**Structure paradoxale du Parergon chez Kant et Derrida  
et sa relation à la révélation mystique et artistique**

**Résumé**

*Partant de l'enjeu de la philosophie kantienne de tout enfermer dans les limites strictes du système de la raison et d'exclure le reste extérieur menaçant au-delà de ces limites, Jacques Derrida a tenté de déconstruire l'effort de la métaphysique pour construire des ponts artificiels*

*au-dessus des ruptures des systèmes philosophiques, généralement causées par l'intrusion de ces restes externes incontrôlables qui ne se soumettent pas à l'autorité du logos métaphysique. Étant donné que dans le système kantien ces restes externes ont reçu le nom de parergon, nous avons suivi cette structure paradoxale du parergon, d'abord sur le terrain de l'expérience mystico-religieuse, puis sur celui de l'expérience esthétique-artistique. Nous soulignons que Derrida renverse la perspective métaphysique et soutient que le parergon est plutôt une structure frontalière fiable, perméable et indécidable, irrémédiablement impliquée dans tout ce qui est enfermé dans des limites formelles et le reste a-formel qui s'échappe à l'extérieur. L'argumentation originale derridienne déconstruit la distinction ergon / parergon et l'ensemble des oppositions métaphysiques, nous menant plutôt à une frontière parergonale indécidable.*

**Mots-clés**

Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Kant, parergon, expérience mystique, expérience artistique