

Abstract

In Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1987), the part of "Envois" is composed of many exchanged post cards. This collection of post cards reminds us of the letters compiled in epistolary novels. There is a lot of prestige attached to many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English and French epistolary novels, such as Gabriel de Guilleragues' *The Portuguese Letters* (1669), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-1748), Françoise de Graffigny's *Letters from a Peruvian Woman* (1747), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), and Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). These epistolary novels constitute the main frame of the epistolary genre. Then, confronted with the epistolary predecessors, what prompts Derrida to write the epistolary text of "Envois" in the twentieth century, in which the telecommunications networks appear to overpower the importance of writing letters or post cards? What is the difference between "Envois" and the previous epistolary novels?

On this issue, I want to argue in my thesis that Derrida's "Envois" is intended to deconstruct the epistolary genre by paradoxically valorizing and substituting the postal effects of the post card for the generic identities of epistolary novels. The postal effects of the post card primarily invoke the impossibility of the predestined destination and intended receiver. The post card always implies the possibilities of interception and multiple receivers in the process of transmission. In this way, the post card disrupts the linear path confined in the hierarchical opposites between the original departure point and the final destination. This disruption facilitates Derrida's attempt to deconstruct the construction of knowledge in the Western intellectual genealogy. The postal effects are applied to destabilize the linear succession of intellectual inheritance originated since Socrates. The inheritance is transmitted by multiple readers and hence susceptible to a myriad of interpretations. The binary logic between the original and the derivative, the present and the absent, and the public and the private is undermined in the multiplicity. The form of the post card, which is "half-private half public" (*Post Card* 62), oscillates in the indeterminacy of multiplicity. The postal effects of indeterminacy aroused in the post card are what Derrida emphasizes in "Envois." As a result, even in the age replete with the telecommunications networks, Derrida still proposes the possibility of "the unlimited

empire of a postcardization” (104). The postcardization does not mean to precipitate the “decadence” (104) of epistolary writing, but it aims to disseminate and recurrently stimulate the possibility of difference.

In my thesis, I propose three perspectives to illuminate the epistolarity of the post card: detour, deferral, and *différance*. They are interwoven in my discussion of Derrida’s “Envois.” In chapter one “Epistolary Genre: Valorization and Substitution,” I propound a paradox that “Envois” simultaneously valorizes and substitutes for the epistolary genre. “Envois” therefore puts the epistolary genre in a detour of difference and defers its determination of identity. In chapter two “Epistolary Otherness: The Object of Desire,” I apply Jacques Lacan’s concept of the object of desire to elucidate the self-construction in the act of writing post cards. The sender’s self-identity is continually deferred in a detour, because s/he requires the absent receiver to evoke his/her difference. In chapter three “Epistolary Writing: Paradox of the Supplement,” I relate Derrida’s concept of the supplement to the paradoxical effects of addition and substitution in epistolary writing. Writing post cards adds to a compensation of the distance, but it also simultaneously substitutes the distance for the final encounter with the absent receiver. In chapter four “Epistolary Exchange: Play of the *Fort Da*,” I compare Sigmund Freud’s, Lacan’s, and Derrida’s different observations on the *fort da* game. The *fort da* movements of epistolary exchanges are interminably deferred in a detour, when multiple readers in the process of transmission are taken into consideration. The multiple readers replenish possibilities of differences with a variety of interpretations. In chapter five “Epistolary Inheritance: Post Card of Intellectual Legacy,” I explore Derrida’s speculations on the scene of reversal copied on the post cards collected in “Envois.” The scene of reversal between Socrates and Plato is speculated to imply possible detours away from the linear succession of genealogy. Different representations of knowledge persistently defer the final determinate meaning of the intellectual inheritance.