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Derrida's Deconstruction and the Rhetoric of Proper Genres in Leonardo and Lessing

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***CLCWeb* Volume 8 Issue 3 (September 2006) Article 1**
Shun-liang Chao,
"Derrida's Deconstruction and the Rhetoric of Proper Genres in Leonardo and Lessing"
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Abstract: In his paper, "Derrida's Deconstruction and the Rhetoric of Proper Genres in Leonardo and Lessing," Shun-liang Chao draws on Derrida's discourse of logocentrism to illuminate the "ex-orbitant" threads of metaphysical thought in Leonardo's and Lessing's texts on the comparison of poetry and painting. Both Leonardo and Lessing seek to subordinate one of the two sister arts to the other by constructing, respectively, the first, fixed principle of the proper genre and by draw-ing rigid borders between what is proper and what is improper. Leonardo privileges painting over poetry owing to the power of visiblity; on the other hand, Lessing subordinates painting to poetry since the former frustrates vision and thus allows the free play of the imagination. In so doing, however, they both push their metaphysical arguments into an aporia and as such, that which is proper and decidable turns out to be improper and undecidable.

Shun-liang CHAO

Derrida's Deconstruction and the Rhetoric of Proper Genres in Leonardo and Lessing

In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida employs the word "exorbitant" to describe his deconstructive reading of Rousseau. By "exorbitant," Derrida means that the tasks of reading are to leave the orbit of the author's (binary) thinking to open a reading and, furthermore, to lay bare the author's derailed arguments to which she/he is blind, those that run off the rails of the logic she/he builds: "to make the not-seen accessible to sight" (163). The "not-seen," according to Derrida, is a blind spot "that opens and limits visibility" (163) in the text. The author desires to, in Derrida's words, "arrest," "domesticate," "tame" (157) his/her binarism; but there is always something "exorbitant" in his/her text -- something that runs off the rails of his/her logic. We find the image of "exorbitant" in words such as "eccentric," "abnormal," "aberrant," "monstrous," "erring," "trespassing," "outrageous," "excessive," and "encroaching" (see the *Oxford English Dictionary*). It would not be exorbitant to say that the notion of "exorbitant" is the matrix of Derrida's deconstruction, that which renders the decidable undecidable, the possible impossible, the proper improper. The "exorbitant" provokes disorder in the structure and thus allows "the play of the structure" (*Writing and Difference* 278). The "exorbitant" always arrives with conceptual oppositions, escorted by value judgment. As Derrida critiques Kant's use of the *ergon-parergon* opposition as the basis for aesthetic judgment: "the whole analytic of [Kant's] aesthetic judgment forever assumes that one can distinguish rigorously between the intrinsic and the extrinsic. Aesthetic judgment *must* properly bear upon intrinsic beauty, not on finery and surrounds. Hence one must know -- this is a fundamental presupposition, presupposing what is fundamental -- how to determine the intrinsic -- what is framed -- and know what one is excluding as frame and *outside* the frame. We are thus *already* at the unlocatable center of the problem" (*The Truth in Painting* 63). The intrinsic-extrinsic or inside-outside limit is bound up with the concept of an exclusive right, the right of ownership, namely, property. And the idea of property ("an exclusive attribute," "the quality of being proper or suitable" [*Oxford English Dictionary*]) lies at the very core of the law of genre: "As soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind. ... Thus, as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" ("The Law of Genre" 56-57). To put it further, the law of genre -- the property of a genre -- already implies within itself the anomalous, the "exorbitant" from the outset: One never knows what is proper until one knows what is more than proper (i.e., exorbitant); that is, they generate each other. This is why Derrida says elsewhere: "the proper names are already no longer proper names, because their production is their obliteration" (*Of Grammatology* 109).

The notion of genre is crucial for working in the comparative mode including interart discourse, in that the comparison of arts becomes impossible or insignificant without the existence of the limits that are drawn by different artistic genres. Interart discourse in the history of Western aesthetics can be traced back to the Greek lyric poet Simonides of Ceos, whose catch phrase was recorded and made popular by Plutarch as "*poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens*" ("poetry is a speaking picture, painting a silent poem"). Since then, the comparison, or really, the contest, of poetry and painting (broadly, word and image) has occupied the centrepiece of interart criticism -- mainly because, as W.J.T. Mitchell has put it, "they are not merely *different* kinds of creatures, but *opposite* kinds" (*Iconology* 47). Critics compare verbal and visual arts hardly without referring to the following two monographs on the poetry-painting distinction: Leonardo da Vinci's "Paragon: Of Poetry and Painting" (ca. 1482) and G.E. Lessing's *Laokoön: An Essay on the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1766). They both establish the property of poetry and of painting: Leonardo sees eye and ear as exclusive to painting and poetry respectively; Lessing considers time as proper to poetry and space as proper to painting. More importantly, they both privilege one over the other by constructing a rhetoric of the proper/legitimate/orthodox genre: Leonardo subordinates poetry to painting and Lessing painting to poetry. Much of the discourse on the comparison of poetry and

painting has served as either an apology for or a stigmatization of the poetry-painting antithesis. With this in mind, I intend neither to suture together nor to split apart poetry and painting as many critics and scholars do. Instead, inspired by Mitchell's close readings of several important texts on the word-image difference, I aim to do Derridean readings of Leonardo's and Lessing's texts to debunk the "exorbitant" (in every sense of the word) in their value judgments, thereby making the proper improper, the decidable undecidable. It should be mentioned that while Mitchell concentrates on the relation of the war between word and image to political ideologies and historical milieus, I am more interested in unveiling the ways in which Leonardo and Lessing construct proper genres with recourse to fixed principles or metaphysical thinking that nevertheless can be (partly) undermined.

The edifice of Western metaphysics since Plato, according to Derrida, has been grounded in logocentrism: the assignment of truth or value to the logos (speech, word, presence, reason), from whence stems "the debasement of writing, and its repression outside 'full' speech" (*Of Grammatology* 3). The logic of logocentrism, he continues, is in fact that of dichotomy: speech and writing, origin and derivation, truth and falsehood; the first terms are superior to the second ones. For example, Aristotle says in *On Interpretation*: "spoken words are the [primary] symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words" (qtd. in *Of Grammatology* 11); Rousseau once stated: "Writing is nothing but the representation of speech; it is *bizarre* that one gives more care to the determining of the *image* than to the *object*" (qtd. in *Of Grammatology* 36). In a similar vein, Fernand de Saussure echoes Rousseau: "Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first" (qtd. in *Of Grammatology* 30). In such logocentric arguments, Derrida points out, speech or *phonè* is always valorised, in that it is the primary symbol of mental experience: *phonè* or voice is "indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself" (*Of Grammatology* 11). In other words, written words are always derivative and secondary; speech is (the *present*ation of) the signifed and writing is (the *re*-presentation of) the signifier. Speech or voice immediately *presents* thought; it is the interiority of mind, thought, meaning, "the self-presence of the cognito" (*Of Grammatology* 12). Voice is an indication of the living conscious, is breath or life itself. As Rousseau states in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*: "Painting is often dead and inanimate. It can carry you to the depths of the desert; but as soon as vocal signs strike your ear, they announce to you a being like yourself. They are, so to speak, the voice of the soul. ... And one cannot hear either singing or a symphony without immediately acknowledging the presence of another intelligent being" (63-64). Incidentally, one can trace the idea of the voice-presence back to the genesis of human life in the *Bible*: "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (*Genesis*: 3:8;*The Bible* 3). In contrast to speech, writing is the mediation of (mediation of) mind, the original thought, is impotent to claim its self-presence and hence suspicious: "[books]," as Socrates says in the *Protagoras*, "cannot either answer or ask a question on their own account" (qtd. in *Dissemination* 136). In the history of Western metaphysics, Derrida observes, the difference between speech and writing is also linked to the one between good and bad writing: "the good and natural is the divine inscription in the heart and soul; the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body" (*Of Grammatology* 17). Representative of this argument is Rousseau, who remarks in *Emile*: "It was as if nature had spread out all her magnificence in front of our eyes to offer its text for our consideration. ... I have therefore closed all the books. Only one is open to all eyes. It is the book of Nature. In this great and sublime book I learn to serve and adore its author" (qtd. in *Of Grammatology* 18). We therefore have a set of binary oppositions: writings of nature and culture, of soul and body, of the interior and the exterior, of the divine and the mundane, of the infinite and the finite, of presence and absence. As a matter of fact, their original model is the Platonic opposition between the intelligible and the sensible: in order to solve the problem of the line between reality and appearance, Socrates in the *Republic* divides the world into "the intelligible realm" and "the visible realm," "the original" and "the image," "truth" and "lack of truth," and prefers the former to the latter (509d-510a, 237-38). In Derrida, (de)construction starts with the priority of the one over the other.

Leonardo da Vinci, in "Paragon," repeats Platonic oppositions by referring to another model of presence: that which Derrida calls the "presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*" (*Of Grammatology* 12). First, painting, in Leonardo's eyes, is the presence of Nature: painting is "the legitimate daughter of nature" and "related to God" (5); by contrast, poetry is the "derivative shadow" of painting (14). In other words, poetry is illegitimate / improper / exorbitant, insofar as it is distant from God, the original truth. Here painting bears a close parallel to the work of a carpenter in Plato's renowned example of bed-making: God is the "progenitor" of the real bed, the Form (*eidos*) of the bed; a carpenter is its "manufacturer" or, to use Derrida's terms, "demiurge"; and a painter or a poet is merely an imitator of a carpenter's particular bed (Plato 597d-e, 347-48; Derrida, *Dissemination* 138). Painting and poetry are thus twice removed from the truth. In the hands of Leonardo, however, painting becomes the *present*ation or "legitimate" manufacture of God's ideas: "And when a picture is unveiled, a great multitude assembles there and the people immediately throw themselves upon the ground adoring and praying to Him who the painting depicts and praying for the turn of health and for eternal salvation, just as though the living divinity were actually present ... it is the painted image that causes them, something which all the writings about the subject could not do but which the image can accomplish by representing the appearance and the power of Deity. Therefore it appears that God loves painting and loves him who loves and cherishes it" (10). In opposition to (the apotheosis of) painting, poetry, because of its failure to create an appearance, still remains far removed from the truth, impotent to claim its self-presence, and thus devalued. In Leonardo, the painting-poetry disanalogy is paralleled with the presence-absence, life-death differential: "Now you, poet, describe a beauty without describing anything alive" (22). Apparently, here truth and presence or life in the form of visiblity cannot be separated. Second, Leonardo goes on to solidify this metaphysical thinking by associating the painting-poetry diversity with the concept of "the book of Nature": "The works of nature are of much more value than are words, which are works of man, because there is the same relation between the works of men and those of nature that there is between man and God. Hence, it is more valuable to copy objects of nature and effect true likenesses, than to copy with words the deeds and works of men" (20). Poems, or "the works of men," are mundane and less valuable because words are not able to "effect true likenesses." By contrast, paintings, "the legitimate daughter of nature," are divine, in that painted images have the power of visibility, of true re-presentation: Paintings, as "the mother of perspective" (4), "alone can portray faithfully all the visible works of nature" (5); "Lover, what poet can put before you in words the true image of your adored one with as much truth as the painter?" (13) Leonardo's view of painting as faithful re-*present*ation, "true likenesses," of visible objects is typical of what Mitchell in *Iconology* terms "the tyranny of the picture," aided by the invention of perspective: "[perspective] denies its own artificiality and lays claims to being a 'natural' representation of 'the way things look,' 'the way we see,' or ... 'the way things really are'" (37). By defining painting as the mother of perspective, Leonardo aims to verify painting as a "true science," that which is "capable of mathematical demonstration" (3). He therefore takes one step further his precursor Cennino Cennini's claim that painting "deserve[s] to be placed in the rank next to science, and to be crowned by Poetry" (4-5; see also Farago 126). In fact, Leonardo, as we see here, goes so far as to make painting the *dominant* art: Since being able to re-*present* the way things really are, painting, he highlights, "does not have need of interpreters for different languages as does literature and at once satisfies mankind, no differently than do things produced by nature" (9); painting, so to say, is "a universal language" (Farago 125), a transcendental signified. Third, in order to justify the power of visibility or true re-*present*ation, Leonardo appeals to the judgment of King Mathias, a story redolent of that of King Thamus, the father of speech, who denounces, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the *pharmakon* of writing as pernicious to memory and true knowledge (see Derrida, *Dissemination* 102). Here is King Mathias's judgment: "On the birthday of King Mathias a poet brought him a work that he had written in honor of the day, declaring that the king was born to benefit the world. A painter presented him with a portrait of his beloved. The king hastily closed the poet's book, turned to the painting, and fixed his gaze upon it with great admiration. The poet, then, with much indignation said: 'O King, read, read, and you will find something of greater substance than a mute picture.' The king, hearing himself reproached for gazing at mute

things, said: "Poet, be still, for you do not know what you are saying. This painting serves a better sense than does your work, which is blind for men. Give me something that I can see and touch, and not only hear. ... For this reason I judge that your creation is much inferior to that of the painter. ... I judge there is nothing on earth made by man that could please me more" (15-16). Leonardo, through the mouth of the King, not merely subordinates poetry to painting according to visibility or "the presence of the thing to sight," but defines their generic differences by the organs to which they appeal -- the eye and the ear.

He then goes so far as to maintain that "sight is superior to all the other senses" (26), because "the work which our hands do at the command of our eyes are infinite" (23); because "the [poetic] imagination does not see as well as does the eye" (13); because "facts are subject to the eye" (12); and because "sight is less deceived than any other sense" (6). Leonardo continues: "those sciences are vain and full of errors which are not born of experience, mother of all certainty, and which do not end in recorded experience, that is, where the origin, or middle, or end is not made known to the five senses" (11) -- among which the eye is most dependable because, as we have seen, "facts are subject to the eye," "sight is less deceived than any other sense." Here the "exorbitant" in Leonardo's text becomes accessible to sight. Leonardo pushes his "visuocentric" arguments into an aporia -- a point of undecidability -- when stressing the potency of image over word: "Are there not paintings to be seen so like the object that they represent that they have deceived men and animals?" (20) An example is given: "It once happened that I made a picture representing a divine subject, and it was bought by a man who fell in love with her. He wished to remove the emblems of divinity in order to be able to kiss the picture without scruples. But finally conscience overcame his sighs of desire and he was obliged to remove the painting from his house" (22). The power of sight/painting, a "true science," to which "facts" are subject, turns out to provoke deception, illusion, and irrationality. The power of sight/painting, of "true likenesses," is then quite "exorbitant," in every sense of the word. Leornardo regards "true likeness" or visibility as the primacy of the proper genre, and thus maintains that "the [poetic] imagination does not see as well as does the eye" (13). On the contrary, Lessing reverses Leonardo's value system and holds that the free play of the imagination is the first principle of the proper genre. The power, the vividness of painted images, in Lessing's eyes, is exorbitant, violent to the imagination; it motivates Lessing to censure painting, to subordinate painting to poetry, for the eye shackles the imagination and shrinks pleasure: "to present the uttermost to the eye is to bind the wings of Fancy" (17); "what pleases us in a work of art pleases not the eye, but the imagination through the eye" (43). Lessing, following the ancients, deems beauty the first and last object of the imitative arts; beauty is born of the imagination and gives birth to pleasure. The liberty of the imagination then becomes the criterion for judging art. Poetry is superior to painting, in the sense that "poetry has the wider sphere [of the imagination], that beauties are within her reach which painting can never attain, and that she may often see reason to prefer unpicturesque beauties to picturesque ones" (55). Mention should be made briefly of the fact that, in the eighteenth century, Lessing was not alone in granting poetry the dominant role due to the freedom of the imagination: Edmund Burke in the *Inquiry* (1756) favours poetry over painting in terms that the former, owing to its obscure or unpicturesque nature, is able to arouse the effect of the unbound which is central to the sublime (57-59).

Although Lessing, as Beate Allert argues, liberates poetry from subordination to painting in the tradition of *ut pictura poesis* and of *mimesis* (113), it is fair to say that he echoes the Platonic gesture by referring to the priority of the unpicturesque over the picturesque, the invisible/intelligible over the visible: "This invisibility leaves the imagination free play to enlarge the scene at will. ... But painting must accept a visible theatre" (78). In the case of painting, Lessing urges painters of his day to quit "expression" as their first law, for the law of beauty, in that the former sacrifices imagination to visibility. The effect of the beautiful is engendered by invisibility, i.e., that which is unexpressed and left to be imagined in the mind. Painting, he says emphatically, is made "not simply to be looked at, but to be contemplated long and often" (16). To achieve this effect, painters ought to choose the most fruitful, pregnant moment of any action to shun the visible fullness, especially "what is unsightly in nature" (16), and as such allow "the free play to the imagination"

(16-17) to fill in those moments unpainted. In consequence, Lessing further suggests that the painter, since confined by the tangibility of the visual medium, take poetical descriptions as their models. For "nothing obliges the poet to concentrate his picture into a single moment," and thus "the whole infinite realm of perfection lies open for his imitation" (20-21); also, the poet "has at his command whole classes of subjects which elude the artist" (89). Now that "the whole infinite realm of perfection" is exclusive to poetry, a wise painter, Lessing warns, would rather copy from poetical descriptions than crave "something new and strange," in order to make his painting "universally intelligible" (76). From this point, he draws a conclusion that "invention" is proper to the poet and "execution" to the painter: In painting "the difficulty appears to lie more in the execution than in the invention, while with poetry the contrary is the case" (72). In order to excuse the painter from the merit of invention, he emphasizes that the painter "deserves more credit" (72) who copies nature through the poet's imitation rather than directly from nature: "The painter who makes a beautiful landscape from the description of a Thomson, does more than one who takes his picture at first hand from nature. The latter sees his model from him; the former must, by an effort of imagination, think he sees it. One makes a beautiful picture from vivid, sensible impression, the other from the feeble, uncertain representations of arbitrary signs" (73). Here Lessing introduces disorder into his "verbocentric" arguments. It is tempting to say that the assignment of "execution" to painting is not established on a rigorous basis, but rather on the consumption of labour: for the painter, it is more laborious and hence more creditable and proper to picture from "the feeble, uncertain representations of arbitrary signs" than to copy directly from visible objects.

The thread of the consumption of labour is exposed to sight as well when Lessing defines and confines the "proper sphere" (x) of poetry and of painting according to the "first principles" -- namely, space and time. Painting belongs to the spatial arts, in that "its signs or means of imitation can be combined only in space" (90); as such, its primary subjects are "bodies with their visible properties," i.e., objects existing side by side in space. On the contrary, poetry belongs to the temporal arts, because its signs "can express only objects which succeed each other ... in time" (91); then, "actions," i.e., objects succeeding each other in time, are the true subjects of poetry. Lessing continues: "All bodies, however, exist not only in space, but also in time. They continue, and, at any moment of their continuance, may assume a different appearance and stand in different relations. Every one of these momentary appearances and groupings was the result of a preceding, may become the cause of a following, and is therefore the centre of a present, action. Consequently painting can imitate actions also, but only as they are suggested through forms. Actions, on the other hand, cannot exist independently, but must always be joined to certain agents. In so far as those agents are bodies or are regarded as such, poetry describes also bodies, but only indirectly through actions" (91-92). Does Lessing tell us that the border between poetry and painting operates only at the level of *direct* representation where the signs bear a "convenient relation" (91) to the thing signified, but not at the level of *indirect* expression? If yes, then the "wholly different signs" (91) that circumscribe the "proper sphere" of poetry and of painting turn out to be a difference of degree rather than of kind -- namely, the degree of convenience or, in Mitchell's terms, the "relation of relative ease or difficulty" (102). The concept of the degree of convenience or labour becomes more obvious when Lessing turns to the representation of bodies by poetry: "The details, which the eye takes in at a glance, he [the poet] enumerates slowly one by one. ... When we look at an object the various parts are always present to the eye. ... The ear, however, loses the details it has heard, unless memory retain[s] them. And if they are retained, what pains and effort it costs to recall their impressions in the proper order" (102). Lessing's choice of space and time as the property of painting and of poetry is based on what Mitchell calls "the economy of signs": "the difference between cheap, easy labor, and costly 'pain and effort'" (102). To put it another way, it is not impossible, but just more inconvenient or laborious, to allow poetry and painting to break the law of genre, to be "exorbitant" -- "exceeding ordinary or proper bounds," "encroaching" (*Oxford English Dictionary*): "The rule is this, that succession in time is the province of the poet, co-existence in space that of the artist. ... Painting and poetry should be like two just and friendly neighbors, neither of whom indeed is allowed to take unseemly liberties in the heart of the other's domain, but who exercise mutual forbearance on the borders, and effect a

peaceful settlement for all the petty encroachments which circumstances may compel either to make in haste on the rights of the other" (109-10). As Mitchell suggests: "if it is only a matter of degree of effort that holds poetry and painting in their proper domains, then it is clear that this distinction cannot be the basis for any rigorous differentiation of *kind*" (102).

Nonetheless, it is hard to believe that Lessing was unaware of the tenuousness of his basis of the "first principles" for the poetry-painting antithesis; then, why did he still stick to policing the boundaries between poetry and painting? The answer may well be the "exorbitant" power of painted images that was discussed earlier. As I mentioned, painting, because of the visibility of its signs, is inferior to poetry in allowing free play to the imagination; by contrast, the intangibility of verbal images allows poetry to have an infinite range of the imagination and a wider (proper) sphere to enclose/encroach on the sphere of painting -- this is what Mitchell calls "an imperialist design" (107): But if the smaller cannot contain the greater, it can be contained in the greater ["contain": "To keep (a hostile nation, ideology, etc.) within limits; to prevent expansion or encroachment into new territory" (*Oxford English Dictionary*)]. In other words, if not every trait employed by the descriptive poet can produce an equally good effect on canvas or in marble, can every trait of the artist be equally effective in the work of the poet? Undoubtedly; for what pleases us in a work of art pleases not the eye, but the imagination through the eye (Lessing 43). In accordance with Lessing's logic, it is tempting to come to the conclusion that we can completely dispense with painting. Apparently, that is not his intention. Lessing's aim is not to radicalize the notion of poetry and painting, otherwise he would not have constructed the poetry-painting border according to the "first principles." Lessing allows the necessity of painting by introducing certain kinds of advantage that poetry lacks in the representations of physical beauty: painting has "that power of illusion which in the presentation of visible objects art possesses above poetry" (120); "to make us see and feel" is "the inadequacy of all verbal expression" (134); "language of itself is powerless," so there are certain moments when "poetry stammers, and eloquence grows dumb," painting would "serve as interpreter" (135). In so doing, however, he introduces undecidability into his "imperialist" arguments. For the visible nature of painting, which is disdained because of doing violence to the imagination, now serves as a supplement, or really, a dangerous supplement, to poetry: the advantage of painting empowers "the smaller" to encroach on the territory of poetry, "the greater." It becomes clear why Lessing makes a call to police the borders between poetry and painting: He establishes poetry as the proper genre, and as such, in order to prevent painting, the dangerous supplement, from trespassing on the property of poetry, painting needs careful attention: he suggests that painting be held in check by referring to the fact that the ancients subjected the plastic arts to "the control of civil law" (10). In this sense, I disagree with Allert's statement that Lessing seeks to create "equal rights among the so-called 'sister arts,' painting and poetry" (106). For, evidently, in Lessing's view, it is *natural* for "the greater" to contain/encroach on "the smaller"; but it would be against natural law if "the smaller" makes an attempt to encroach on "the greater": "If painting claims to be the sister of poetry, let the younger at least not be jealous of the elder, nor seek to deprive her of ornaments unbecoming to herself" (61). To put it another way, Lessing's demand for "the mutual forbearance on the borders" between poetry and painting is to preclude the expansion or encroachment of painting into the domain of poetry, to exclude the "exorbitant" (encroaching) painting from the property of poetry. But Lessing seems to forget that at the moment when he urges the painter to copy nature from poetical descriptions, he already allows painting to encroach on the domain of poetry: "The painter is not only to copy the same thing that the poet has copied, but he is to copy it with the same touches. He is to use poet not only as narrator, but as poet" (71). In this sense, Lessing is "one who exceeds [the] proper limits" (*Oxford English Dictionary*) that he sets up; he is the exorbitant.

In conclusion, it behoves us to say that as long as the idea of genre exists, the battle between poetry and painting, or broadly, between different art forms, will never end; that as long as one art form is given the predominant role in the battle according to a first principle on which a whole hierarchy of meanings relies, the logic or rhetoric of building the first principle, if scrutinised closely, may always be "exorbitant," be deconstructed. Leaving the orbit of mainstream discourse on the battle between arts, my deconstructive readings of two earlier monographs on the poetry-

painting relationships look closely into the very core of the notion of comparative arts -- i.e., the property of genre and the logic of the proper genre -- and, hopefully, will thereby draw more attention to this dimension in the study of the comparison of arts.

Note: I dedicate this article as a token of everlasting love to Tze-ming Hu (1972-2003). My special thanks go to Lyn M. Lawrence for his sincere scholarship and his help with the proofreading of my text.

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