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## **On Transcendental Fiction**

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# On Transcendental Fiction

Geoffrey Bennington

Let me suggest provisionally that fiction (or at least literary fiction), in its traditional (philosophical) determination, always has to do with a certain *beyond*.<sup>1</sup> That it puts us in adventurous touch with something over the frontier, with other worlds, with ghosts (perhaps, as we shall see, with ghost ships). And that, reciprocally, any beyond always runs the risk of falling prey to fiction, so that as soon as philosophy ventures into it, it runs the risk of finding itself somewhere it never should be.

Jacques Derrida claims in *Parages* that it is on the frontier of philosophy and literature—or rather, where this frontier trembles—that philosophy is most called to thought (10). One imagines that such a frontier (especially if it were to turn out to be *essentially* unstable), has a complex structure that is difficult to pin down. My working hypothesis here, in what will be both rather elementary and rather dry (for which I apologize), is that this structure must have an at least *analogical* relation with the structure of the frontier as Kant presents it, and especially in the famous and obscure discussion in the *Prolegomena* of the distinction between limit and bound, bound and limit, border and boundary, perimeter and periphery, barrier and gate, *Grenze* and *Schranke*. Moreover, we shall see that analogy is also part of our problem and, as such, cannot solve the question of the frontier.<sup>2</sup>

I shall be trying to show, not that philosophy and literature are two domains with a frontier (even a vague or uncertain frontier) that separates them more or less successfully, but that where there

is a frontier (even a sharp or distinct frontier), or perhaps where there is an effort to *think* the frontier, there is something like literature. This “literature” can (as tends to be the case in Kant) be something from which one *suffers*, of which one bears the *passion* (as one says the passion of Christ), while enjoying it more or less secretly. “Something like literature” would then be (as Jean-Luc Nancy has brilliantly shown from a quite different point of view) Kant’s passion, or at least the passion of a Kant re-read after Derrida—re-read, then, with a view to subjecting the Kantian transcendental (or finding it already subjected) to the strange kind of twist we have got used to calling the *quasi*-transcendental.

And so, by way of an exergue, as an example of this double passion, this famous paragraph that I cite without commentary, in which the whole *Critique of Pure Reason* is at stake:

We have now traveled throughout the land of pure understanding and carefully inspected its every part, but have also surveyed it throughout, determining for each thing in this land its proper place. This land, however, is an island, and is enclosed by nature itself within unchangeable bounds. [Dieses Land aber ist eine Insel, une durch dir Natur selbst in unveränderliche Grenzen eingeschlossen]. It is the land of truth (a charming name), and is surrounded by a vast and stormy ocean, where illusion properly resides and many fog banks and much fast-melting ice feign new-found lands. This sea incessantly deludes the seafarer with empty hopes [den auf Entdeckungen herunschwärmenden Seefahrer] as he roves through his discoveries, and thus entangles him in adventures that he can never relinquish, nor ever bring to an end. But before we venture upon this sea, to search its latitudes for certainty as to whether there is in them anything to be hoped, it will be useful to begin by casting another glance on the map of the land that we are about to leave, and to ask two questions. We should ask, first, whether we might not perhaps be content with what this land contains, or even must be content with it from necessity [aus Not] if there is not other territory at all on which we could settle. And we should ask, second, by what title we possess even this land and can keep ourselves secure against all hostile claims. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A235-6/B294-5)<sup>3</sup>

Kant not only *makes* a difference between these two terms *Grenze et Schranke* (an operative difference, as they used to say), but he makes that difference the object of an explicit reflection, and he does so from the first edition of the *Critique* (1781), and then, in the *Prolegomena* (1783), pushes this reflection to the point of making this distinction a key to the understanding of his entire thought, at least as far as pure speculative reason is concerned—and this leaves more than a trace in the second edition of the *Critique* (1787).

In Kant’s discussions of the limits and boundaries of the understanding, which are of course legion, the dominant German

term in general is *Grenze*. Thus, at the outset of the preface to the first edition of the first *Critique*, explaining how, on the basis of the principles reason cannot fail to employ in the sphere of experience, it finds itself impelled to go beyond experience and invokes principles that are of no use in that sphere:

By doing this, however, human reason plunges into darkness and contradictions; and although it can indeed gather from these that they must be based on errors lying hidden somewhere, it is unable to discover these errors. For the principles that it employs go beyond the boundary of all experience [da sie über die Grenze aller Erfahrung hinausgehen], and hence no longer acknowledge any touchstone of experience. The combat arena of these endless conflicts is what we call *metaphysics*. (Aviii)

There would be dozens of examples of this usage that one could quote, as much in passages that remain unchanged from one edition to the next as in some additions that are found only in the second edition.<sup>4</sup>

It is true that one also finds uses of the word *Schranke*, notably in a passage from the “Discipline of Pure Reason”, in which Kant proposes an extended analogy between our knowledge in general and our knowledge of the terrestrial globe. Kant wants to make a distinction between two forms or modalities of ignorance (an ignorance which, he recalls, should incite me to pursue my inquiry rather than abandon it), or rather two forms *and* two modalities of ignorance. I can *first* be ignorant either of things, or of the determination and the limits (*Grenzen*) of my knowledge. Each of these two forms of ignorance can have two modalities: the ignorance in question can be *contingent*: a contingent ignorance of things calls for a *dogmatic* inquiry into the things in question; a contingent ignorance of the limits of my knowledge calls for a *critical* inquiry into the limits (*Grenzen*, still) of my *possible* knowledge. But that my ignorance be *necessary* (second modality, then, and apparently of both forms at once, for Kant no longer talks of things, is already on the limit), that cannot be established empirically by *observation* (*Beobachtung*), but solely by critical means, by the deepening (*Ergründung*) of the primary sources of knowledge.

We must therefore distinguish the determination of the limits (*Grenzbestimmung*) of our knowledge, which can only be done on the basis of *a priori* grounds, from a mere *limitation* (*Einschränkung*) due to what Kant calls “merely a cognition, although only indeterminate, of an ignorance that can never be removed completely” (A758/B786). The first ignorance, which is necessary, determined by a *Grenze*, gives rise to science, whereas the second, contingent and *limited*, only gives rise to a perception.

If I represent the earth as flat (“as a plate,” says Kant), I can learn from my experience that however far I go there is always ahead of me more space into which I could still advance. In this way I know the Schranken of my own knowledge of the earth at a given moment (the circle closed by the horizon that represents the limit of my current perception, and even the sum of all I have seen in all the circles I have thus known as I went around the earth), but I do not know the Grenzen of all possible geo-graphy (Erdbeschreibung). But if I learn that the earth is a sphere, then, on the basis of a small part of that sphere, I can know it (without experience of what its surface may contain) in its scope (Umfang), its size, and its Schranken.

My knowledge, so long as I restrict myself to the data of immediate experience, is thus limited, it has Schranken that do not correspond to the Grenzen of what I could know if I set off from the knowledge (Kant does not say how I get that knowledge) of the sphericity of the globe; but having progressed to such knowledge and what it makes possible, I now know these Grenzen (of the writing of the earth) as Schranken (of the earth itself, in the analogy here being used). If one does not know that the earth is spherical, then one will rather imagine the sum of knowledge (acquired in the circle of an apparently flat space surrounded by a horizon) as analogous to our current little circle: a big circle, then, on a flat surface, limited by a horizon that one can never embrace with a single glance, and that one imagines to be the horizon of an *unconditioned* totality (for the circle must contain the whole of possible experience). But, says Kant, all the questions of our pure reason concern what might be found *beyond* this horizon, or else, allenfalls, at best, for that matter, also on its frontier (Grenzlinie, its boundary line). “However, all questions of our pure reason still aim at what may lie outside this horizon, or—for that matter—at least on its boundary line” [Indessen gehen doch alle Fragen unserer reinen Vernunft auf das, was außerhalb diesem Horizonte, oder allenfalls auch in seiner Grenzlinie liegen möge”] (A760/B788).<sup>5</sup>

Hume’s error was to imagine that one can simply put such questions in their place beyond the horizon as mere fictions.<sup>6</sup> However useful that may be, this second step of reason (zweite Schritt, the first being the dogmatic step), which would be the step of rest or temporary dwelling, for skepticism is also—here—presented as a Ruheplatz (a resting-place, says Pluhar’s translation, a step that is not a step, a halting step) where reason can reflect on its dogmatic wandering (for dogmatism is here a wandering, whereas in the cel-

ebredated preface to the second edition of the *Critique* it is rather skepticism that is presented as a nomadism, and dogmatism would rather be sedentary). In other words, where it can make a sketch of the region in which it finds itself, better choose the path it is to take, but where it cannot establish a fixed abode for this is not ein Wohnplatz zum beständigen Aufenthalte [a dwelling-place for constant residence]. Only critique, the third step, can render such residence possible, precisely by fixing the bounds, here explicitly opposed to limits, of knowledge. Where skepticism can merely conjecture that reason is *limited* (and that the questions it raises fall in part beyond those limits), *Critique* establishes *a priori* the *bounds* of reason.

This is precisely why we have to change analogies, and compare our reason to a sphere rather than an indefinite flat surface, as we saw earlier. For the problem in representing reason as a flat surface is that such a surface is in principle unlimited, and so any limit in or on it can only be empirical and uncertain, put in place *a posteriori*, whereas what makes a sphere a good representation of reason is that its limits are rigorously determinable *a priori*. The object of the analogy (the sphere) therefore has Schranken that mean it can represent reason that has Grenzen, whereas the flat surface, having as such neither Schranken nor Grenzen, can only give rise to the tracing of indeterminate or at best merely empirical limits.

Let us leave aside for now this minimal sign of a complication in the distribution of Grenzen and Schranken (a complication that consists in the fact that the one can figure the other in an analogy), because the general distribution of the two terms still seems clear and coherent. Grenzen are on the side of necessity, the *a priori* and critique; Schranken on the side of contingency, the *a posteriori*, the empirical and skepticism.

And, it would seem, it is exactly in this sense that Kant picks up this distinction again in the *Prolegomena*, the very subtitle of whose conclusion names the Grenzbestimmung of pure reason.<sup>7</sup> Kant repeats that we can claim knowledge only in the context of a possible experience, but this does not mean that we have to give up on things in themselves, which of course we cannot know, but with which one can have a relation other than a knowledge-relation. The frontier between phenomena and things-in-themselves is complex and difficult to describe. Kant says this:

Our principles, which limit [einschränken] the use of reason to possible experience, might in this way [i.e. if they closed off the frontier of possible experience to such an extent that *nothing* was supposed to subsist beyond] become transcendent and the limits [Schranken] of our reason be

set up as limits [Schranken again] of the possibility of things in themselves (as Hume's Dialogues may illustrate) if a careful critique did not guard the bounds [Grenzen] of our reason with respect to its empirical use and set a limit [here Ziel, term, the aim, the final point] of its pretensions. (§57, 128; tr., 91)

Our reason, then, does indeed have *Schranken*, which, one must believe, are contingent, but which always might present themselves as the bounds of all reality. And these contingent bounds might present themselves as such precisely on critical grounds, if those grounds were to be no longer *immanent*, but, according to the celebrated but obscure distinction from the first *Critique*, *transcendent*. And what is a transcendent principle? Precisely, a principle that not only transgresses the limits of the field of experience by error or lack of caution, but which *incites* one to cross those limits and even to overthrow them. In the *Critique*, the frontier between Grenze and Schranke begins to be a little less distinct here:

Let us call the principles whose application keeps altogether within the limits [in den Schranken] of possible experience immanent principles, and those that are to fly beyond these limits [Grenzen: so here, Schranke and Grenze are not distinguished, they are the same thing, in this passage which remains the same from one edition to the next] *transcendent* principles. But by transcendent principles I do not mean the *transcendental* use or misuse of the categories, which is a mere mistake made by the power of judgment when, not being duly curbed by critique, it does not pay enough attention to the boundaries of the territory [Grenze des Bodens] on which alone our pure understanding is permitted to engage in its play. Rather, I mean by them actual principles requiring us to tear down all those boundary posts [Grenzpfähle] and to claim an entirely new territory that recognizes no demarcation at all. Hence *transcendental* and *transcendent* are not the same. The principles of pure understanding that we have put forth above are to be of empirical and not of transcendental use, i.e. use extending beyond the boundary of experience [Erfahrungsgrenze]. But a principle that removes these limits—indeed, even commands us to step beyond them—is called *transcendent*. (A296/B352-3)

In the *Critique*, then (in the second edition, which dates from after the *Prolegomena*, as much as in the first), a transcendent principle does not respect a frontier that can just as well be called Grenze as Schranke. In the *Prolegomena*, on the other hand, what runs the risk of being transcendent is a principle that tries to pass off simple Schranken as Grenzen. It is no longer so much the case that this principle incites one to cross the frontier, but that it posits this frontier as being uncrossable, whereas one *ought* to cross it, but



only in a certain way, which remains to be specified. In the *Critique*, the transcendent tries to *erase* the frontier, whether it be bound or limit (the distinction matters little, because the principle in question wants, precisely, to sweep away anything to do with it, move into a domain with no demarcations, and can therefore happily erase the frontier between these two ways of thinking the frontier), whereas in the *Prolegomena*, the transcendent is transcendent (or rather, our good immanent principle, or our transcendental principle that prescribes immanence, also runs the risk of becoming transcendent) by wanting to *close off* this perspective that before it was transcendent to want to *open*.

Let me suggest that it is precisely this confusion, or this indetermination in the determination of the frontier, the vagueness here affecting the frontier supposed to pass within the concept “frontier,” between Grenze and Schranke; that it is this confusion that the *Prolegomena* want to clear up, and let us accept an empirical explanation—namely that Kant didn’t have the time or the energy to change everything—for the maintenance of the confusion in the second edition of the *Critique*. Let us return, then, to the way things are presented in the *Prolegomena*. We cannot accept that the frontiers of reason be Schranken (because then we should have not only to give up knowing what is beyond them, but relegate that beyond to the status of mere fiction, as does Hume); they must, then, be Grenzen.<sup>8</sup> Only the latter can be traced securely and rigorously and only the latter also allows a *certain* crossing of the frontier (a crossing that would be blocked by its determination—an indeterminate determination, moreover, because it would be empirical and contingent—as Schranke) towards what lies beyond. Critique, which will establish once and for all the Grenzen of reason, will also allow, in so doing, a *certain* crossing of these Grenzen.<sup>9</sup> Kant attempts to make his distinction clearer by pulling the whole spatial or topographical analogy towards Grenze (whereas in the *Critique*, at least in the passage we have just been quoting, Grenze and Schranke both work in a spatial register), by giving a different version of the Schranken, which will do all it can to exclude them, not only from the *sphere* of knowledge, but from any spatial intuition, even of a plane. Kant first offers a *definition* to clarify this evanescent distinction:

Bounds [Grenzen] (in extended beings) always presuppose a space existing outside a certain definite place and inclosing it; limits [Schranken] do not require this, but are merely negations which affect a quantity so far as it is not absolutely complete. But our reason, as it were, sees in its surroundings a space for the cognition of things in themselves, though we can never have determinate concepts of them and are limited

[eingeschränkt] to appearances only. (130; tr., 93)

In the determination of reason, then, we are indeed dealing with Grenzen and not with Schranken (which are a simple negation, a contingent measure of the incomplete nature of our current knowledge, for example), with limits and not with bounds, even if Kant still says that reason is *bounded* by its limits. The space reserved for things-in-themselves (which for its part can have neither Grenzen nor Schranken, being none other than the unlimited field into which we were being invited by the transcendent principle), remains a space of knowledge or cognition without concept, the space of the Ideas of reason, and it alone gives dignity to metaphysics (for were it not for this space, if reason were simply limited to the domain of the understanding, it would be content with mere positive science). How are we to represent the crossing of this frontier, demanded by reason and permitted in such a complicated way by critique? Kant will appeal to a more and more complex topography to figure it.

In mathematics and the natural sciences, there are indeed Schranken, but no Grenzen. One might expect that Kant would explain this by saying that these two sciences do not posit any space beyond themselves, and that they know only the contingent bounds of their knowledge at a given moment of their development. The Schranken would thus be pushed back regularly towards an ideal completeness that would never be reached in fact. But this is not exactly how Kant presents things. He does recognize that progress within mathematics or natural sciences is *de jure* infinite, but instead of making Schranken the contingent bounds constituted by the current horizon of these sciences, he makes of them something quite different, namely the apparently necessary and essential frontier of these disciplines, insofar as they are bounded, indeed, but insofar as they do not approach these limits:

As long as the cognition of reason is homogeneous, determinate bounds [bestimmte Grenzen] to it cannot be thought. In mathematics and natural science [examples, then, of such homogeneous rational cognition], human reason admits of Schranken, but not of Grenzen, viz. That something indeed lies outside it, at which it can never arrive, but not that it will at any point find completion in its internal progress. (131; tr. 93)

Note how much has changed: Grenzen are now the term of a progress, basically a *telos*, whereas Schranken are, not the contingent limits of a specific cognition, but something like the boundaries of a discipline. Kant continues:

The enlarging of insights in mathematics and the possibility of new discoveries are infinite; and the same is the case with the discovery of new properties of nature, or new forces and laws, by continued experience and its rational unification. But Schranken cannot fail to be seen here; for mathematics refers to appearances only, and what cannot be an object of sensuous intuition (such as the concepts of metaphysics and of morals) lies entirely without its sphere. It can never lead to them, but neither does it require them. (131; tr., 93)

And now Kant continues: "Es ist also kein kontinuierlicher Fortgang und Annäherung zu diesen Wissenschaften, und gleichsam ein Punkt oder Linie der Berührung." This sentence, which carries a good part of the weight of the demonstration, remains desperately obscure. The English translation is clearly erroneous: "There is therefore a continuous progress and approach to these sciences; and there is, as it were, a point or line of contact," translating as though the German had *ein* rather than *kein*.<sup>10</sup> What seems clear is that these sciences do not push us to approach what does indeed constitute their frontier, the Schranke that separates them from metaphysics, because they are absorbed in their proper internal (and infinite) task, and this task can be pursued *ad infinitum* without metaphysical questions ever arising. Pursuing mathematics or the natural sciences *as such*, one never finds oneself confronted with the frontier of these disciplines (or if one does, one can imagine this would be only contingently so, and then one should turn aside to continue doing math or science). Whereas the science of *Grenzen*, namely metaphysics itself, is distinguished from mathematics and the natural sciences, insofar as its frontier is concerned, by needing to approach its frontier by its very nature, and even inducing the permanent temptation of the transgression of the frontier, or rather—for this is the complication that has dictated from afar all these attempts to make distinctions, the transgression of the Schranke that metaphysics also involves and which is precisely not the Grenze—mathematics and the natural sciences remain sagely (or can remain sagely) within the frontiers drawn by their respective Schranken.

This is as much as to say that the frontier, so far as metaphysics is concerned, is *dynamic*.<sup>11</sup> Grenzen are a bit like Schranken, but as dynamically crossed and forbidden at one and the same time. And this is exactly the end or purpose of the natural dialectic of reason, a dialectic that is both the very rationality of reason and its radical contestation. One might say that Kant's thought here is very tense, caught in the risk of pure reason's coming apart by its very inner tension:

But metaphysics leads us towards Grenzen in the dialectical attempts of pure reason (not undertaken arbitrarily or wantonly, but stimulated thereto by the nature of reason itself). And the transcendental ideas, as they do not admit of evasion and yet are never capable of realization, serve to point out to us actually not only the Grenzen of the use of pure reason, but also the way to determine them. Such is the end and the use of this natural predisposition of our reason. . . . (131; tr., 93-4)

For this natural tendency must above all not be a movement of deregulation or dispersion, but, *qua* natural, while escaping *ex hypothesi* from the explanations of natural science, must be susceptible to a teleological description from which the ghost of Epicurus, always wandering around this central and frontier zone of Kant's thought, must be banished.<sup>12</sup> Thus it is this very tendency of our reason to go to the limit and even to go beyond the limit, which gives rise to metaphysics as such, whose end, which, in the end, is concerned only with this very movement according to which reason recognizes itself at its limit:

. . . the end and the use of this natural predisposition of our reason, which has brought forth metaphysics as its favorite child, whose generation, like every other in the world, is not to be ascribed to blind chance but to an original germ, wisely organized for great ends. (131; tr., 94)

For metaphysics is *more natural* in us than any other science, and to that extent can even less than others be considered the product of a mere arbitrary choice.

What does it mean to say that nature, via metaphysics, pushes us to recognize or determine Grenzen? First, that having recognized Schranken, reason cannot be satisfied with them. And this non-satisfaction translates as a certain transmutation of Schranken into Grenzen (for we are getting to the point of contact, they *are the same thing*, just as—and this is no doubt still the same thing—phenomena and things-in-themselves are the same thing), operated by a change of sign, from negative to positive, and of quality, from rupture to contact, from non-relation to relation, from cut to continuity:

We have above (§§33, 34)<sup>13</sup> indicated the Schranken of reason with regard to all cognition of mere beings of thought. Now, since the transcendental ideas have urged us to approach them and thus have led us, as it were, to the spot where the occupied space (*viz.*, experience) touches the void (that of which we can know nothing, *viz.*, noumena), we can determine the Grenzen of pure reason. For in all Grenzen there is something positive (e.g. a surface is the boundary of corporeal space, and is therefore itself a space; a line is a space, which is the boundary of

the surface, a point the boundary of the line, but yet always a place in space), whereas Schranken contain mere negations. (132-33; tr. 94)

So, there are Schranken, not to be crossed: but as one approaches them, one cannot fail to try to cross them. This *temptation* (according to §33, there is in the pure concepts of the understanding something *Verfänglich*, insidious, leading one astray, a principle of seduction that is a result of their very purity), produced by the negative, forbidding character of the Schranken, operates a remarkable conversion whereby they *become* Grenzen, i.e. a point, line or surface of contact with the beyond *insofar as it is empty*. The negativity of Schranken tended paradoxically to positivize the beyond, to make of it a domain that was of course forbidden, but by that very fact a domain of the same nature as the domain of experience, desirable, like a better world or a fictional world, whereas the positivization of the frontier *itself*, as Grenze, will confirm the void beyond as *void for knowledge*, but thereby allow a certain accessibility for reason as non-knowing. The minimal but infinite difference between Schranke and Grenze consists then in the fact that reason, as understanding, can approach the former without ever *comprehending* it, whereas the Grenze is part of the space of reason, which understands that it cannot understand the beyond of the understanding precisely by comprehending the Grenze itself. The Grenze thus becomes two-faced (whereas the Schranke—this was its very negativity—had one face only, on the inside), and reason finds a certain contentment by integrating its outer face, by which it touches on the void.

The Grenze, then, comprises the Schranke, and the minimal transgression of the Schranke that consists in recognizing that it has another side. This makes of it the place of a certain contradiction or conflict that infiltrates Kant's very syntax:

If we connect with the command to avoid [Verbot . . . zu vermeiden] all transcendent judgments of pure reason the command (which apparently conflicts with it) to proceed to concepts that lie beyond the field of its immanent (empirical) use, we discover that both can subsist together, but only [right] at the boundary [aber nur gerade auf der Grenze] of all permitted use of reason. For this boundary belongs to the field of experience as well as to that of the beings of thought, and we are thereby taught how these remarkable ideas serve merely for marking the bounds of human reason. On the one hand, they give warning not boundlessly to extend cognition by experience, as if [so daß] nothing but world remained for us to cognize, and yet, on the other hand, not to transgress the Grenzen of experience and to think of judging about things beyond them as things in themselves. (136; tr., 97)

So where is the duplicity of the Grenze, its double positivity? Clearly in a double interdiction: 1) Do not transgress the Grenze in order to judge what lies beyond it as *still* forming part of what lies on this side (i.e. the objects of experience); and 2) do not transgress the Grenze in order to judge what lies beyond as *not* forming part of experience, i.e. as things-in-themselves. What is the frontier here, on the frontier, between these two negative injunctions? There are things beyond the frontier, and the frontier belongs to the field of those things (as well as to the field of the objects of possible experience). The frontier signals that one must not judge them as though they belonged in the field of experience, but also that one must not judge them as though they did not belong there (as though they were things-in-themselves). What lies beyond the Grenze of experience is indeed the field of things in themselves, but one must not *judge* them as such, for no (determinative) judgment is permissible as to things in themselves, on pain of not respecting their radically unknowable character, and making them *objects* of an experience, be it impossible.<sup>14</sup> The objects of the transcendental Ideas, then, are to be taken not as objects of experience, nor as objects beyond experience (that would be fiction), but *as the frontier itself*, in the crossing that does not cross, in its non-transgressive transgression. Caught in the double bind of these apparently conflicting interdictions, reason stands and gathers itself, picks itself up, *on its own frontier*, in the fleeting no-man's land—its only proper homeland where it will never manage to orient itself—the vanishing membranous space between its inner edge (experience) and its outer edge (noumena).

So one judges the domain beyond the frontier neither according to the domain this side of the frontier, nor according to its beyond, but according to the join between the two. This pure judgment, which must then be neither one side of the frontier nor the other, will bear solely on the *relation* between the two sides, on what crosses the frontier insofar as it is *crossing*, and not insofar as it will cross or has crossed. The Grenze is thus determined as the pure suspense of a frontier in the pure event of its never-accomplished tracing. Reason as such (insofar as it is not limited to the understanding, but insofar as it doesn't just *let itself go* either) is to be found precisely here, busy only tracing this double line, or tightrope-walking always on the point of falling into the empirical or else into the transcendent void.

One might wonder if it is by chance that the example that Kant takes here is that of God. Among the three Ideas of reason that Kant enumerates (immaterial being, world of the understanding taken as a whole, supreme Being) why choose the third to illustrate

the problem posed by the Grenze? Can God be an example? “Wir wollen ein Beispiel vom Begriffe des höchsten Wesens hernehmen,” says Kant (134). He is happy to concede to Hume all of Hume’s arguments against theism, and even against the supposed proofs of deism, but intends to hang onto what he calls “der Satz der deistischen Behauptung selbst,” the proposition of the deistic affirmation itself (135). For one cannot literally attribute to God an understanding and a will, on pain of reducing Him to the dimensions of strictly human reason, but if on the other hand one is content merely to attribute to God *ontological* predicates (eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence), one has thereby thought nothing determinate at all. Kant’s response, supposed to allow the maintenance of the deistic affirmation, is that one *behaves as if*. . . or rather that one *speaks as if*, without *really* extending to the field of Ideas concepts belonging to the field of the understanding:

We stop at this Grenze if we limit [einschränken: no Grenze without Schranke] our judgment merely to the relation which the world may have to a being whose very concept lies beyond all the cognition which we can attain within the world. For we then do not attribute to the Supreme Being any of the properties in themselves by which we represent objects of experience, and thereby avoid *dogmatic* anthropomorphism; but we attribute them to his relation to the world and allow ourselves a *symbolic* anthropomorphism, *which in fact concerns language only* and not the object itself. (136; tr., 97: my emphasis on “which in fact concerns language only”)

The Grenze, then, the *point of (no) reason* where reason hangs on the event of its own possibility as pure relation between two domains where it is *not* entirely itself (for on the one side of the Grenze it is merely understanding, and on the other it is Schwärmerei and fiction)—this Grenze, at least as to what concerns the transcendental Idea of a Supreme Being, avoids falling under the two interdictions we have seen by resorting to the *as if*, to the symbol or, as we shall see in a moment, to analogy. In its ownmost point, reason posits the pure relation that gives it its reality by giving it its limit, and it’s *all about language*. The object itself escapes us on both sides of the frontier: it is not subject to the categories of the understanding, and is inaccessible to us as a thing in itself—but we can posit the relation between these two domains by what we can call either mere language or pure language, nur die Sprache, language as the pure affirmation of the relation as analogical.

Here then is the last paragraph of this §57:

If I say that we are compelled [genötigt: this is a necessity rather than an

obligation] to consider the world as if it were the work of a Supreme Understanding and Will, I really say nothing more than that a watch, a ship, a regiment bears the same relation to the watchmaker, the shipbuilder, the commanding officer as the world of sense (or whatever constitutes the substratum of this complex of appearances) does to the unknown, which I do not hereby cognize as it is in itself but as it is for me, i.e. in relation to the world of which I am a part. (136-7; tr., 97)

This passage immediately calls into question the compatibility of these examples, in which analogy already appears to be playing a complex role, for everything we know about Kant would encourage us to be wary of thinking there was any *identity* between the watchmaker-watch relation and the commanding officer-regiment relation. Moreover, if this were already an analogy, this would be an *analogy of analogy*, a kind of multiplication of analogy that we shall see in a moment to be part of what makes analogy analogy.

Reason recognizes its Grenze, then, in speaking only by analogy of the relation between that Grenze's two sides: the *as if*, the determining role of which in Kant's moral thought is well known, here plays in (as) the definition of pure reason (by) itself as a play of language that avoids all objective transgression of the limit while allowing reason to find itself to be other than the understanding. *Reason recognizes itself at the limit in analogy*. Faced with the extreme precariousness of the situation of reason here, Kant quickly ends his section and opens a new one, which will take on the task of explaining and justifying this recourse:

§58. Such a cognition is one of analogy and does not signify (as is commonly understood) an imperfect similarity of two things, but a perfect similarity of relations between two quite dissimilar things.\*

\*[Kant's note:] Thus there is an analogy between the juridical relation of human actions and the mechanical relation of moving forces. I never can do anything to another man without giving him a right to do the same to me on the same conditions; just as no body can act with its moving force on another body without thereby causing the other to react equally against it. Here right and moving force are quite dissimilar things, but in their relation there is complete similarity. By means of such an analogy, I can obtain a relation concept of things which are absolutely unknown to me. For instance, as the promotion of the welfare of children (=a) is to the love of parents (=b), so the welfare of the human species (=c) is to that unknown in God (=x), which we call love; not as if [*als wenn*] it had the least similarity to any human inclination, but because we can posit its relation to the world to be similar to that which things of the world bear one another. But the relational concept in this case is a mere category, viz., the concept of cause, which has nothing to do with sensibility.<sup>15</sup>

So what is placed in relation in Kantian analogy is already re-



lations: the analogy posits a relation of relations, not of objects. If, as is the case here, the relational concept in play in the relation related by the analogy is a *category* (here, causality), and therefore already *pure* with respect to the sensibility (even if saying, as does Kant, that it therefore has *nothing to do* with the sensibility seems a little strong in the context in which the categories are elaborated), one can see the advantage for reason which is seeking to maintain itself on its frontier as the place that identifies it most securely: pure analogy of pure reason as pure relation of pure relations.

The *Grenze*, then, is essentially a limit-place (surface, line or point) where reason speaks itself analogically—and so always differently—but where it thereby speaks itself *as such*. Reason according to Kant would thus be the faculty of the pure relation that can speak itself only by analogy. The domain of the understanding serves to provide pure reason with material for analogies with which it can think itself at and as its limit. And this limit, the *Grenze* “itself,” the place of analogy, *is already an analogy*, at least to the extent that reason does not *literally* have a frontier. An analogy, then, to speak the proper (i.e. analogical) place of analogy, an analogy of analogy following a fractal multiplication that also gives us a precious analogy for thinking the frontier more generally. And to the extent that the *Grenze* is thus fundamentally analogical, and can only be analogical (as the pure relation as such is, properly speaking, *nothing*), it can give rise to different substitutions, *including Schranke*, from which Kant’s initial effort was to separate it as clearly as possible. And so, when Kant comes to resume what seems less and less like a demonstration and more and more like an analogical drift, *Schranke* can reappear as the *proper term* for a *Grenze* become in turn a mere analogy: here is the very beginning of §59:

At the beginning of this note [Kant means the whole conclusion of this part of the *Prolegomena*, that began with §57 under the title “On the Determination of the Bounds of Pure Reason”] I made use of the metaphor [Sinnbild] of a boundary [Grenze] in order to establish [festzusetzen: set down firmly] the limits [Schranken] of reason in regard to its suitable use. (p. 141; tr. p., 100)

*Grenzen* which, you will remember, must above all not be confused with *Schranken*, were therefore *from the start* in a position we might call metaphorical—*analogical*—with respect to *Schranken*, that they were content to present in a fashion that is imaged, but firm, solid. The abyss of analogy opens up here never to close again, for from the moment that one of the terms of what one had to believe was a *distinction* and even an *opposition* can take the place of the other to present it more vividly, then it follows that the

whole conceptual scaffolding that we have had such trouble deciphering begins to wobble and could fall at any moment. We would then have to start out again from this sentence and re-read this whole conclusion from its beginning, saying to ourselves that each time the word *Grenze* appears, it might always be merely the analogical or metaphorical figure of its apparent opposite. This is no doubt why Kant, having tried to clarify things by calling *Grenze* an image or a metaphor (*Sinnbild*, an allegory, even), sees himself obliged to go back on everything that was argued in §§57 et 58: but this does no good, to the extent that he cannot get rid of the analogical language of frontiers, which is now contaminated by a radical uncertainty as to its conceptual status. Whence a paragraph entirely made up of concessions and corrections, struggling to keep its balance (I will simply emphasize some of the (ana-)logical articulations without further commentary):

The world of sense contains merely appearances, which are not things in themselves, *but* the understanding must assume these latter ones, viz., noumena, because it knows the objects of experience to be mere appearances. In our reason both are comprised [*befaßt*] together, and the question is, How does reason proceed to set boundaries to [*begrenzen*] the understanding as regards both these fields? Experience, which contains all that belongs to the sensible world, does not bound itself [*begrenzt sich nicht selbst*]: it only proceeds in every case from the conditioned to some other equally conditioned thing. Its boundary [*Das, was sie begrenzen soll*: that which must (obligation) bound it] must lie quite without it, and this is the field of the pure beings of the understanding. *But* this field, so far as the determination of the nature of these beings is concerned, is an empty space for us; and if dogmatically determined concepts are being considered, we cannot pass beyond the field of possible experience. *But* as a *Grenze* is itself something positive, which belongs to what lies within as well as to the space that lies without the given complex, it is *still* an actual positive cognition which reason only acquires by enlarging itself to this *Grenze*, yet without attempting to pass it because it there finds itself in the presence of an empty space in which it can think forms of things *but* not things themselves. *But* the setting of a boundary [*Begrenzung*] to the field of experience by something which is otherwise unknown to reason, is *still* a cognition that belongs to it *even* at this point, and by which it is *neither* confined within the sensible *nor* strays beyond the sensible, *but only* limits itself [*sich einschränkt*], as befits the knowledge of a *Grenze*, to the relation between what lies beyond it and what is contained within it. (141-2; tr., 100-101)

The knowledge proper to reason *limits itself to its bounds, is bound to its limit*. At the limit, reason is bounded by exposing itself to the void that gives the pure relation of pure reason as pure endless analogy. Reason as such shrinks until it subsists only as the surface, line or point of the frontier itself, minimally positive.

The attempt to trace a secure and definitive frontier between Schranke and Grenze is thus doomed to fail. Any de-termination *in general* is affected by this, because this failure is the end of the end of pure reason, which finds itself only by losing itself in the zero thickness of the pure frontier as place of analogy *without term*.

Does this mean that “analogy” is the proper name of what we are trying to articulate here? Certainly not, because there can be no propriety of analogy. The *ana-logos* always remains to one side of the *logos*, bordering or lining it without letting itself be comprehended by it, or letting itself be comprehended solely as its Grenze, which immediately relaunches the whole machinery. Reason, *exposed* by Kant according to a certain *ana-logics of logic*, speaks itself and loses itself, not in the empty space beyond the frontier, but at the frontier itself as *pure* analogy. But one senses that analogy can *never* be pure, as it is purely a placing in relation. Like the frontier as such, analogy as such is *nothing*, and so there is analogy only in a dispersion of uncontrollable, in(de)terminable singularities, always in the now of the event of the frontier. Analogy is only ever analogical, relaunches itself indefinitely as the unlimited limit of thought or as the pure relation of thought and language. The frontier, as Aristotle knew, is infinite, interminable, a term without term. Kant never finishes tracing it, putting a term to it, limiting himself to bounds, bound to limits. This is his cross, his passion, that gives rise to a reading that I cannot say is either literary or philosophical, that really starts I know not where, and really ends I know not how.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is an adapted translation of a text originally written in French for the conference “Passions de la littérature,” Université de Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, July 1995, and subsequently published in the volume of the same title edited by Michel Lisse. It might also be considered as a detached chapter of my book *Frontières kantiennees*.

<sup>2</sup> These terms have been variously and inconsistently translated into English (and other languages). I shall most often leave them in German in what follows.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, I shall quote from the Werner S. Pluhar translation of the first *Critique*. See too the echo of this passage in the section on the “Paralogisms of Pure Reason”: A395-6. Norman Kemp Smith’s famous earlier translation translates “unveränderliche Grenzen” as “unalterable limits.”

<sup>4</sup> For example, in a note to the Preface to the second edition: “This method, which imitates that of the investigator of nature, consists in searching for the elements of pure reason in *what can be confirmed or refuted by an experiment*. Now the propositions of pure reason, especially if they venture beyond all bounds of possible experience [wenn sie über alle Grenze möglicher Erfahrung hinaus gewacht

werden] cannot be tested by doing (as we do in natural science) an experiment with their *objects*. Hence testing such propositions will be feasible only by doing an experiment with *concepts* and *principles* that we assume *a priori*. In that experiment we must arrange [to use] these concepts and principles in such a way that the objects can be contemplated from two different standpoints: *on the one hand, for the sake of experience, as objects of the senses and of the understanding; yet on the other hand, for the sake of isolated reason that strives to transcend all bounds of experience [Erfahrungsgrenze], as objects that we merely think.* (Bxviii)

<sup>5</sup> Let me reestablish a little more context for this crucial passage: “If I conceive of the earth’s surface (according to its sensible semblance) as a plate, then I cannot know how far it extends. But experience does teach me that wherever I may go, I always see a space around me in which I could proceed further. Hence I cognize the limits of what is in each case my actual geography [Erdkunde], but I do not cognize the bounds [Grenzen] of all possible geography [Erdbeschreibung]. But if I have indeed got as far as to know that the earth is a sphere and its surface spherical, than I can also from a small part of it—e.g. the magnitude of a degree—cognize determinately and according to *a priori* principles the diameter, and through it the complete boundary [Begrenzung] of the earth, i.e., its surface area. And although I am still ignorant as regards the objects that this surface may contain, yet I am not ignorant as regards the range that it contains, i.e. the surfaces magnitude and limits [Schranken].

“The sum of all possible objects for our cognition seems to us (similarly) to be a level surface; and this surface has its seeming horizon—viz., what comprises the entire range of such possible objects for our cognition and has been called by us the rational concept of unconditioned totality. To reach this horizon empirically is impossible, and all attempts to determine it *a priori* according to a certain principle have been futile. However, all questions of our pure reason still aim at what may lie outside this horizon, or—for that matter—at least on its boundary line [...]

“Our reason is by no means a plane spread out indeterminably far, whose limits one cognizes only in a general way. It must, rather, be compared to a sphere whose radius one can find from the curvature of the arc on its surface (i.e. from the nature of synthetic *a priori* propositions), from which in turn one can reliably indicate also the sphere’s content and boundary [Begrenzung]” (A759-762/B787-790).

<sup>6</sup> Let me recall that according to the *Prolegomena*, Hume, already a geographer of human reason in the *Critique* (A761/B788), now become a Seefahrer himself, may have awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumber, but “. . . did not suspect such a formal science, but ran his ship ashore, for safety’s sake, landing on scepticism, there to let it lie and rot; whereas my object rather is to give it a pilot who, by means of safe navigational principles drawn from a knowledge of the globe and provided with a complete chart and compass, may steer the ship safely whither he listeth” (*Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, dis als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* 13; *Prolegomena* 7). Unless otherwise indicated, I will be using the Paul Carus translation (extensively revised by James W. Ellington) in what follows.

<sup>7</sup> This conclusion comprises §§57-60, with the overall title “*Von der Grenzbestimmung der reinen Vernunft*” (“On the Determination of the Bounds of Pure Reason”).

<sup>8</sup> “Hence he inferred that reason had no power to think such connections [e.g. causal connections], even in general, because her concepts would then be purely fictitious [Erdichtungen] and all her pretended *a priori* cognitions nothing but common experiences marked with a false stamp” (*Prolegomena* 8, tr., 3).

<sup>9</sup> This would perhaps be the place to look for a properly Kantian riposte to Hegel's complaints in the *Science of Logic* about "Die Schranke und das Sollen", translated as "Limitation and the Ought" (131). Hegel famously complains, with Kant clearly in mind, that "great stress is laid on the limitations of thought, of reason, and so on, and it is asserted that the limitation *cannot* be transcended. To make such an assertion is to be unaware that the very fact that something is determined as a limitation implies that the limitation is already transcended. For a determinateness, a limit, is determined as a limitation only in opposition to its other in general, that is, in opposition to that which is *free from the limitation*; the other of a limitation is precisely the '*being beyond it*' [Es pflegt zuerst viel auf die Schranken des Denkens, der Vernunft usf. gehalten zu werden, und es wird behauptet, es könne über die Schranke nicht hinausgegangen werden. In dieser Behauptung liegt die Bewußtlosigkeit, daß darin selbst, daß etwas als Schranke bestimmt ist, darüber bereits hinausgegangen ist. Denn eine Bestimmtheit, Grenze ist als Schranke nur bestimmt im Gegensatz gegen sein Anderes überhaupt als gegen sein Unbeschränktes; das Andere einer Schranke ist eben das Hinaus über dieselbe.] (*Ibid.*, 134). As is clearer in the German, Hegel makes no real effort to respect the complex distinction Kant is at least attempting to make between Schranke and Grenze (and if anything inverts the terminology): it might be argued that what Kant says about the Grenze in the *Prolegomena* is precisely an attempt to think through the "self-transcending" logic of the limit in general. The deconstructive demonstration of his failure does not of course commit one to accepting the Hegelian solution to the problem.

<sup>10</sup> Although this is clearly an error, the reading is not completely implausible, to the extent that one might imagine that these sciences of Schranken are what they are insofar as they continually push back their limits without ever reaching complete knowledge. The translation by Gary Hatfield reads, no doubt more correctly but still mysteriously, "There is therefore no continuous progress and advancement toward those sciences, or any point or line of contact, as it were" (104).

<sup>11</sup> I use this term less in the Kantian sense than in that of the non-linear dynamics of so-called chaos theory.

<sup>12</sup> I follow the figure of Epicurus in Kant in some detail in *Frontières kantiennees*.

<sup>13</sup> These are the paragraphs that resume the schematism and the phenomenon/noumenon distinction: the pure concepts of the understanding are not *in experience*, whence the tendency to think that they could lead us *beyond* all possible experience.

<sup>14</sup> The very distinction between determinative and reflective judgment in fact becomes unstable as a result of this construal of the frontier, as I try to show in *Frontières kantiennees*.

<sup>15</sup> This argument around analogy, with some of the same examples and internal analogies, will return in §90 of the *Critique of Judgment*, where much of the work is again done in a difficult footnote which pushes the thought of analogy, at least in the case of God, far toward a thought of heterogeneity which can be shown to disrupt or interrupt the whole structure of teleology, with what I believe to be grave consequences which go well beyond Kant. I comment at length on these passages in Chapter 5 of *Frontières kantiennees*. In our immediate context, it might be worth recalling that this description of proportional analogy ( $a : b :: c : x$ ) mirrors Aristotle's famous analysis of the structure of metaphor in the *Poetics*.

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