Counterpath
TRAVELING WITH JACQUES DERRIDA

BY CATHERINE MALABOU AND JACQUE DERRIDA
Translated by David Wills
The chapters comprising Catherine Malabou's essay, *The Parting of Ways: Drift, Arrival, Catastrophe*, have been randomly arranged. Their numerical sequence (1 to 25) does not therefore respect their logical order. As explained at the end of the Preface, this is designed to enable several different reading trajectories. The reader who wishes to establish the original order of the text, that is, to explore successively Pathways 1, 2, and 3, should begin with chapter 1 and proceed as directed by the numbers given in brackets at the end of each chapter, following this sequence: 1, 4, 17, 16, 19, 9, 10, 12, 25, 14, 2, 5, 13, 7, 15, 20, 21, 18, 23, 8, 3, 6, 11, 22, 24. A logical table of contents, reproduced as an appendix to this volume, will serve as a reminder and resolve any uncertainty.

Against a gray background and in a smaller font, mimicking or whispering unguarded confidences, are selections from letters or postcards that Jacques Derrida addresses, as if sotto voce, to Catherine Malabou between May 1997 and May 1998, while awaiting, then reading *The Parting of Ways*.

The extracts selected from that correspondence, a sort of outwork or bookend [*hors livre*], may be read continuously or randomly, for example, by testing them according to this or that code or decipher proposed by Catherine Malabou.

*Arriving and deriving* [*dériver*] have separated. *Catastrophe* is the name for the parting [*écarr*] that henceforth keeps each out of range of the other. “Henceforth” means since Derrida has passed by since he has situated the very possibility of the voyage within that space or parting.

I invite the reader to follow the path of this demobilization of what is derived [*la dérive*] so that what arrives, under emergency conditions, as a catastrophe, will be the chance that starts the voyage.

*Dérivé*, from the Latin *rivus* (stream) or *ripa* (bank), literally means “to leave the bank or shore,” in two contrary senses. In the first instance, deriving can characterize a continuous and ordered trajectory from an origin to an end. One thus speaks of the etymological *derivations* of a word—the slow and regular movement of variation within language—or of the leeway within which a sailboat is able to maintain its course against opposing winds. In the second instance, however, deriving as drifting refers to a loss of control, to deviation or skidding. A boat that is *à la dérive* is drifting off course, losing its way. Necessity and chance thus cohabit, in a paradoxically complicitous way, within the same verb.

The same double game is again found in *arrival*. To *arrive*, from the
“... the margin within which, save certain drifting (à quelque dérive près), I shall remain ...”

—SPURS: NIETZSCHE’S STYLES

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THE PARTING OF WAYS

Drift, Arrival, Catastrophe

Presentation and Choice of Texts
by Catherine Malabou

CORRESPONDENCE

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Jacques Derrida writes to Catherine Malabou during his travels from May 1997 to May 1998, as he waits for, then reads her essay "The Parting of Ways"
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English translations from the following works by Jacques Derrida have been used in this book:


The Other Heading, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Micheal B. Naas. ©1992, Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.


Notes

Translations from the cited English versions of Derrida's work have at times been modified, often to emphasize the sense of the French original developed in Malabou's discussion. All translations from French texts for which no published English version is cited are mine. (D.W.)

Preface

1. Given Time, 7.
2. "Don't lose the thread, that's the injunction that Penelope was pretending to follow..." "A Silkworm of One's Own (Points of View Stitched on the Other Veil)," in Veils, 22.
4. "To Speculate—on 'Freud',” in The Post Card, 261. The double bind or double constraint is a structure that combines two contradictory injunctions. It is impossible to obey the one without at the same time disobeying the other. Derrida also names this effect a "stricture," from the word "striction," meaning "tightening," "constriction," "partial decrease of a fluid in flux." Here and elsewhere, emphasis on "drift," "deriving," and derivatives is mine.
5. Specters of Marx, 65.
6. Memoires for Paul de Man, 17. Speaking of deconstruction Derrida declares: "one cannot and should not attempt to survey or totalize the meaning of an ongoing process, especially when its structure is one of transference."
9. René Thom, Prédire n'est pas expliquer, 28, 29. For Thom, there are seven fundamental types of catastrophe: the fold, the gather, the dovetail, the butterfly, and the three umbilici (24ff.).