



Introduction

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Conferences sometimes follow a call. Academics know all about this, the “Call for Papers” that conference organizers send out in advance of the event. The *Mosaic* October 2010 *Freud After Derrida* conference, no exception here, was preceded almost two years earlier by a call inviting responses to the conference title from across the disciplines, and by special in-person calls to the conference’s five keynote speakers. In my experience at the journal, however, a conference call does not originate with *Mosaic* or its editor, so much as with the work of such others as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida, work that continues, perhaps today more than ever, to call for response. Returning to the *Freud After Derrida* conference, then, through this second special proceedings issue, might well be an opportunity to consider what Judith Butler calls “the structure of address itself” (129), the way in which “we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails” (130).

I am interested in ways that this “structure of address” can be read in the two keynote essays that open this proceedings issue, those of Sarah Wood and David Wills. For example, David Wills’s essay—his response to the *Mosaic* invitation to deliver a keynote “address”—begins by positioning Freud as himself a man addressed: “A first man called Freud stands forth, like Adam in Genesis Chapter 2, under the gaze of God, to respond to the call of naming the creatures that parade before him.” But



Freud's call neither issues from a biblical deity nor serves a narrative of human dominion over nonhuman animal life. Rather, the call comes from "what we now presume to recognize as the unconscious," whatever that is, "[s]ome previously undiscovered and unclassified life form, just emerging into taxonomic space. Some animal like that." Suppose, Wills ventures, that the syntagm titling his essay (a paraphrase taken from the "Envois" in Derrida's *The Post Card*), "order catastrophically unknown," is the call by which Freud is addressed, the "very unconscious itself uttering itself, perhaps in the guise of the death-drive or the very inorganic origin that gives rise to it." This suggestion not only reads Freud after Derrida as completely at odds with the classificatory and taxonomic drive that characterizes the medical and neurological sciences of his day, but also responds to a Freud who remains marginal to most current academic work, at least work that remains preoccupied with determinations of origin and order, with the point at which life differentiates itself from matter, the organic from the inorganic, so that the evolutionary descent (ascent) of mind might begin. For Wills, on the other hand, reading Freud's metapsychology (as Derrida has opened it) leads to a "catastrophic unknown" concerning cause-and-effect, before-and-after, linear order, including after the order of "life itself," and the bifurcation of animate from inanimate, life from death.

Life proves precarious, as it surely is today, when, in Judith Butler's words, we assume that address "proceed[s] from my autonomy," rather than coming to me "from elsewhere, unbidden, unexpected, and unplanned" (130). Like the story Sarah Wood mentions early in her essay: "I had a story, or what I thought was a story, rather a sentence that fell to me." Or, like the "something else" she reads, and reads Derrida reading in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "the way his reading values sensitivity to something that isn't intellectual, or that is naively counter-intellectual, that is to say, in the first place bodily and verbal. To be more precise, he is sensitive to what comes from or through his body, an experience that is more than physical, and he is also feelingly aware of something in the body of a word that is undeniably greater than the language customarily permits. A soul, I would call it, to give an old and unscientific name to movements of the signifier that betray a life not visible by day and not measured by clock-time."

WORKS CITED

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.

