
MASHING UP Derrida and Film

By Joanna Callaghan

[The Post Card – Adaptation](#) from [Heraclitus Pictures](#) on [Vimeo](#).

The above video is research in progress for the fourth long format film in the series 'Ontological Narratives' which will take as its starting point Jacques Derrida's book La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà / The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond (1) (in part, a mock epistolary novel).

In this research film, the question of adaptation, representation and deconstruction is explored. Rather than seeking a way to 'represent' the narrative that exists within the novel my proposal is to not 'create' a representation at all but to adopt others' representations of the narrative(s) that exist(s) within The Post Card with its themes of love, infidelity, writing.

The project is funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and is a collaboration with Professor Martin McQuillan

'Ontological Narratives I - IV' is a series of films about ways of being through philosophical ideas. This research project is actively concerned with enriching and complicating practice-based inquiry by adapting a philosophical text into a film in order to perform and re-inscribe the philosophical problems presented by that text. I am currently working on the fourth film in the series, inspired by the 'Envois' section of Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card*.

Derrida's work has been of interest in both film studies (2) and the visual arts. (3) Two documentaries have been produced that feature Derrida, *Derrida*, dir. Kofman and Dick, 2003 and *Derrida d'ailleurs*, dir. Fathy, 1999. (4) There is also Ken McMullen's beautiful *Ghost Dance* (1983) in which Derrida appears as a kind of character. In contrast, 'Ontological Narratives IV' takes ideas of Derrida as its point of departure for a consideration of film making and epistemology and, like my previous films on Plato (*A mind's eye*, dir. Callaghan 2009) and Heidegger (*Thrownness*, dir. Callaghan, 2004), may not explicitly feature their philosophical origin.

The 'Envois' section of *The Post Card* is written as a series of love letters from the narrator to an unnamed lover. The letters recount the story of

their love affair alongside reflections upon the history of the post and on psycho-analysis. It contains references to real people within the academic world in which it is set and to places; Oxford, Paris and Yale. The opportunity for a realistic presentation of a film narrative is presented through the narrative that exists in the 'Envois'. However one of our questions in producing a creative film work, is grappling with the relation between representation, adaptation and deconstruction. (5)

To answer this we have been producing digital video sketches that include interviews, video essays and animation. In creating "Adaptation" a short mash up of films set to Monteverdi, I was exploring the possibility of not creating an original representation at all. That is, not to write and produce a narrative film with actors, locations, and mise en scene as I usually do, but to adopt representations provided by existing films that deal with aspects of Derrida's text, broadly love and infidelity. The films had to be made and set in France or the US during the period of the lovers' correspondence from 1977 to 1979. Working with six to seven French films produced during that period, the clips are cut together to create narrative episodes such as the writing and receiving of letters, clandestine meetings or trips away. The mash up engenders deconstructive practices through creating unexpected relations between the clips and the films, and in turn creates new readings of the material and by extension the book.

This clip is one of four I have produced and distributed online. These are essential to the research journey, functioning as both documentation and a communication tool when enlisting support and interest. The online environment facilitates rapid feedback and reaction, and, with Web 2.0 technologies, allows for wide dissemination well beyond academia.

We currently have a script with characters and plot, and are undertaking the unenviable task of casting and pre-production. The story we are creating is not strictly that of *The Post Card*, but functions as a counter signature to the text. It will be set in academia with the main character, a Professor of Literature researching *The Post Card* as his life begins to reflect the events of the book. "Adaptation" will, with careful placement, feature in the final film ironically, as a mash up by a student. We believe that Derrida's *The Post Card* is *both* a deconstruction of representation, and a love story about representation. This aporia is the very space of our research.

[Joanna Callaghan](#)

A filmic counter signature to Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card*

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Produced by [Heraclitus Pictures](#)

Also see [The Post Card - Deconstructive Film](#)

(1) Derrida, Jacques, *La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà*. Paris: Flammarion, 1980; Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

(2) For example, see Brunette, Peter and David Wills, *Screen/Play*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

(3) See Brunette, Peter and David Wills (eds), *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

(4/5) Callaghan, Dronsfield, McQuillan (2009) *La Carte Postale: Film & Dissemination proposal* (unpublished).

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