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**PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS
OF RETURNTOCINDER.COM (A DECONSTRUCTIVE DIGITAL
CONCORDANCE)**

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Returntocinder.com¹ – an experiment in the growing field of digital pedagogy – is a well-organized, easily searchable collection of notes that has been made available to the general public without any direct connection to an institution of higher education. The hope is to give researchers both inside and outside the University the chance to track down quotations that could be useful for their dissertations, their class preparations, or their general studies. In fact, because returntocinder.com will always be a work in progress, and because returntocinder.com developed its understanding of dissemination from the work of Jacques Derrida, the possible usages of all these notes cannot be determined beforehand. Returntocinder.com adopts an indeterminable relation to the way it will be used, the form in which it will function, and the content it will contain.

Eight months ago, in its earliest stage, returntocinder.com was exclusively a concordance-style database of the work of Jacques Derrida. As of today, Wednesday, August 28, 2019, returntocinder.com also includes ~10,000 entries from the work of Heidegger, Husserl, Spillers, Spivak, Kierkegaard, Ronell, Augustine, Sharpe, Nietzsche, Chun, Kant, Aristotle, Plato, Marx, Wark, Lacan, Freud and more. Currently, though this number will soon be surpassed, the 14,000 annotated entries from over 100 works by Derrida remain the most significant part of the website. These entries, about one to six lines in length, generally aim to mark “morsels” or “chunks” of the immediate context of a certain page range. Each entry follows the paradigm of a Bible Concordance, where the index not only helps you locate a certain figure, but it also offers a paraphrase about the *trials* said figure undergoes on a specific page or section (e.g. “Genesis 22: Abraham climbs Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac”). If a Bible concordance tends to provide a summary in shorthand, the entries on returntocinder.com – hoping to preserve some

¹ See *Return to Cinder*, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://returntocinder.com>.

of the syntactical particularity of the context to which they refer – often directly quote words from the original text. Condensed and abbreviated, these entries are neither exact replicas nor what is conventionally understood as a paraphrases – I call them quasi-quotations. In many cases, the notes are like a collage of the page or page range in question: words or phrases have been cut and paste together from different sentences. The hope is that this fragmentation provides a “map” of the source text so that the passage in question can be easily tracked down.

On the website, the entries can be accessed by way of 3 different search or browse functions. You can search the entries by source, by motif, or by keywords or phrases. For example, if you want to read all the entries from Derrida’s *Gift of Death*, you can type this title into the search box, and the entries will appear in paginated order. If, on the other hand, you are not limiting your search to a specific text, the entries have also been torn apart from their source and divided into 841 motifs. The motifs include philosophers’ names (Hegel, Heidegger, Descartes, etc.), famous ideas attributed to Derrida (*pharmakon*, supplement, *différance*, dissemination, etc.), and many classical concepts like justice, law, knowledge, and love. Finally, if you want to browse any word or phrase, beyond the motifs that are provided, you simply press enter on the search bar. Though this general search function overlaps with the motif function, the motifs remain valuable because they offer users tips or hints regarding the range of possible searches. The decision to include these tips is tied to the hope that those who use the website will not be limited to experts in a particular field.

As of this moment, returntocinder.com only includes the notes of a single annotator, but this will hopefully change in the coming months. The returntocinder.com team (which consists of a philosophy professor, two developers, and a graphic designer) is currently developing a new format that aspires to exponentiate the dynamic nature of these experimental research techniques. We are creating an open-source App that will allow users to organize their notes by source, motif, and page location. Everyone should be able to make their own returntocinder.com. A distant yet organizing vision of this project is to allow users to interact with each other’s notes, thus creating a vast crowdsourced concordance-style index of an unlimited number of texts. For more information on this project, please check out databyss.org. In the meantime, returntocinder.com continues to expand.