

Counter-Institutions

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CONTINENTAL
PHILOSOPHY**

S I M O N M O R G A N W O R T H A M

Counter-Institutions

*Jacques Derrida and the
Question of the University*

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For Alfie, with much love

Contents

	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xi</i>
	Introduction	1
1	Counter-Institution, Counter-Deconstruction	25
2	Teaching Deconstruction: Giving, Taking, Leaving, Belonging, and the Remains of the University	44
3	“The Fidelity of a Guardian”: The “Double-Keeping” of Jacques Derrida	68
4	Auditing Derrida	85
5	The Claim of the Humanities: A Discussion with Christopher Fynsk	119
	<i>Notes</i>	<i>147</i>
	<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>155</i>
	<i>Index</i>	<i>161</i>

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Counter-Institutions

Introduction

As Derrida himself points out, in a number of texts we shall come to in a moment, the *contre* or counter implies a “with-against” movement, a turning toward and away from, a measure both of distance and proximity (inordinately difficult to calculate, and therefore in constant need of reckoning), which—if one ties the term as intimately as Derrida does to the concept of the institution—implies a deeply complex and highly ambivalent relationship to orthodox academia, official organizations of all kinds, state and party politics, and so forth. This ambivalence, this complexity, is indeed written all over Derrida’s biography.

Born in 1930 in Algeria, Derrida—as he has chosen to remark in several places—did not travel more than seventy kilometers from El-Biar, or Algiers, until 1949, when he visited Marseilles and Paris for the first time. As is well known, however, during his childhood he was expelled from school by Algerian administrators zealous to implement anti-Semitic quotas imposed by the Vichy government. Thus the so-called homebody was violently cast out of doors as an expression of politico-ideological force and exclusion, one which found its context and established its “rationale” in an educational-institutional setting. The image of a misfit clung to Derrida in a rather different way as his education continued after the war (given his childhood experiences, one might have thought he would reject academia). From 1952 to 1956, while a student at the Ecole Normale, Derrida chose

to work on the problem of genesis in Husserl, writing a paper which, in the interview “Politics and Friendship,” he tells us Althusser was unwilling to evaluate, since it seemed to him too difficult and too obscure, too innovative, for the *agrégation*, and which Foucault assessed in turn as either an A+ or an F. Derrida notes:

I bring up this episode because it gives a fair idea of my relationship to academic authority—that represented by the *agrégation* examination committees in particular (I failed the exam that same year)—and because in the midst of this I wrote that four-hundred-page study on Husserl. It was a period when, in certain circles (even Marxist ones), people began taking a keen interest in Husserl—I mean a different type of interest, different from Sartre and Merleau-Ponty’s way of approaching Husserl. As for the university and the *agrégation* committee, Husserl was still poorly known and poorly received.¹

Thus, Derrida began his academic career by both introducing and innovating, experimenting with Husserl—but a complex Husserl, a Husserl scorned by the academy, taken up by key figures associated with leading intellectual trends, and then read “otherwise” by Derrida, yet in the most traditional academic form of a lengthy scholarly thesis, one that his academic masters nevertheless struggled to recognize and did not know how to evaluate. In several senses, then, Derrida’s introduction to Husserl, his first major academic project, might be described as itself counter-institutional.

Between 1956 and 1957, Derrida spent a year in the United States, at Harvard, after which he completed his military service as a teacher in civilian clothes (one can imagine the counter-institutional possibilities or, at any rate, the “with-against” structure of such a role and position), before returning to Paris in 1960. For four years he served as a teaching assistant at the Sorbonne, during which time his introduction to Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry* was published. Soon afterward, he returned to the Ecole Normale to teach, at the invitation of Jean Hyppolite and Louis Althusser. Derrida taught for many years as an *agrégé-répétiteur* at the Ecole Normale, a role defined by a number of difficult if not contradictory demands, which he dissects at length in “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends.” The *agrégé-répétiteur*, Derrida tells us, fulfills the traditional function of the guardianship and controlled reproduction of received knowledge within the university institution:

A repeater, the *agrégé-répétiteur* should produce nothing, at least if to produce means to innovate, to transform, to bring about the new. He is destined to repeat and make others repeat, to reproduce and make others reproduce: forms, norms, and a content.²

Alongside the student or “young candidate,” the *agrégé-répétiteur* “must therefore make himself the representative of a system of reproduction” (75). However, by the 1970s, *agrégé-répétiteurs* had for several years also been allowed to conduct a seminar in addition to their required duties, thus reproducing, as Derrida puts it, a “division” that in fact marked the candidate’s own connection to the institution, repeating and reproducing officially sanctioned knowledge and teaching while at the same time “introducing, like a long stream of contraband, premises that no longer belong to the space of the general *agrégation*, that even undermine it more or less underhandedly” (77). Thus, while an almost total silence and separation—an unquestioned dissociation—came to govern the relationship between licensed and contraband materials, still it was in the very nature of such contraband to find itself being smuggled across borders.

In 1966, Derrida lectured abroad for the first time, and returned to the United States to participate in the famous Johns Hopkins conference in Baltimore, at which he delivered his paper, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”—a lecture and an event that was to dramatically elevate Derrida in terms of his academic career and reputation in America and internationally, ushering in a period (one that was to last the rest of his life) of worldwide travel in response to an ever-increasing number of academic invitations. In “Stops,” included at the end of *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida*, cowritten with Catherine Malabou, Derrida details these various commitments and visits, year by year.³ From the late sixties onward, Derrida also undertook regular teaching obligations at Johns Hopkins, Yale, Cornell, CUNY, New York, UC Irvine, and NYU, often for a period of several weeks per year. In 1984, he took the position of director of studies at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales in Paris. And from the 1980s onward he was to receive a significant number of honorary doctorates from universities in the United States, Britain, Italy, and other countries in Europe and beyond, including the one awarded him by Cambridge University in 1992, after the well-known fiasco involving a letter of opposition written by academic colleagues dismissive of Derrida’s work. In 1980, Derrida successfully conducted his oral defense for the *doctorat d’état*,

the proceedings of which were subsequently published, in English, as “Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis.” If, leaving aside the Cambridge affair, all this seems to indicate a general trend toward institutional acceptance of Derrida on the part of the academic establishment, in “Punctuations” he nevertheless develops his thesis defense according to this (counter) logic of the “with-against,” by saying that, from the late sixties onward:

It was already clear to me that the general turn that my research was taking could no longer conform to the classical norms of the thesis. This “research” called not only for a different mode of writing but also for a work of transformation on the rhetoric, the staging, and the particular discursive procedures, which, highly determined historically, dominate university discourse.⁴

Moreover, since “these scholarly and university models likewise provide the laws regulating so many prestigious discourses,” the “very idea of a thetic presentation” and indeed the general “system” such a presentation effectively represents came under “deconstructive questioning” (120). From this moment on, then, Derrida informed his academic “jury” at the Sorbonne, he found himself “convinced of the necessity for a profound transformation, amounting even to a complete upheaval of university institutions” (121), although this “upheaval” is quickly nuanced in “Punctuations” as a matter of “transition” and “negotiation,” since, for Derrida, there can be no absolute suspension of various forms of legitimacy, authority, competence, or tradition (indeed, claims to this effect frequently reconstitute all the more stealthily yet forcefully the forms of power and control they ostensibly reject or deny). Nevertheless, Derrida was to insist on indissoluble ties between the university institution and the entire “ontological and logocentric onto-encyclopedic system” (121) forming the object of deconstruction. He talks of an “indissociable link between the modern concept of the university and a certain metaphysics” (121), one which calls not just for Derrida’s own texts on Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger regarding teaching and institutions (or indeed any writings that might deal simply with “philosophical contents, themes or theses” [123]), but, more crucially, which necessitates “meaningful frames, institutional structures, pedagogical or rhetorical norms” (123)—in short, new or as yet unrecognizable institutional spaces and initiatives. Here, philosophy takes center stage (only to experience its own dislocation), to the extent that it gives rise to the question: “How is it that philosophy finds itself inscribed,

rather than inscribing itself, within a space that it seeks but is unable to order. . . . How is one to name the structure of this space?" (123). At least since Kant, philosophy remains undecidably both the origin or foundation and an essential division or function of the university institution, a part of that structure which it also demarcates or allots, both "prior" and "derivative." In other words, philosophy both belongs and does not belong to the university. This deconstructive problem of philosophy as one of the (impossible) "structure" of its "space" raises fundamental questions about the conditions of institutional possibility and of institutional limits, and furthermore potentializes a vast critique of the entire ensemble of notions associated with academia: academic autonomy and freedom, institutional self-identity and auto-foundation, collegiality and the interrelationships of faculties or disciplines, the link between the university and its "outside" (political institutions, national culture, the nation-state), and so forth.

Thus, as "Punctuations" unfolds, Derrida speaks of this pathway taken by his thinking, his subsequent loss of interest in the submission of a thesis, and his involvement, from 1974 onward, in a "long-term struggle" (125) fought over (or on the grounds of) the institutions of philosophy and the university, notably at a time when the condition of such institutions seemed to be worsening considerably. (Indeed, Derrida presents his institutional activism as a series of "public acts" that he views as of equal importance to his "publications," also construed as "public acts" [126].) In "Punctuations," moreover, Derrida indicates that, since this struggle precisely links the university to what may (only problematically) be considered its "outside," such a struggle inevitably and necessarily involves "cultural, political and other relations of forces in this country and in the world" (126). (Interestingly, in the interview "Negotiations," where Derrida dwells on his involvement in the founding of the International College of Philosophy three years after his thesis defense, he cites—or sites—the College as "a philosophical place but also a place where philosophy will be put into question."⁵ Derrida goes on: "The matter concerned a place for philosophy in the world today, a college open to philosophical internationality where, in principle, if everything worked out, we were going to discuss what philosophy is to become, and should become, in the future" [18].) In 1974, then, Derrida participated in a meeting of a group of students and teachers, which led to the founding of Greph (Group de Recherches sur L'Enseignement Philosophique, or Research Group on the Teaching of Philosophy)

early the next year. This turn of events was partly a reaction to the 1973–74 CAPES report, which Derrida and others saw as linked to a broader political and ideological attack on philosophical education, taken up by the French government under the general sponsorship of a variety of technoscientific, technoindustrial, and even technomilitary interests. In particular, the proposed Haby reforms of 1975 focused this attack on the teaching of philosophy in secondary schools. In response, Greph (“neither a union nor a corporative association,” insists Derrida in the essay “Who’s Afraid of Philosophy?,”⁶ and not just an organ of theoretical research but a disparate and diffuse activist grouping committed to transforming political codes and affiliations as much as contemporary political realities) struggled to maintain and extend philosophy in the *lycée*, arguing for its introduction prior to the final year, or the *Terminale*, as had traditionally been the case. In “Negotiations,” Derrida speaks of his—and Greph’s—complex and double relationship to philosophy in its traditional sense: that of an irreducible “with-against” positionality or apositionality:

A few were surprised to find that someone who spends his time deconstructing philosophy, etc. protests when one tries to destroy philosophy. Why do I do this? I can give at least two reasons: the first is that I thought the attacks, not only on the part of government but also on the part of, let us say, techno-capitalist society, were trying to reduce the field of philosophy and that these attacks, in fact, represented a philosophy. It was not only a destruction of philosophy, but the attack was made in the name of a certain unformulated philosophy that also became a matter for me to deconstruct. . . . At the same time, I find it necessary, vital that the philosophical debate remain open. For what interests me in the name of deconstruction to be possible, philosophical culture must remain alive and well. Deconstruction inhabits it and is inseparable from it.

(14–15)

Philosophy and deconstruction are not simply opposed to each other, nor can they be reconciled or synthesized. Instead, they *counter* each other in the most complex sense, and it is here, for Derrida, that the possibility of a certain counter-force arises.

As a result of this effort on the part of Greph and other activist groupings to obstruct the proposed Haby reforms, an Estates General of Philosophy was called for. Held on June 16 and 17, 1979, the Estates General saw over 1,200 people gather together in a large

amphitheater at the Sorbonne. In “Who’s Afraid of Philosophy?” Derrida recalls that the “atmosphere” of the event was reminiscent of “certain moments of 1968,” particularly regarding the unfettered freedom of speech and the multitude of proposals for action (186). (In this context, it perhaps is worth noting that, during the late sixties, at the time leading up to the student uprisings in Paris, the time when Derrida’s travels began in earnest, he had a complex relationship to the Communist Party and intelligentsia in France, one that involved both a degree of solidarity and deep-seated misgivings about the philosophical or intellectual basis for revolutionary thinking of the kind associated with the politics of “the Party.” The interview “Politics and Friendship” charts this “with-against” relationship in fascinating detail. More broadly, in “Punctuations,” Derrida speaks of an “oblique, deviant, sometimes directly critical, relationship with respect to everything that seemed then [i.e., during the 1960s] to dominate the main, most visible, most spectacular, and sometimes the most fertile outcrop of French theoretical production, a phenomenon that, in its various different forms, was known, no doubt abusively, as ‘structuralism.’ These forms were of course very diverse and very remarkable. . . . But regardless of their indisputable interest, during this period that was also in appearance the most static period of the Gaullist republic . . . what I was attempting . . . was of an essentially different nature” [119]—namely, a project that questioned both the “metaphysical presuppositions” but also, crucially, the “political price” of intellectual “advances” during this time.)

Those who participated in the Estates General of 1979 came from a wide variety of backgrounds and reflected an array of interests: some were teachers of philosophy, others not; some were academics, others not. A twenty-one-member committee was formed, and broad debate was encouraged, with no prior agenda of a specific type. Members of Greph sat on the committee but did not form a majority. In “Who’s Afraid of Philosophy?,” which reflects on the Estates General, Derrida remarks that, while the historical meaning and significance of this gathering or the pressure it may have exerted at the time continued to remain unclear (the essay is from 1980), nevertheless “information circulated, awareness increased, groups formed and continue to work, in Paris and in the provinces” (186–87). Derrida also tells us that “resolutions were passed” concerning, for example, “the teaching of Philosophy outside the Terminale” (187), and furthermore notes the intention to hold further meetings of this kind in the face of the government proposals. Lastly, he draws attention to a “televised

declaration” by the education minister on the evening of June 16, 1979, the first day of the Estates General, which “made itself out to be reassuring on this subject” (187). Tellingly, the presidential election of Mitterand and of a socialist government in 1981 was won on a platform that included proposals by Greph and the Estates General, in particular a pledge that the threat to the teaching of philosophy would be withdrawn. An extension beyond the *Terminale* was also indicated, although this never materialized.

However, the new government did set up a committee, chaired by the minister of research, to explore the possibility of establishing an international college of philosophy in France. Derrida took part extensively in this initiative, viewing the proposal as vital to a much-needed project of re-elaborating the value and function of philosophical research and teaching. Four leading intellectuals worked on the report on the founding of the College—Francois Chatelet, Dominique Lecour, Jean-Pierre Faye, and Derrida—and their “diverse interests,” as Derrida puts it, made for a most difficult negotiation. In “Negotiations” he tells us that:

in writing the first draft of the text, I had to make an effort precisely not to mark the text in a personal way. Moreover, I was advised or asked in a friendly way to avoid the word deconstruction and the word differance, with the “a.” In this kind of situation, similar to some that occurred in GREPH, I enter into the ranks, I melt into the multiplicity. There are things that interest me in the multiplicity of positions, but sometimes what happens is that I am the most repressed of all. I am made to understand that, above all, one must not speak of this. The situation is familiar to me: there I am (I could generalize) in a group of people who are friends, allies, or at least people who are not enemies, and I am made to understand that, if there is something that must be passed over in silence, it is I.

(19)

Here, in order to participate in a sort of counter-institutional initiative, an alternative model for an institution dedicated to research and teaching, Derrida is made to accept a certain degree of marginalization or exclusion in the founding discourse of the College (and is indeed called to “counter-think” the complicated interrelationships and effects of singular intellectual authority versus a “popular” or “democratic” leveling of voices), adding once more a further twist to the “with-against” structure that so defines his relationship to a

variety of academic institutions, indeed to the very question of the institution. Furthermore, in setting up the College, Derrida remarks in “Negotiations” that “one had to negotiate with who-knows-how-many partners at the same time”: “a socialist government represented by several agencies difficult to locate, difficult to isolate outside a ministry that looked on things from above and assigned civil servants to us, functionaries who were intellectuals, ‘academics’ in the ministerial offices at that moment”; those who were more “attentive to the economic and architectural aspects” of the project than its philosophical scope and ambition; “one also had to think of one’s philosopher-colleagues, especially in France, although not only in France; these were other virtual addressees”; and finally, the views of student groups and bodies were also indispensable and could not be overlooked (18–19). Once again, the possibility of a (counter) institutional initiative came to involve Derrida in a series of complicated—perhaps nearly incommensurable—relations in which distance and proximity, turning toward and turning away from, were brought together in almost incalculable measure.

The International College of Philosophy (Ciph) was eventually founded on October 10, 1983, and, despite the difficulties encountered at the planning stage, Derrida was elected its first director. Funded by the state, the College was nevertheless to retain autonomy, and its mission was to provide a place for research on or in philosophy in the broadest possible sense, in conjunction with a number of other disciplines, especially in fields or topics excluded or marginalized in other institutions. A series of texts and historical documents relating to the setting up of the College can be found in the appendices to Derrida’s *Eyes of the University*, the second volume in the English translation of *Right to Philosophy*. In addition, the first volume opens with the essay “Privilege,” in which Derrida notes that what makes the College distinctive is less the specific nature of its financial and institutional relationship to the State than “two characteristics: its declared and statutory internationality and the absence of chairs and permanent positions.”⁷

In “Negotiations,” Derrida tells us that as a founding figure in the establishment of the College and as its first director, “I thought it only fair to let people who wanted to enter the College remain free to give the college the orientation that seemed necessary to them, a diverse, critical orientation . . . the institution had to be open, pluralistic, liberal in style” (14–15). Nevertheless, he wanted at all costs to keep open a space for deconstructive analyses and research, and at times

felt called upon to assert his authority as director along quite traditional lines. Moreover, in essays such as “Titles” and “Privilege,” which deal with a host of questions about the College, Derrida emphasizes the innovative, experimental, and unpredictable nature of this new institution, while at the same time outlining, in not inconsiderable detail, the possible areas of research and inquiry in which it might involve itself, according to complex laws or logics of “legitimation” and “destination” that the College both obeys and exceeds (the latter term, “destination,” is worked out at greater length in “Send-offs”). Thus, if we refer back to “Negotiations,” Derrida tells us that, in terms of the day-to-day running of teaching and administration (as much as research direction) in the College, “the strategies are multiple. . . . Negotiation is constantly in a state of micro-transformation. *Every day*: this means it does not stop” (17). The various counter-moves implied by such ceaseless negotiation once more call into continual play a “with-against” logic in relation to academic authority and tradition. Derrida therefore says that

in a given institution . . . when I insist on the necessity of a nonhierarchical structure or the necessity of an unstable hierarchy, I do not think that there are nonhierarchical structures. I do not think they exist. There can be nonhierarchy according to certain codes. The erasure of a certain coded hierarchy always gives rise to a more subtle, more symbolic hierarchy, the code of which still remains in formation. I do not believe in the erasure of hierarchy. What I am opposed to is always a certain stabilizing or stabilized coding of a hierarchy. Given certain situations . . . I propose that one not give oneself a constitution, statutes that permit hierarchy to be stabilized. . . . For the same reason, it is necessary to open the College to people who do not have an academic title or to people who teach in high schools in France; this is very important—and it is necessary that secondary school teachers not be subordinated to those who teach at higher levels. This is not a way of nullifying the hierarchy but a way of destabilizing the given hierarchies and codes.

(21)

Thus the College has “elections, there is a director, I was the first director elected to the College for a year,” yet “this is another way of treating hierarchy and authority” (22). At the same time, “it is not at all an anarchism. I am not an anarchist, from this point of view, nor am I an anarchist in negotiation. Deconstruction is undoubtedly

anarchic; it would be in principle, if such a thing could be said. It puts into question the arche, the beginning and the commandment, but the anarchism of deconstruction must constitute an authority with the necessity of hierarchy. And must help in thinking as well as in regulating this negotiation” (22). The encounter between deconstruction’s anarchism “in principle” and the unavoidable institutional context that gives rise to its various countermovements therefore entails a complex and always ongoing engagement, a continual *countering*, “with-against.” Furthermore, this negotiation is always singular. It implies a situation that cannot, in any simple way, be reduced to a particular case or example of a general law, but that calls for a certain rethinking—or counter-thinking—each time of asking. Thus, in “Negotiations,” Derrida responds to questions about the College and Greph by outlining some of the broader principles at stake in their “institutionalization,” while at the same time insisting that “what I was led to do in a micro-environment at the institutional moments to which you are alluding (the College, or GREPH) cannot be immediately translated or transposed to another moment in France or to another country or to another academic situation” (17). It is therefore important to remind ourselves that, in order to maintain or extend the counter-movement of, say, deconstruction in relation to the problem of the university in all its guises (including the question of the university’s “outside”), we must in a certain way forget as well as remember this history of Derrida’s institutional involvements and activisms in France from the 1970s onward. (Such a history would also have to refer, “outside” France, to Derrida’s connection with the International Parliament of Writers or UNESCO.) We must not only reconstitute this history as a source of guidance or inspiration (for it shows what may be possible, in the field of institutional transformation, if one follows the logic of the “counter,” as Derrida does tirelessly in each case), but we must also countersign it, which means transforming it, borrowing from it and abusing it, both taking it and leaving it, in order to recast the “counter” in ways that might seem somewhat unrecognizable from the perspective of such a history. This is indeed the ambition of this book, written some thirty years after Derrida’s first involvement with Greph, in a context or juncture characterized by a host of important differences in relation to that time—as well as, perhaps, similarities that remain to be thought, according to a different temporal logic, scheme, or rhythm. (Indeed, such counter-temporalities might be detected in the anachronistic time of Derrida’s own “thesis” [as non-thesis], the ostensibly

belated moment of which punctuates his life and career in a way that makes him feel at once “so young” and “so old” [113].) Moreover, Derrida’s insistence upon the institutional purchase or leverage of the “counter” at the micrological level makes it extremely difficult to extrapolate a general solution or totalized strategy in relation to the predicament the university finds itself in today. If, as Derrida says in “Privilege,” “*deconstruction is an institutional practice for which the concept of the institution remains a problem*” (53), nevertheless the necessarily unending commitment of deconstruction to institutional transformation cannot amount to a single answer to the “university question” — only singular interventions in calculated environments. According to the very logic or law of the “counter,” the “university problem” today (as it is diagnosed in broad terms in Bill Readings’s *The University in Ruins*, for example) cannot be solved at a single stroke, not least because the extrapolation of a general solution risks lessening, rather than increasing, the strategic and mobile force of the “counter.” Of course, a certain degree of generalization is unavoidable from the moment one speaks of the “counter” — *or, indeed, of what it counters* — in any discourse that hopes to be translatable, repeatable, effective, or legible to others (such a discourse is also necessary and should not simply be decried). Yet, still, one must negotiate with the fact that, for Derrida, the force of the “counter” intensifies in contexts or conditions that are singular (which, as I argue in the next chapter, should not be confused with a simpleminded notion of presence or presentness), and *where the institution as a problem remains in question*. In such circumstances, moreover, it is always possible that such “counter” interventions might be badly calculated, that they may go awry, get ignored, become marginalized, get mis- or reinterpreted, for good or ill, or become reappropriated into the system. For all I know, this may happen to this book, or to the emphases it places on the counter-institutional possibilities of testimony, teaching, the gift, the “counter” itself, and so forth. Nevertheless, the significance of the “counter” — a significance that must *necessarily* survive — is that it opens up the logic of institutional engagement in other terms, leaving us in a position where, instead of simply bemoaning the massive and unanswerable transformation of the university in recent times, or the endless power of the “system” to reincorporate threats to its logic or practice, it is possible to imagine incisive interventions in a situation that is in fact not (nor ever could be) totally closed, totally determined. Deconstruction does not harbor the possibility of the redemption of the contemporary university, but — let us negotiate,

calculate, counter “otherwise”—it may draw out in it what is still open to a future.

Counter-Introduction

In abstract and general terms, what remains constant in my thinking . . . is indeed a critique of institutions, but one that sets out not from a wild and spontaneous pre- or non-institution, but rather from counter-institutions. I do not think there is, or should be, the “non-institutional.” I am always torn between the critique of institutions and the dream of an *other* institution that, in an interminable process, will come to replace institutions that are oppressive, violent and inoperative. The idea of a counter-institution, neither spontaneous, wild nor immediate, is the most permanent motif that, in a way, has guided me in my work. What I try to explain, for example in *Du droit à la philosophie*, is that the philosophical as such, which is not meta-institutional, is nevertheless a very paradoxical institution, whose space has to be administrated without a symmetrical contract—an institution in which thought on the subject of the institutionality of the institution has to remain open and have a future [*avenir*]. Of course, it will be said that deconstruction of the question of the institution is not institutionalizable—but neither does it belong to a space untouched by institutionality. It is probably this logic that has guided me for all these years, always at war with institutions, but always attempting to found yet another one—the “Grep,” then the Etats généraux and the College, all of them counter-institutions with original and paradoxical ideas (albeit unrealized) on the subject of counter-institutionality.

—Jacques Derrida, “I Have a Taste for the Secret”⁸

No more than philosophy or science, literature is not an institution among others; it is at once institution and counter-institution, placed at a *distance* from the institution, at the angle that the institution makes with itself in order to *take a distance from itself, by itself* [s’écarter d’elle-même].

—Jacques Derrida, “A ‘Madness’ Must Watch Over Thinking”⁹

I would like to say a word about the word “counter” in countersignature, that can be an adverb and/or a preposition. The word “*contre*,” counter or against, can equally and at the same time mark both opposition, contrariety, contradiction and proximity, near-contact. One can be “against” the person one opposes (one’s “declared enemy,” for example), and “against” the person next to us, the one who is “right against” us, whom we touch or with whom we are in contact. The word “*contre*” possesses these two inseparable meanings of proximity

and *vis-à-vis*, on the one hand, and opposition, on the other. Clearly in countersignature, the word has the meaning of proximity and *vis-à-vis*. It is what is facing us, beside us. We shall of course come back to this double meaning of the word “*contre*” that summarizes what is at stake in this discussion. . . . If I might add a very quick note, before returning to the text, I would say that, even beyond my love for the word and the abyssal thing called “countersignature,” it happens that for a long time I have “cultivated” or “allowed to be cultivated” in numerous texts the formidable ambiguity of this “*contre*,” as determined in the French idiom. The word “*contretemps*,” for example, designating exhibition less than time-lag, anachrony; the word “*contrepartie*” [counterpart], that marks not so much opposition as exchange, the equivalence of a gift and counter-gift; the word “*contre-exemple*” [counterexample] that, like an exception, challenges the generality of the law. All these words recur in many of my texts, often to designate the relation between me and me, as close as possible to the authenticity, the authentication of my own signature. Here and there, I have had occasion to say that I am at the wrong time [*à contretemps*], or that I am my own counterexample or counterpart.

— Jacques Derrida, “Countersignature”¹⁰

Nevertheless, if one were not to begin with this “history” of Derrida’s institutional activism, it might come as a surprise to many, including experienced readers, that Derrida, in “I Have a Taste for the Secret,” would wish to link his work in general—his entire project, one might say—to what he calls the “permanent motif” of the counter-institution. (In “Countersignature,” he states that the “counter” draws as close as possible to his own signature.) No doubt, Derrida’s involvement in institutional issues, most notably the part he played in the educational reform of philosophical teaching in France during the 1970s and 1980s, is gaining the appreciation of those who would wish to reaffirm Derrida’s career and motivations, not least in the face of more negative perceptions that were somewhat inevitably rehashed in several of Derrida’s obituaries. Moreover, Derrida’s various writings on the question—in all its guises—of the university have increasingly come to be acknowledged as an indispensable part of the critical debate on this topic, which has quickened its pace, notably among those in the humanities and social sciences, since the mid-1990s. (This debate is so extensive and important that I cannot hope to summarize it here, although needless to say it pervades and impels the entirety of what follows. That Derrida’s work is increasingly seen as indispensable to this debate establishes a principal context for the way in

which this book takes shape.) However, as I argue in my first chapter, it would be difficult to deny that the concept of the “counter-institution” is rarely the focus of attention where Derrida scholarship is concerned. And, indeed, the various connotations surrounding the term “counter” are hardly ever brought out in critical accounts of deconstruction’s “technical” vocabulary or intellectual program. (Perhaps this is because Derrida’s sense of the “permanence” of the term jars with the more specific cultural connotations of the word “counter,” which tends to conjure up the revolutionary spirit of *la pensée soixante-huit*—as in “counter-culture,” for example—with which one could only somewhat mistakenly associate Derrida’s work.) Nevertheless, the more one reads Derrida, the more the term creeps up on you . . . surprisingly, or perhaps one might say belatedly.¹¹ (Indeed, just as the present study was being finished, Catherine Malabou’s *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida*, cowritten with Derrida, was published in English translation. This is the first book I know of that elevates the “counter” [in deconstruction] to the status of an out-and-out heading. The counterpath or *contre-allée* refers to a “sideroad,” a “service or access road,” or an alley “that runs alongside a main thoroughfare, such as one finds providing access to the buildings lining the boulevards of French cities.”¹² It is a sort of byway [thus its elevation to a main heading immediately becomes ironic, problematic, deconstructible], but a byway that nevertheless facilitates effective access into perhaps the very heart of a building or institution, at an angle not immediately the most “obvious” one. For Malabou, the counterpath entails a direction or trajectory that remains at bottom incalculable, or which ultimately exceeds programmability in terms of the concept of derivation. In other words, what unravels along its pathway is any simple relationship to an essential origin or immutable point of departure, or indeed a predictable point of arrival. Nevertheless, neither is its [counter] movement simply uncontrolled or its effects and technologies of “disseminative pluralization” [158] merely beyond analysis, description, or remarking—as Derrida himself suggests when he says, in the book, that Malabou writes “beautifully” but also “algebraically” [145], or where he implies that her privileging of the problem of derivation as a key to Derrida’s own travel writings involves a certain amount of irony and might even be described as “insanely economical” [41]. Knowing this about her own book, perhaps, Malabou’s “counterpath” is therefore susceptible to the paradox of being chaotically programmed [in other words, the text itself looks very much like programmed chaos], with her various

chapters on different aspects of Derrida's travels randomly arranged or arbitrarily mis-sorted according to a meticulous editorial principle at work throughout, one that asserts the "actual" or "original" sequence in order to indicate its subversion, therefore operating "with-against" a logical ordering. Like the *contre*, then, the counterpath unfolds "with-against" itself, promoting movement of the kind that one might detect in Derrida's "Mochlos," where the university itself—instituted by, or *as*, or in terms of an event that it cannot simply include or incorporate in its "own" institution [that is, according to a logic of derivation]—proceeds on the basis of an unstable footing or founding [walking on two undecidably left or right feet], which suggests the possibility both of profound disorientation and the unfolding of a certain "chaotic" trajectory and even history that remains susceptible to analysis of the kind that unavoidably formalizes itself as a necessary contingency or deconstructive strategy.¹³ Thus the question of the counterpath, if it is indeed akin to the deconstructive problem of the founding, direction, and analysis of the university, provides an indispensable counterpoint to the question of counter-institutional possibility being pursued here.)

The stealthy influence of this *contre* or "counter" throughout Derrida's writings therefore provides a reason for including in the "counter-introduction" to this book three more or less "indicative" quotations drawn from texts produced at different times (although each of them quite late on in Derrida's career) for different occasions: an interview with François Ewald first published in *Magazine Littéraire* in the early 1990s, a conversation with Maurizio Ferraris a little later in the 1990s, and a conference paper given at Cerisy in 2000 in honor of Jean Genet. And it seemed useful to take these quotations as the occasion to say something about the meaning and "constant" importance, for Derrida's thought, of the "counter" and the counter-institution, and indeed their value as the guiding thread of my own project, particularly at a time when the question of the university provokes such heated debate, not just in terms of the changing fortunes of scholarship, research, and academic life, but in view of the wider transformation of "democratic" institutions in the context of a complex variety of historical, "global" trends.

However, it will be obvious enough to anyone who reads these passages that, while Derrida here makes relatively rare *explicit* mention of the "counter-institution" (a term that is nevertheless presented as a constant "motif" in his work), these quotations do not themselves speak *openly* about the broader issues and questions that, indeed,

would seem to find any claim or rationale that the “counter-institution” might itself have. Instead, they seem to speak largely about language, philosophy, literature—for some, the “classical,” “disciplinary” concerns of the established scholar, housed in a narrow and introverted relationship to the institution that allows him to speak. In approaching these quotations from Derrida, then, one must be aware that in order to link the question (in and for deconstruction) of the counter-institution to the question of what relates the university to its “outside,” one must, at the very least, come at an angle . . . or, better still, perhaps, one must read these passages in a way that allows them to form the very angle “that the institution makes with itself,” as Derrida puts it. A continually shifting (counter)point that gives (shifting) shape to the question of the institution. Thus, my purpose in beginning with these quotations is less to advance a general thesis for this book, in terms of a “vision-statement” of the specific kind of counter-institution for which the contemporary moment calls (and upon which everything therefore *hinges*), than it is simply to *read* these passages as or at just such an angle, perhaps all the better to see what angle the “counter-institution” makes with the university, and indeed the university with its “outside.”

The Dream of an *Other*

In the passage from “I Have a Taste for the Secret,” we find that the condition of possibility of the counter-institution is, to draw on Derrida’s own words, “the dream of an *other*.” Another institution, yes, but also an *other*, the *other* in its own right (if that were possible), a move from the dream of another institution to the dream of an *other* allowed by Derrida’s own italicization. The structure or trait of the counter-institution is, in these terms, bound up with that of the dream, the form and dynamics of which require careful analysis and complex thinking, particularly at the crossroads between psychoanalysis and deconstruction, where we find ourselves here. For the dream to which Derrida refers when talking of an *other* institution can hardly be confused with the kind of dreaming that we might associate with, say, the visionary ambitions of an agent or subject of consciousness and volition. Such an institution, in other words, is ultimately not reducible to the work of the self or, indeed, to activist programs of various kinds. Rather, Derrida’s description of the counter-institution as “the dream of an *other*” gives full force to the double genitive upon which it operates, carrying over the multiple syntactic charge

implied by the phrase. Perhaps not fortuitously, then, the implications of this complex phrasing—often noted as a feature of Derrida’s language—tie in with the psychoanalytic conception of the dream as the irreducible yet irrecoverable trait of the other. If it is a deliberate or calculated move on Derrida’s part to link the very thought of counter-institutional possibility to the phenomenon of dreaming, nevertheless it goes without saying that dreaming itself exceeds such deliberate or calculated acts, both in psychoanalysis and deconstruction. And it is not least in this inextricable sense or experience of excess that Derrida’s “dream” of the counter-institution is precisely “the dream of an *other*.” To go further, following a line of thinking found in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, we might even say that dreaming is a kind of thinking or a movement of thought that may lie at the origins of thought itself. If thought cannot ever entirely free itself from the process of dreaming, which might in fact give rise to thinking, then the thought of the counter-institution that arises in this passage from “I Have a Taste for the Secret” must inevitably give itself over, to a certain degree, to the complex agency of the dream. And, notably, it is by way of such dreaming that the counter-institution may come to “replace” or, indeed, *rethink* existing institutions only according to “an interminable process” that, in the very style of the dream, hardly promotes closure, balance, resolution. The counter-institution depends upon a dream-thinking in which its possibility arises less as the possibility of a fully realized presence or actuality than as an always restless and excessive trait, an unsettling interruption that cannot definitively be said to have come, but which may always come, and which in this sense is continual. Here, it is perhaps worth noting that, throughout this book, the “counter-institution” is construed less as a better designed or more preferable institutional model that would work to supersede current institutions in order to constitute an *improvement* of some kind, than as just such a trait of the “other.” This is not to say that the call for new institutions should go unheeded, nor that such a demand for institutional change it is not, at times, urgent and compelling—as it is today. Nor is it to imply that the purity of the “counter-institutional” spirit must be preserved in a way that always transcends (and therefore risks leaving untroubled) the more prosaic and pragmatic life of existing institutions. Our account of Derrida’s own institutional involvements demonstrates as much. Rather, as Derrida notes in the passage from “A ‘Madness’ Must Watch Over Thinking,” to think the counter-institution according to the irreducible trait of the “other” is to continually shift the

force of the “counter-institutional” so that it works, again, at an *angle* with or to the institution. Never the same as an institution, the counter-institution is made—in an “interminable process”—precisely at this angle. And in a number of different ways the various chapters of this book endeavor to (re)make this angle with the institution in order to remain as open as possible to the trait of the “other” amidst the forces of increasing university bureaucratization and programmability, commercial rationalization, management culture, the advance of technics and so-called evidence-based evaluation, the changing fortunes of teaching, the threatened name and claim of the humanities, and so forth.

Without a Symmetrical Contract

In “I Have a Taste for the Secret,” Derrida says that “the philosophical as such, which is not meta-institutional, is nevertheless a very paradoxical institution, whose space has to be administrated without a symmetrical contract—an institution in which thought on the subject of the institutionality of the institution has to remain open and have a future [*avenir*].” As we have already suggested, via a number of texts including “Punctuations” and “Mochlos,” Derrida shows how philosophy cannot transcend the field that it nevertheless demarcates, partitions, or allots: that of the university. This is not just because philosophy at the same time always exists as a part of the university, constituting itself as a discipline among others. It is also due to the fact that, as Derrida shows in relation to Kant, the orientation that stems from the philosophical thought of the university remains insufficient to provide an extraterritorial standpoint from which to regard or comprehend the university *as such*. Philosophy thus belongs to the university (it cannot simply stand outside, over, or above it), but it does so in the form of a certain *non-belonging*—for, in another respect, “philosophy” is not just one discipline among others, since it also exists as the always deconstructible foundation of the university in which it remains (in the sense that it can never hope to master or supersede the university itself). Never entirely inside or outside the university, philosophy forms an angle with its own institution. If, for deconstruction, this renders philosophy a “counter-institutional” phenomenon *par excellence*, it is nevertheless important to note without delay that this state of affairs hardly renders philosophy a master-counter-institution. For the very same set of circumstances that position philosophy as a privileged example of the

“counter-institutional” simultaneously displace and dislocate it as a master discourse or discipline: namely, this very same angle that philosophy makes with itself or with its own institution. Thus, the question of philosophy’s non-symmetrical “contract” or relation to itself includes the incalculable angle of incidence it shares with what could (therefore) only improperly be called the “nonphilosophical” disciplines. From this perspective, the “counter-institutional”—the *other* of philosophy “itself”—is at once irreducible and yet irrecoverable in any programmatic sense, insofar as the university (in part or whole) is concerned. Yet it is also this non-symmetrical relation—a certain lack of balance, closure, calculability, resolution—that opens the very possibility of the future. This is the actuality of philosophy (although, again, we should be careful not to say *just* philosophy, or not just to say philosophy, philosophy *as such*): a non-symmetry or asymmetry with itself, which gives rise to the futural or virtual dimension of this very same actuality. In various places throughout this book, then, I try to follow Derrida’s lead by linking a thought of the counter-institution to the question of virtuality that, in different guises, has become such an important figure in the “theoretical” analysis of contemporary “actuality.” Thus, for example, I borrow Derrida’s invented term *actuality* on a number of occasions, in order to describe what happens when the institutional and teaching body finds itself at the kind of angle that the “counter” makes in order to make possible teaching or the institution. (Here, I try to show how this angle adjusts the question of the university’s relation to its “outside,” particularly in the context of debates about technological and global change.) As Derrida himself says, the “logic” of the counter-institutions in which he has been involved, such as Greph, the Estates General, and the International College of Philosophy—a logic that also gives them their force and foundation—nevertheless always entails a paradoxical thinking that gives rise to ideas that must, in a certain way, remain “unrealized.”

A Word About the Word “Counter”

In the first chapter of this book, I try to add a word or two about the counter-institution in a way that draws inspiration from Derrida’s point that to “counter” not only means to oppose or contradict, but also, inseparably, to engage, meet, make contact. This is the double meaning of what it means to be “against” when one “counters” something or somebody. Indeed, I spend quite a while in pursuit of this little word, chasing it through the dictionary (pushing “right against”

it) in a way that shows how this very same word is not just one among countless others to be found in the dictionary, but rather one that also gives definition to the dictionary itself: as a device for reckoning, calculation, or accounting; as a place both to divide, distinguish, discriminate, and to link, relate, conjoin; as the site where values, terms, and tokens are exchanged; as a counting house or casino for a calculated taking of (incalculable) risk; or indeed as a machine for making angles. This analysis of the word “counter” overextends or exceeds itself, therefore, setting up a non-symmetrical “contract” or relation in which the dictionary itself comes to be placed at an angle with its own institution. The counter cannot be contained by the dictionary, the dictionary cannot be contained by itself: thus, we need to readjust or recalibrate the angle by which we relate the institution to its “outside.” And this angle, in all its complexity (which includes very real implications and effects), profoundly unsettles those approaches that might seek to equate such analysis with mere word play.

In order to say more about those very real implications and effects, we can do no better than to begin with Derrida’s explication of “the formidable ambiguity of this ‘*contre*’” in his late text, “Countersignature.” First of all, Derrida shows how the word “*contretemps*” inextricably includes the sense of “anachrony” or “time-lag.” This implies that the “*contre*” or “counter” in “counter-institution” would inevitably problematize any simple claim to timeliness that such an institution might make for itself. Needless to say, such appeals to timeliness or urgency frequently presuppose an immediate and direct relationship to an “outside,” a compelling context or a pressing state of affairs that establishes the grounds for setting up a counter-institution in the first place. Of course, Derrida’s own analysis of the American Declaration of Independence complicates (or counters) such an idea of timeliness, by demonstrating the profoundly disjointed temporality of the institution (the impossible condition of possibility of the Declaration of Independence is that it is authorized by the very “people” whom it serves to constitute or inaugurate as a legal or constitutional body). In my first chapter, therefore, I try to adjust the angle which relates the counter-institution to its “outside” (or, indeed to the institution), by arguing that any counter-institution worth its name would never be as “timely” as some might wish it to be. However, I venture to add that this founding trait—that of the time-lag or anachrony reserved in the “counter” of “counter-institution”—may turn out to establish not just a principle or logic of foundation, but the very *force* of resistance asked of counter-institutions. Indeed, the anachronies implied

by the “counter,” which angle the institution against itself, also come into play in other places throughout the book, for example, where I discuss both the rise and the limits of management-based systems of academic audit and evaluation. Here, Derrida’s word “*contre-exemple*” or counter-example springs to mind, since, during my discussion of the rise of audit culture in academic institutions today, I try to show how the discourses and practices of “excellence,” “quality,” “evidence,” and audit cannot fully dissociate themselves from an intractable testimony that “like an exception, challenges the generality of the law.”

Coming back to this explication of the word “*contre*” in “Counter-signature,” upon which I have staked so much, Derrida goes on to note that “the word ‘*contrepartie*’ [counterpart] . . . marks not so much opposition as exchange, the equivalence of a gift and counter-gift.” In the second chapter of this book, I pick up the question of teaching insofar as deconstruction is concerned. This is a question to which I return in the subsequent section of the book, concentrating on Derrida’s essay “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends,” in order to reaffirm the point I make in the second chapter: namely, that any teaching worth its name issues from a non-symmetrical “contract” or relation to itself. Here, following Derrida’s reading of Mauss, where the thought of the gift marks a shift from “cold economic rationality” to a thinking of the “symbolicity” of this “rationality,” I ask whether the conditions of possibility of cultural study or critique might be understood as founded upon the (im)possibility of the gift. The gift opens the possibility of all exchange, of exchange in general, yet it remains in excess of all economies, and is indeed unaccountable as such. One cannot count on the gift. To the extent that the study of culture seeks to uncover the “symbolicity” (and not just the fact) of “economic rationality”—a symbolicity that must therefore exceed this very same rationality, this very same economics—it promotes a kind of knowledge or method that cannot be translated fully into an economy of exchange. From this perspective, I try to rethink cultural studies as not just (in Derrida’s own terms) a “good-for-everything concept,” not just the concoction of an insipid interdisciplinarity or a retreat from genuine philosophical problems, but *also* as an inextricable excess built into rationalized and administered economies, or indeed what might be seen as the “global” economy of knowledge or the institution. Moreover, this rethinking of cultural studies deeply affects the question of teaching. For if teaching always has to do with *giving an account* (even if only at a minimal level), then

the rise of cultural studies as an economy of exchange and a way of accounting *opened by a thought of the gift* may compel us to respond in new ways to the aporetic situation of teaching in general. Once again, the institution (of teaching) forms an (incalculable) angle with itself, (en)countering itself in an experience of the *actuvirtual*, leaving us “right against” an actuality that (like the gift) cannot ever be fully realized or recuperated. And, of course, this *actuvirtuality* remakes the angle with the university’s “outside,” not least at a time when the question of virtuality has, as we have already noted, become so pronounced in “theoretical” descriptions of contemporary “actuality.” (And the complexity of this angle is compounded when one remembers that such descriptions are always, at an irreducible or minimal level, themselves a kind of *teaching*.)

These few examples, as far from exhaustive as Derrida’s own “quick note,” therefore demonstrate ways in which a thought of the “counter” and the counter-institution might begin to impinge upon the analysis of the academic institution today and upon our understanding of the angle it makes with its “outside.” They also indicate, once more in a nonexhaustive fashion, some of the possible ways in which the chapters of this book relate to one another—although I should quickly add that, in the spirit or style of the “counter,” I would hope that the different sections that follow might be read at an angle to or from each other, keeping at once a certain distance and proximity in the uncanny experience of the *vis-à-vis*. Here, I should also say something about the last part of the book—an extended discussion with Christopher Fynsk. At the risk of overextending the figure of the angle, this discussion is in many ways a counter-text lurking at the edge of the book. A counter-text, in the sense that it runs “right against” the other sections, and perhaps opens up each of them to their own contrarities, as well as to their connections. It is no doubt fitting, then, that I find myself incapable of measuring the angle the discussion makes with the book. Fynsk and I certainly don’t agree about everything, nor do we exactly disagree about anything. Perhaps we counter each other in this text. But I say this less to glamorize the discussion as a sporting duel between two intellectuals than to indicate the light it might begin to shed upon differing perceptions of the fate of the humanities, cultural studies, “theory,” and deconstruction, not least as such perceptions arise on different sides of the Atlantic. As I say near the beginning of the text, the question of the university is one that demands that meticulous consideration be given to the problem of what distinguishes and what links particular

universities—and, indeed, what connects and divides different aspects of the debate about the university—in different national and “political” settings. This poses the question, then, of the “politics” of the university in the Anglo-American world, but also includes the question of the ever-changing complexities that tie American and British institutions to universities elsewhere across the globe. The text that concludes this book doubtless makes only the smallest contribution to this pressing need. But to the extent that it stages an encounter that proceeds from a shared and implicit awareness of such complexity, the discussion does perhaps capture a sense of what it might mean to act as *counterparts* in the debate. I am extremely grateful to Chris Fynsk for his patience and generosity in participating in the discussion, especially at a time when he was kept busy by plans to move from his post at Binghamton University in the United States to the University of Aberdeen. During this time, I myself benefited from a period of sabbatical leave granted by my own university, which enabled me to complete most of this book. For this, I must acknowledge my gratitude to colleagues in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Portsmouth. I would also like to thank a number of academic colleagues who have supported or taken an interest in my work in recent times, or provided the occasion to develop some of the ideas found in this book. Foremost among these are Samuel Weber, Peggy Kamuf, Timothy Clark, John Schad, Gary Hall, Joanna Zylińska, Paul Bowman, Marc Redfield, Sarah Wood, Herman Rapaport, Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Nicholas Royle, Peter Nicholls, Graham Allen, Roy Sellars, Forbes Morlock, and Peter Kilroy. Finally, during the time this book was being finalized, the sad news broke of Jacques Derrida’s death. Indeed, the section of the third chapter that deals with Derrida’s “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How it Ends” was written in the immediate aftermath and shock of this news, and was—is—no doubt strongly affected by Derrida’s passing. In the last year or so of his life, having offered to contribute to a collection of essays I planned to edit, Derrida wrote some kind words in letters that he sent to me (as I know he did in many other cases). But, regrettably, I cannot say I knew him personally. Yet it is impossible in a text like this one, composed around the time of Derrida’s death, not to register sadness and to close, here, by remembering Derrida’s life and thought.

Counter-Institution, Counter-Deconstruction

Who or what calls for counter-institutions today? What form might they take, and why?

In recent times, thinking in particular of his lecture on “The University Without Condition” from 1999, Derrida has once more added his voice to others in calling for a rethinking of the university, which would include an analysis of its ongoing redefinition in a variety of contexts: globalization; the restructuring of the nation-state; the transformation of contemporary international politics; the advent of so-called late capitalism and the readjustment of the labor market; the intensifying commercialization of higher learning; the recalibration of the subject; the rise of institutional discourses, programs, and practices tied to the notion of “excellence”; and so forth. In view of the massively difficult questions such “contexts” imply, Derrida has called for a new humanities to be envisaged (although, of course, the metaphor of vision would need to be treated with great suspicion here, not least given that Derrida is always hugely attentive to that which remains invisible, concealed, or unforeseen in the founding, orientation, or future of the university). This “new” humanities, and indeed the “unconditional university” of which Derrida also speaks, would not simply be a radical invention of the “present,” but would instead negotiate complexly with the deep-seated traditions of the university.¹ Neither would the actuality of such institutions be reducible to commonplace conceptions of the “real.” For Derrida, such

institutions remain inconceivable without careful consideration of what, in “The Deconstruction of Actuality,” he terms *artifactuality* and *actuvirtuality*, which refer to complicated effects of spectrality, virtuality, the *as if*, and the mediatization of the “real” in the “present.”² To call such phenomena “contemporary” is doubtless necessary and unavoidable, but it is also, for obvious reasons, a little misleading or contradictory. As such, while concrete proposals and plans are never too far from Derrida’s mind, the institution of new institutions must be envisaged alongside shrewd understandings of these intricately woven forces and effects, which always leave a reserve or remainder carried over from “today.”

Neither is this recent call for “new” or counter-institutions itself unprecedented or “new.” As we have already seen, during the 1970s, Derrida participated in the founding of Greph, taking a leading role in its activist work and helping to mobilize opposition to the Giscard government’s proposals to “rationalize” the French educational system and impose new restrictions upon philosophy in the curriculum. His role in convening the Estates General of Philosophy in 1979 and his close links to the founding of the International College of Philosophy in Paris, when considered alongside his connection with the International Parliament of Writers and UNESCO during the 1990s, illustrates further Derrida’s continuing interest in the possibility of launching an array of politico-philosophical and literary projects while experimenting with “new” kinds of institutions in which they might take shape. The complexity of this “history” of deconstruction’s affiliation with counter-institutions of various kinds—including Derrida’s published texts on the subject—prohibits any simple contrast or comparison with more recent calls on Derrida’s part for institutional change or reflection.³ In other words, it is no more possible to extrapolate a longstanding position or viewpoint from this “history,” of the type one would find in a “thesis” that hopes to transcend particular historical conjunctions or events, than it is feasible to confidently state the *difference* of Derrida’s recent work on the university in terms of a “self-evidently” altered historical moment or juncture, that of the “present.” This difference must be stated otherwise, according to a more complex temporality, for example that of *artifactuality* and *actuvirtuality*. And it must enter into any analysis that gives rise to the call for a counter-institution.

In recent times, Derrida has not been alone in publishing texts that call for a rethinking of the university “today.” During the past decade or so, a whole literature has emerged, produced by a number of

critics and thinkers working in a variety of national settings, which not only investigates the contemporary plight of the university, but which suggests future possibilities for academic life, work, and effort in view of the changing set of circumstances surrounding educational institutions.⁴ While the intellectual background and affiliation of contributors to the debate is, unsurprisingly, varied, it is nevertheless interesting that many of those who have engaged with such issues are associated with deconstruction. Several of the texts that have acquired importance in this regard devote themselves to the task of analyzing the very *question* of the institution. This is a task which has involved rigorous inquiry concerning the foundation or institution of institutions, and careful exploration of the conditions and effects that establish their possibility and characterize their history. Of course, such analyses proceed from perspectives that are irreducibly although not merely “philosophical.” More recently, however, such texts have been complemented by a growing interest in the possibility of reorienting the institutional landscape. Such reorientation may take a variety of different forms, depending upon the specific set of circumstances at hand. For example, in Britain, the iron grip on university teaching and administration of public management techniques and quality-assurance procedures, together with the evaluation of scholarly work nationally by the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise), implies a vast funding machine programmed according to very specific requirements, interests, and concerns, of which the present government may perhaps be only the most visible sign. In Britain, therefore, the call for counter-institutions must negotiate this particular field. In addition, reorienting the landscape of the institution might involve the effort to found or envisage new institutions, perhaps those that could draw their force from exploiting new technology and media, or those that might ally themselves with extra-academic forces and ventures spanning different countries. Yet it may also entail plans to transform (or indeed complement) part or all of the university that we inherit, either as a concrete ensemble of material conditions and practices or as a (ruined) idea. Or both. Derrida’s “The University Without Condition” is just one example of recent work that aims to negotiate the complexity of these different yet necessarily interrelated possibilities. Like so many of Derrida’s texts, it was originally given as a lecture to a distinguished assembly, this time at Stanford University. The essay concludes with “seven theses, seven propositions, or seven professions of faith,” which Derrida calls “altogether programmatic” (230). They sketch out the work ahead for the “new” humanities, in a way that is

necessarily very different from but that inevitably calls to mind the legislative or performative dimensions of the founding texts of Greph and the International College of Philosophy. (It should be noted that Derrida's "programmatic" recommendations in "The University Without Condition" are, paradoxically, designed to help us avoid, offset, or delay the reduction of the university to purely programmatic, end-oriented goals, reactivating the complex negotiation—beyond mere opposition, more akin to the "with-against"—that Derrida foresees as vital to the humanities' future in the university. Indeed, the complexity of this negotiation arises in part from the fact that the effort to envisage future possibilities draws its force from a performative act, a profession of faith, which must structurally fall short of and at the same time exceed a programmatic vision of the future as positive object or intention.) Since the text of Derrida's lecture is now widely available, I will refrain from summarizing its specific hypotheses and propositions in detail. However, the send-off to Derrida's address is worthy of some reflection. He concludes by saying to the audience "it will be up to you now" — "up to you" not just to institute change (as if Derrida had made everything else clear, therefore leaving his audience simply "ready-for-action"), but to decide upon the very nature and direction (the discourse) of the question—of the university, of the humanities—which calls to be thought. "Take your time but be quick about it, because you don't know what awaits you" are Derrida's last words on this occasion (237). Despite the apparently urgent tone, there is a double and undecidable meaning awaiting us here. (Quite precisely, we don't know what awaits us in these last words.) Derrida seems to be saying, "okay, those of us here of a philosophical bent are not accustomed to haste, but nevertheless the situation is pressing and we shouldn't delay too much." But isn't he also saying that one must be quick *to* take one's time, or that one should not hesitate to take a while in order to do justice to the question? As if undue or excessive haste might even compound the problem or indeed partake of it? As if it is this very problem of the speed, pace, or rhythm of change that *also* requires analysis—analysis of a kind that, if it is to be effective, can therefore fall on neither side of the customary opposition between haste and delay?

In what follows, rather than starting to build a prospective model of the counter-institution in view of the predicament the university finds itself in today, I want therefore to explore this *other* or "counter" temporality, the temporality not just of the counter-institution but of the "counter" itself: a "counter" logic, force, movement, rhythm. In

light of the growing demand for counter-institutions, which in Britain and doubtless elsewhere increasingly acquires a sense of urgency, I want to begin by showing why one cannot simply force a “counter” logic or movement, a counter-institution, to “be quick about it,” or call for counter-institutions in such an unequivocal way. Yet, as the analysis proceeds or unfolds — *while it takes its time* — I also suggest that the “counter” begins by coming back, promising to answer the call along the lines of a certain *artifactuality* or *actuvirtuality*, or in other words, by way of complex effects of spectrality, virtuality, the *as if*, and the tele-effect, which together haunt our electronic communications networks and computerized systems. Still to come (according to an originary or “always already” logic), the “counter” returns in ghostly form, amid the discordant rhythms and incalculable reckonings of the “now.”

“Counter” Temporality

Until one delves a little deeper, “counter” does not appear to be an especially privileged term in what might be called Derrida’s “classic” deconstructive vocabulary. For many of those who think themselves familiar with Derridean “key terms,” “counter” would not necessarily figure as much of a counter in the highly complex economies of philosophical and linguistic (or, indeed, politico-ideologico-cultural) production associated with deconstruction, nor would many rate its prominence among deconstruction’s proliferal modes of critical and discursive transaction, exchange, or (re)valuation. Indeed, if deconstruction often declares — and yet keeps — its hand according to the language and logic of the wager, its highly regulated or carefully calculated games of chance are played out around this little word with perhaps a certain discretion. Of course, one immediately thinks of the countersignature or contraband as significant terms or ideas for Derrida, but otherwise “counter” is rarely made to participate in the neologisms or titles by means of which deconstruction announces itself. During the “classic” period of deconstruction, of course, the cultural connotations of the word “counter” would probably have conjured up the revolutionary spirit of *la pensée soixante-huit* — as in the well-worn notion or motif of a “counter-culture,” for example. In this regard, it is perhaps telling that not until quite recently has Derrida spoken openly about his love of the word, and drawn fuller attention to the part it has played in his work — retrospectively, perhaps even belatedly.⁵ My use of the term “belatedly” here, and throughout, is

deployed with a certain degree of ironic misapplication, deliberate linguistic incompetence, or intended abuse. For the lateness of what is “belated” in deconstruction, or in counter-deconstruction, must be imagined, as I endeavor to show, in terms of an “other” temporality in which deferral and delay are only a part of the more complex temporal structure of *différance* that also gives rise precisely to the “here-now,” a “here-now” that “unfurls,” as Derrida puts it in *Specters of Marx*,⁶ perhaps even *before* its time. In *Specters of Marx*, *différance* in its “irreducibility” involves the “spacing of [a] promise and of the future-to-come that comes to open it,” which nevertheless cannot be equated simply with “deferral, lateness, delay, postponement.” As Derrida says, *différance* also comes “without lateness, without delay, but without presence” — “it is the precipitation of an absolute singularity, singular because differing, precisely [*justement*], and always other, binding itself necessarily to the form of the instant, in *imminence and in urgency*: even if it moves toward what remains to come, there is the pledge [*gage*] (promise, engagement, injunction and response to the injunction, and so forth). The pledge is given here and now, even before, perhaps, a decision confirms it” (31). And as Derrida himself implies, the pledge of course also participates in the form, structure, or movement of *différance*, in a way that significantly complicates its own “here-and-nowness” as also just a little *precipitate*, and therefore temporally disjointed, not quite or not just “here” or only “now.” What remains in and constitutes the present is precisely the remainder.

If, just lately, Derrida has indeed spoken rather “belatedly” about his love of the word *contre* or “counter,” some might still find it surprising that deconstruction has not put the “counter” front-of-house to a greater extent, or capitalized on it more explicitly over the years, particularly, as we shall see, given that it is heavily embroiled in a series of lexical and etymological connections that might otherwise prove highly suggestive for deconstruction’s logic and language, as Derrida himself has recently noted. Is deconstruction’s apparent avoidance of the term as its explicit motif or heading linked to a “political” strategy, or, at any rate, a sense of necessity?

In this latter connection, much has been said of late about deconstruction’s “belated” politics, understood less as a deathbed conversion than in terms of a genuine reluctance to identify with received political language, concepts, and thought in too hasty a manner (although, of course, on a number of occasions Derrida has been prepared to quiet a little the question of deconstruction in order to demonstrate a certain solidarity with—or resistance to—existing

and specific political causes, events, or actions). Geoffrey Bennington has shown how Derrida's "reticence about some sorts of political statement and argument" rests upon his deep-seated reservations about the metaphysical background and underpinning of the classical conception of the "political," which, if left unquestioned or unchecked, all too often produces unanticipated and unwanted effects in the sphere of "radical" politics. During the high period of revolutionary zeal and, indeed, intellectual vanguardism that accompanied it, "a sense of political strategy and solidarity may have dictated prudence about criticizing the arguments of the Left," writes Bennington.⁷ (This is something Derrida himself confirms in the interview "Politics and Friendship," adding that he well understood how his particular kinds of criticism of, say, French Communist Party doctrine in the 1960s and 1970s would simply get reappropriated and turned against him.) Thus it is that Derrida *appears* to have "come late" to politics. In a text of the early to mid-1970s, "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends,"⁸ Derrida admits a similar "belatedness" (70) when it comes to the systematic analysis of the institutional setting (the university), which establishes a privileged context for intellectual engagement with current social and political issues. This delayed declaration on Derrida's part takes the form of explicit reflection upon the teaching of philosophy, at a time when proposed reform of the French educational system would have entailed a reduction or dilution of philosophical education, with all the far-reaching social, cultural, and "political" implications and effects this might involve. Here, it is the possible limitation or restriction placed upon philosophy which seems on the one hand to stir action, as if the counter-movement—the "politics"—of deconstruction irreducibly calls for more and not less "philosophy." And yet, on the other hand, since for Derrida "philosophy" can never prepare anyone for the unprogrammability or interruptive violence of a genuine decision or action, its structural interminability and thus its nonclosure in an action or decision reties philosophy to a refusal of reducibility. (Which gives rise to the paradox that decision always arrives both too early and too late.) In "Privilege," therefore, the very "right to philosophy" and "right of philosophy" necessarily undermines or holds up the call-to-arms that asks us to go "right to philosophy," right now, in the present, without detour or delay. (Interestingly, this text comes just before "Where a Teaching Body Begins" in *Who's Afraid of Philosophy*.)⁹

In "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends," then, Derrida's tardiness ("after approximately fifteen years of experience called

‘teaching’ and twenty-three years as a civil servant”) is once more admitted, not so much in order to “put on a show of self-critique, *mea culpa*, or histrionic guilty conscience” (70) than as the condition of a necessary contingency that ties Derrida’s own work to that of Greph (“for the first time, I am here linking my discourse to the group work engaged in under the name Greph” [70]). Crucially, this compact of names, this inaugural signing/countersigning, is to be accompanied, quite unavoidably suggests Derrida, by an analysis of such “belatedness” itself, which never amounts to just the unpunctuality of an (inadequate) individual, the (in)decision of a single person, but comes to define the structural trait of a certain necessity or “number of necessities” (71). Perhaps, then, it is the trait of the latecomer that gives us, just a few sentences later, the proper name of Greph as a “counter-institution” (71). This “counter-institution” both is and is not a function of the signature of Jacques Derrida, who at once wishes not to “brand or take over” Greph (“I in no way commit or direct the group,” he says (71), just as, in the interview “Negotiations,”¹⁰ he cultivates a certain distance and detachment in regard to the International College of Philosophy), but who at the same time—and in the same place—recognizes that “it is not fortuitous” that “I at least appeared to take the initiative, in a seminar I conducted, in forming Greph” (71)—and Derrida says explicitly that this must not be forgotten or left out of the analysis. At one and the same time, therefore, the counter-institution comes before-after Jacques Derrida, or the signature of Jacques Derrida, by dint of an always undecidable and disruptive temporal sequence brought out in the contingent necessity of this compact of proper names, or, in other words, this counter-signature. Indeed, if Derrida effectively inaugurates, anticipates, and thus preempts Greph, the group must therefore bear the hallmark of one who, as we have already been told, is a latecomer, one who comes afterward. And even if we regard Derrida as an exceptional figure of the group, rather than its founder, the sense of pause or delay is only compounded, since (as he will not let us forget) Derrida was undeniably there at the beginning! The whole thing must have been slow in getting started! Rather like the “political,” the counter-institution—the “counter” itself—seems to get delayed or held up in deconstruction, drawing its particular and peculiar force from a constitutive hesitation, but one similar to philosophy’s interminability or irreducibility—its ongoingness—in relation to decision or action (brought out by deconstruction). Never fully present in deconstruction’s own register, then, the “counter” might nevertheless be taken

to name or sign (improperly) for deconstruction, however surprising this may seem.

As Bennington has written elsewhere, it is precisely the separability of the name, by means of which it functions in the absence of its object or referent, that works to de-nominate, depropriate, or, in other words, announce one's death. Meanwhile,

the signature, and this is precisely what distinguishes it from the proper name, attempts to catch up again the proper we have seen depropriate itself immediately in the name. . . . The act of signing, which is not to be reduced to the simple inscription of one's proper name, attempts, via a supplementary turn, to reappropriate the propriety always already lost in the name itself.¹¹

One way in which the signature aspires, however impossibly, to recuperate presence or to restore the "proper" is to always to date itself. (Of course, dates can be falsified, just as signatures can be forged.) Dating the signature represents the attempt to catch up with presence or with the present, and indeed it is principally this dating that legitimates the signature, or the "proper" of the signature, within the law. Yet the signature acquires validity only on condition of its repeatability. The signature *becomes* a signature not at its point of origin but at the point of repetition. The "first" or initial "signature" simply is not one, since the function and value of a signature depend upon it being comparable to itself. Which is not the same as saying "the same as itself," since one *must* sign again in a *different* place and time before the signature and the signature's validity are recognized as such. Which, much less than an inscription of identity, indicates a structure of difference/deferral: *différance*. This, then, is how the signature is *credited*. Thus:

Any signature is a signature only on condition that it call or promise a countersignature. Derrida invokes the example of travelers' checks, which one signs before departure, but which have to be countersigned on arrival if one is to get one's money, the validity of this countersignature being guaranteed by its resemblance to the "original" signature. To accelerate the demonstration, let us say immediately that any signature is no more than a promise of a countersignature.

(157)

The "counter" always already arrives late in the signature. As it turns out, it is always already before the signature (the signature is

always already countersignature), and yet all the time must come after it(self). The counter hides in the signature, like the “counter” in deconstruction, or in the texts that Derrida signs. (Deconstruction is after all, as it turns out, always counter-deconstruction. Under the counter of deconstruction, that is.) The counter hides itself, but it must (belatedly?) come, with the force of a promise, or of the promissory structure of the *to come*. (We might even say that the counter opens a line of credit for which one signs, always.) In taking a position of any kind, therefore, the counter-institution must always negotiate with the demand to fulfill itself in an action—this demand is, of course, unavoidable, just as the taking of positions will always be a necessary contingency—but it must do so by way of negotiating with that which *calls* or founds it, that which affirms it, which must be linked, here, to the disjunctive temporality of the “counter.” Such a negotiation is at once always already urgent and yet utterly interminable.

If, for deconstruction, the “counter”—for example, the “counter” of the (counter)signature—irreducibly entails this sort of temporally disjunctive shuttling, back and forth at once (a delay, a detour, a pause, a hesitation, a slowing down or a failure to catch up, a lack of punctuality, a precipitateness, a line of credit; but also a repetition that always already defers to the other, an other [a counter?]) that is from the outset concealed in the “self,” the “same” or the “proper,” waiting to come), then, needless to say, this makes it particularly difficult to reinscribe the “counter” within the logic or narrative of orthodox “radical” activism or “radical” action in its classical conception. Deferral/difference/without-presence is always already part-trait of the “counter,” and the “counter-institution” (Geph) and counter-signature (Jacques Derrida) are *necessarily* to be associated with a certain “belatedness,” which might better be understood as simply something other than presence in the conventional sense. Viewed in this way, counter-institutions cannot be founded *simply* in order to undertake the task of urgent “radical” action as asked for in standard leftist discourse, although of course they can always mute a little the question of deconstruction—or, in our new or counter-coinage, *counter-deconstruction*—in order to negotiate and demonstrate a solidarity with, even an activist intervention in, certain “political” causes. (This solidarity would be both the most and least hypocritical of all.) What I am saying here risks sounding more than a little dismissive and condescending in regard to those involved in such causes, but on the basis of the discussion so far, it is meant to suggest that there is an *other* radicality of the “counter” (that which puts radicality itself in

question), which actually warns us against reducing counter-institutions, or indeed the call for counter-institutions, *merely* to direct activist causes or programs of any kind. That is to say, counter-institutions may and should participate in such struggles, but they should also remain irreducible to a logic of self-justification on such terms. This *other* radicality of the “counter” found in deconstruction, then, implies that counter-institutions must not be founded with such straightforward limitations in mind. Or rather, since such limitation is indeed literally *impossible* as a foundation (given the trait of the “counter” as or in temporal disjunction or *différance*), such institutions would give rise to an unwanted paradox: in aiming to strike *solely* at the “possible,” the “doable,” the “pragmatic,” or, in short, the “present,” they would—as “counter-institutions”—limit themselves precisely to the impossible. An odd yet unavoidable insistence, this: in its most radical guise, the counter-institution will never be as timely as we would wish it to be. Yet, to somewhat reverse the equation found in “The Principle of Reason,”¹² where Derrida cautions that simple assertions of academic freedom and of the ideal of autonomy often permit vested interests to dominate university research and activity in ways that are all the more powerful for being surreptitious, such a “radical” counter-institution would—in the excess of the counter’s disjunctive *différance*—necessarily retain a certain independence in relation to partisan interests and concerns, while at the same time bearing a founding trait that remains far from indivisible (the irreducible *différance* of the “counter”) and thus always structurally open to the “other.” In fact, I would even venture to say that this founding trait—that of the “counter,” in the sense that I am developing here—might provide not just the principle but the *force* of resistance to those vested interests that, as Derrida has shrewdly noted, often take sly advantage of the humanities’ sense of impartiality or ideal of autonomy for their own benefit. In “The University Without Condition,” for example, Derrida explains how “commercial or industrial interests” that “sponsor” science and technology departments bring about a funding situation by means of which the humanities can be made vulnerable and indeed may even be held hostage in institutional terms (206). This can happen, then, not despite *but precisely because of* the humanities’ sense or ideal of independence. (In imagining it has no “ends,” the university is subjected to ends that may not be its own or of its own making.) In contrast, however, the irreducible nonalignment of the counter-institution would nevertheless entail the divisible trait of the “counter” as its founding characteristic, promoting a structure that preserved first

of all an openness to alterity, the coming of the other in “itself,” and that instituted—along the lines of the “Declaration of Independence” as analyzed by Derrida elsewhere—“a complicated relation between the backward of the *après coup* and the forward of the future anterior” (to quote Tom Keenan’s description of Derrida’s analysis in the interview “Negotiations”).¹⁵ In short, this new “sovereignty” of the counter-institution would much less mimic the timeless autonomy of the traditional humanities (which, as Derrida shows, has all too often caused the humanities to become susceptible to “external” abuse) than act instead as the force of resistance to threats of partisan domination, continually reinstituting itself according to the destabilizing momentum and disjointed temporality of the “counter” trait. Indeed, if one reads Derrida’s various remarks on the founding and activities of the International College of Philosophy (notably in “Negotiations”) it becomes clear that—without a permanent chair or program and without given orientation, including that of “autonomy” or “neutrality,” which would themselves not be excluded from the analysis—the College provides something like a model for the counter-institution, precisely along the lines of the “counter” logic I am here seeking to rethink.

“Counter” Definitions

But let’s break off to look at some dictionary definitions that might impinge upon the counter-institution, remembering to respond along the way to the question—which might become an accusation—of whether we are merely engaging in wordplay. The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes a very full entry on the word “counter,” which itself takes a while to negotiate. (Perhaps the seven entries that follow might serve as a playful accompaniment to the “seven theses, seven propositions, or seven professions of faith” with which Derrida concludes “The University Without Condition.”)

(1) “Counter” is first of all principally to encounter, to *meet*, to engage in contact. The assumption that this “contact” involves the opposition of wholly realized entities, utterly distinct and fully constituted *beforehand*, only really comes *afterward*. (Here we glimpse once more the counter-temporality of the “counter.”) To “counter” is thereafter—and only thereafter—to go counter *to*, to act or speak in opposition *to*, so as to check, oppose, contradict, or controvert, or to lie or tend in the opposite direction, thus having an opposite tendency or working to the opposite effect. Yet the idea of exchange, not as what happens *after* forms, essences, or identities are fully formed and

distinguished, but as that which in fact *gives* definition here, returns nonetheless in the “other” meaning or set of meanings surrounding the word “counter.” Thus the “counter” is defined as one who counts, reckons, or calculates, or alternatively, it is an apparatus or instrument for keeping count, or anything used in counting or keeping account, or a table or desk for counting money or keeping accounts, such as a bureau or a banker’s or moneychanger’s table. (In just a while, we will have occasion to come back to the complexly woven economic meanings and allusions found in the definition of “counter.”) Here, far from being the aftereffect, symptom, or outcome of an existing division, it is the “counter” that itself divides. It divides in a number of senses: whether in the sense of a body or machine which tells, reckons, computes; or in the sense of an object, specifically a piece of furniture, which orchestrates spatial and hierarchical relations, relations of value and law, identity and difference, by manifold processes of *division*. That is, the tradesman stands *behind* the counter, goods are sold and money paid *over* the counter, while “under the counter” is used with reference to illegal or clandestine transactions. It is the “counter,” then, which itself divides. As it must do, since as we have already seen, the supposedly “clear” distinction between things, forces, or sides does not really preexist the “counter” itself, which would then become merely the *scene* rather than *agent* of, say, confrontation or conflict. Instead, the allusion to a full and firm opposition only occurs *after* or on condition of that which it must in fact presuppose. However, this in turn means that such division is always going to be provisional, precarious, violent (an incision, perhaps a decision, a game of chance; in other words, an *institution*, one that is therefore always already crossed by the “counter”) since it does not divide between one thing and another on the strength of an essential difference (why, indeed, would it need to? —the division would already be *there*). Once again, the violence comes *before*, not *after*, all taking of sides, all definition. An originary violence, then. With such violence, the “counter” comes before itself. Born of the violent disjunction “between the backward of the *après coup* and the forward of the future anterior,” the counter-institution must always negotiate this (nonnegotiable) violence with which it heaves.

(2) The *OED* tells us that in “later times” the “counter” is used chiefly in keeping an account or reckoning in games of chance. One cannot fail to notice the number of references to sports and games in the dictionary entry. In skating, “counter” refers to a turn in which the body is revolved in a direction opposite to that in which it was

revolved in the previous turns. A complicated piece of choreography, this, a twist or turn against itself and yet, one imagines, part of a single movement or rhythm. In fencing, meanwhile, “counter” is a name applied to all circular parries, that is, parries in which, while the hand retains the same position, the point is made to describe a circle, passing under the adverse blade so as to meet it again when the latter is “disengaged,” removed from engagement. This is also called a counter-parry. One imagines a complex play of feint and counter-feint, a well-known and carefully rehearsed yet highly disguised maneuver in which disengagement is really just *feigned*, not principally by the subject of the attack — whose engagement is, notwithstanding, characterized by a certain detour, a circling movement — but in the outmaneuvered movements of the other. In broadsword, the *OED* informs us, the “counter” is a play in which an attack is made as the adversary himself leads to attack; in pugilism, it is a blow delivered as the adversary leads off. To “counter” is therefore to give a return blow while receiving or parrying the blow of an antagonist. It is to strike with a counter-blow designed to make use of the force of the other. And the swordsman or pugilist *waits* in order to make use of the other’s force. Here, I am reminded of a boxing story by Jack London, where the weaker contender, near to defeat, resorts to a tactic known only to the battle-weary. By way of a carefully timed feint and counter-blow, he strikes hard at the muscles in the upper arm of his opponent, doing the most damage possible, since the muscles are taut, ready to strike. This is done both to lessen the impact and to hurt his adversary to the limit of the weaker contender’s abilities.

Making use of the other’s force or weight is also a way to describe what we call leverage. In connection with a reading of Derrida’s “Mochlos,” I have discussed in a number of places the conditions of possibility of leverage in the university.¹⁴ Leverage entails a counter-force. The lever is used to exert force against the body that resists it, and it operates by means of that other body’s own pressure. Along the lines of such leverage, Derrida in “Negotiations” subscribes to a “truly Nietzschean axiomatic” (one we also frequently associate with Foucault):

Force is always a “difference of force.” Force is differential, there is not a substance of force. When one says that force is differential, what one is really saying is that force is not something. It is not something that is stabilizable, which would fall under phenomena.

(35)

We might say, in other words, that force — both the concept and force of force — is always counter-force. A force against force and against the concept of force (the idea that it is “something” and might be phenomenalized as such) — this is what allows force (counter-force) to happen.

“Counter,” the “counter,” is therefore the very place, we might say, where highly organized games of chance take place. Where the carefully calculated taking of risk happens. The “counter” is a gambling chip cast across a surface, a baize, a whole field or domain that plays host to a multitude of stratagems and ruses that seek to gamble with the incalculable. No wonder, then, that the “counter” is, in its very definition, so closely tied to a series of sports and games. And the dictionary is, of course, also this: a house or home *par excellence* of a calculated taking of risk, of organized games of chance, of an interminable effort to negotiate — or gamble — with the incalculable. This is obvious enough, of course, when one considers the multiple and *différent* definitions — the counter-definitions — of “counter” we are currently investigating. Thus, while the series of sporting references found in the dictionary obviously do not contain or exhaust the various meanings of “counter,” neither can the “counter” be considered a master name or “proper” name, a byword, a “counter,” for this series. For the counter must participate in the set it partitions, not least since it cannot transcend the game of chance, the taking of risk, the gamble, upon which its definition (in the dictionary) is staked. “Counter” is always caught up, then, in the wholly im-proper place of its own definition. A little further on in the *OED* entry, a “counter” is, in early use around the fourteenth century, a counting house, while in the fifteenth century it comes to describe the office, court, or hall of justice of a mayor and yet also, at the same time, the prison attached to such a city court, notably a debtor’s jail, in, for example, “London, Southwark and some other cities and boroughs.” Under the counter of proper trading and the offices of the authorities, then, “counter” turns into a prison-house where, presumably, the inmates continue to gamble with an indebtedness that remains irredeemable. (Here, where the references to gaming cross themselves with an incalculable and clandestine economy, the “counter” both leaves us in the dictionary and takes us beyond mere wordplay.)

(3) In a dense crisscrossing or exchange that takes place across — and, indeed, under — the counter of dictionary definitions, then, the counter shifts place from house or home (the dictionary itself as ostensibly the scene of the “proper”), to public exchange and official

offices, to the gambling table and prison-house. In his essay “Reading and Writing—*chez* Derrida,”¹⁵ Samuel Weber conducts a lexical-etymological survey of the word *chez* and its antecedents, finding hidden—or waiting to come—in this little word a variety of possible meanings or senses. *Casanier*, for instance, meaning “homebody,” finds its origin in *casenier*, which in turn is derived from *casana*, in Italian, “a bank.” *Casenier*, then, refers to an Italian merchant residing in France. “Like its referent, the word is itself an émigré,” notes Weber (90). Through the migrant displacements of language, definition, and translation, the émigré is found to abide, at root, in the stay-at-home, therefore forcing it to wander. *Casemate*, meanwhile, “another Italian émigré, this time from the word *casa-matta*” (90) means, literally, a madhouse. Figuratively, it designates a false or phony house, and may be associated with *matar*, which in Spanish means “to kill.” The madhouse may not be too far from the slaughterhouse. *Case*, originally meaning small house or cottage, later refers to a square or box, the spatial dimensions of which may be reproduced on a game board. Today, however, *case* indicates the highly structured cellular subdivision and compartmentalization of space, as would be found in pigeonholes, while the meaning of *casier* relates to the safekeeping of belongings. Yet “this most organized member of the family *chez* also bears the marks of the disorder it seeks to master: the *casier* is the inscribed record of infractions,” Weber tells us (91). Not surprisingly, then, *casa* gives rise to *casino*, “a house of organized, authorized transgression, and above all, games of chance” (91). Finally, at the very end, then, the counter turns up—albeit in a figure or movement of indebtedness and infraction rather than one of redemption—to (dis)organize the “proper” place of more respectable institutions like the mayor’s office, court, or hall of justice, the bank, the *OED*, and no doubt the university. Which turn out to find their definition right alongside games of chance, which are therefore never so easily confined or locked way in some other place.

(4) Elsewhere in the dictionary, “counter” is the name given to an imitation coin or a token used to represent a real coin. Hence rhetorically the counter is contrasted with real coins, as being only their temporary representative or counterfeit. This is also applied to debased coin, and contemptuously to money generally as a type of thing of no intrinsic value. The latter extension is of special interest, since it hints furtively at what this particular usage is designed officially to deny. Despite the long-standing history that accompanies attempts to divide and distinguish between the two,

counterfeit money and “real” money operate in very similar ways. Money, in other words, is just like counterfeiting (in this, it is akin to the countersignature that already resides in the signature). It is already a force that disrupts or, rather, fakes the relation between sign and referent. Counterfeiting, then, mimics and reproduces a discrepancy and a fraudulence that money itself generates. Money always already relies on the counterfeit in order to function. Once again, an originary violence, division, disruption, and fraudulence—namely, that of the “counter”—gives rise to the very institution which afterward turns or sets its face against the “counter.”

(5) “Counter” means to go in the opposite direction, and therefore to go back again, for example, in a direction opposite to that which, in hunting, the game has taken. In hunting, therefore, one follows the scent or trail of a game in the reverse direction. “Counter” is also defined in the *OED* as “against the front (of anything), in full face,” yet full-frontal opposition here is linked awkwardly to—or confused with—a certain turning away, a certain going back. That which opposes in full face also returns or *goes back to*, as our example of counterfeit money (and of the bank and the casino) amply demonstrates.

(6) Going back to the debtor’s prison in “London, Southwark and some other cities and boroughs,” the *OED* tells us that the official spelling of this meaning of “counter,” from around the seventeenth century, was in fact “compter.” If one follows coin and coinage as it passes through the dictionary, this comes close to “computer.” Indeed, if one consults a different source, the *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins*, we are told that in English, “count,” in the sense of “enumerate,” comes ultimately from the Latin word *computare*, meaning to calculate.¹⁶ Thus *computare* is the source of the English word *compute*. It is interesting, here, that through the twists and turns of coinage, we discover the indebtedness of the computer, we find the computer in debt, which presumably renders it unable to realize or fulfill its function properly, correctly, currently. (An inestimable interest or investment that crosses countries, cultures, and histories of the usage of “counter” means that the computer cannot repay its debts in the here and now—in other words, it cannot compute.) Indeed, the *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins* informs us that the English *compute* comes from the Latin *computare* via the Old French *conter*, which carries the sense of “adding up and rendering an account.” It is this function that gets scrambled, or at any rate reprogrammed, amid all the delays, deferrals, distortions, and hesitations—the short-circuitry—of the “counter” as it passes through (and transforms) the

dictionary-machine, the dictionary counting-house and casino. Here, then, the computer cannot reckon or calculate in a way that results ultimately in balance or closure. Derrida, in “Negotiations,” tells us that one must negotiate with (and within) the counter-institution—and thereby pursue a counter-logic, a counter-politics—according to “knotted speeds or rhythms . . . knotted differences of rhythm” that, for Derrida, provide an “unimaginable, unrepresentable, unobjectivizable” (28) image of the institutional body (yet “every institution is this,” he insists). Derrida therefore writes:

In the *knot* of negotiation there are different rhythms, different forces, different differential vibrations of time and rhythm. The word knot came to me, and the image of a rope. A rope with entanglement, a rope made up of several strands knotted together. The rope exists. One imagines computers with little wires, wires where things pass very quickly, wires where things pass very slowly: negotiation is played along all of these wires. . . . Also, cables that pass under the sea and thousands of voices with intonations, that is, with different and entangled tensions. Negotiation is like a rope and an interminable number of wires moving or quivering with different speeds or intensities.

(29–30)

Knotted together here almost indistinguishably we find all the threads of the counter-institution’s disjunctive temporality (hidden in all institutions) and the different and differential rhythms of modern global technology, as if the untimeliness of the “counter” turns out to be surprisingly timely. Or as if the computer’s inability to finally settle all debts in the present—which would suggest both its fraudulence and its structural affinity with the ostensibly “outdated” technics of the (counter)signature—in fact *resonates* with the force of the counter-institution itself. Is this a message (if it is one) that is slow in coming, that may never come, or one that accelerates through an “interminable number of wires moving or quivering with different speeds or intensities”? In the interview “The Deconstruction of Actuality,” Derrida speaks of the “one thing that one cannot accept these days—on television, on the radio, or in the papers”: namely, “an intellectual taking his time,”¹⁷ and yet the different temporal rhythm of, say, the media is not linked here solely to effects of cultural acceleration or to the collective contraction of attention span that undoubtedly at times silences some intellectuals or drowns out their voices. Indeed, in another interview, “Nietzsche and the Machine,” Derrida

questions or complicates the idea that history is now speeding up by saying that “it is well-known today that acceleration—a question of rhythm and of changes of rhythm—does not simply affect an objective speed that is continuous and that gets progressively faster. On the contrary, acceleration is made up of differences of rhythm, heterogeneous accelerations that are closely related to . . . technical and technological developments.”¹⁸ In “The Deconstruction of Actuality,” then, the temporality and speed of new media and technology are presented according to just such complicated rhythms:

This other time, the time of the media, gives rise to another distribution, to other spaces, rhythms, relays, forms of speech-making and public intervention. What is invisible, unreadable, inaudible on the screen with the widest audience may be active and effective, either immediately or eventually, disappearing only in the eyes of those who confuse actuality with what they see, or believe they do see, in the window of the “superstore.”
(89–90)

Such a situation—just about as contemporary as it gets—“always leaves one to hope or count on the untimely” (90). Precisely, to *count* on it, according to the different and heterogeneous “rhythms,” “relays,” or “distributions” we find stored in this little word.

To put it another way, “*différance* is a movement of deferral and difference that allows for the temporality of now and is immediately concerned with this moment now,” as Richard Beardsworth comments while interviewing Derrida in “Nietzsche and the Machine” (248)—calling us to rethink what, for emphasis, we called the “belatedness” of deconstruction.

(7) Last definition of “counter”: in typography, a depression in the face of type, reproducing the effect of a counter-punch, or an equivalent effect got by engraving the punch; a space that is partly or wholly enclosed within a printed letter.

Teaching Deconstruction: Giving, Taking, Leaving, Belonging, and the Remains of the University

The Remains of the University and the Study of Culture

In an essay on “Literary Study in the Transnational University,” J. Hillis Miller tries to account for the hostility shown by some practitioners of a certain kind of cultural studies toward what is perceived as “high” theory and, in particular, deconstruction. Describing the emergence of cultural studies as a quasi-discipline, he remarks:

Insofar as cultural studies still depends on the traditional idea of culture as the production in a subject or subjectivity of an identity produced through indoctrination by a nation-state or by a subculture such as an ethnic or gender community . . . it was necessary to resist the questioning by deconstruction of all the key concepts necessary to this idea of culture. These include identity, agency, the homogeneity of a given culture, whether hegemonic or minority, the definition of an individual by his or her participation in a nation or community, the unbreakable tie of a text or any other assemblage of signs to its context. The questioning by theory of these concepts often needed to be side-stepped in order for the project of cultural studies and related new disciplines to get going. These key concepts are glued together by a reinstalled referentiality that can no longer afford to be put in question and remain in question.

(83)

For Miller, a cultural studies of this sort relies on, at the very least, a minimal degree of retention of such unquestioned “referentiality” as a condition of its need to thematize, narrativize, or interpret various texts, events, and artifacts according to a wider “context” (whether described as “historical,” “social,” or “cultural”) to which these phenomena remain unbreakably tied. A “context” such as outlined by Miller would of course need to be accorded, at bottom, a basic level of coherence for the analysis to get underway. Furthermore, insofar as—for Miller—this “context” would thereby establish a more or less generalizable framework within which might be understood the shaping of identity in particular instances, thus facilitating rather traditional ways of determining objects of cognition and knowledge, it could be considered to work so as to reanimate conventional ideas of the “self” or “agency.” In assuming that there is always a “context” for every “text,” in a way that could be comprehended in the above terms, a cultural studies of the kind described by Miller would reinstall the particular as an expression or exemplar of a more clearly determined situation or setting (history, nation, culture, society, ideology) that, in turn, might be considered to fuel critical misrecognition or reduction of the effects and implications of “transnationality” or “globalization.” Furthermore, in this case, the supposed exemplarity of the particular in its identity with the general would inevitably tend to prompt an account of, as Miller himself puts it, the “production in a subject or subjectivity of an identity” produced by a culture, whether it be hegemonic or minority: the assumed culture of nation-state or, as is more often emphasized nowadays, a subculture existing in some sort of relation to more dominant cultural practices and trends. In addition to this reinscription of knowledge in relation to the human subject, the founding of a certain kind of cultural study upon longstanding models of cognition, as described above, would reestablish cultural-studies practitioners working in this way as themselves knowing *subjects*. From this perspective, then, Miller would doubtless see certain aspects of the critical landscape of cultural studies—its not infrequent commitment to “identity politics” over the years, its shift of emphasis toward the participatory agency of subjects within contemporary popular culture, and even some versions of the debate about the ethics of cultural studies—as set up to reinstall the coextensivity of subjects of knowledge and knowing subjects in a way that would depend uncritically on deeply structured relations of reference, identity, and agency.

Miller therefore views cultural studies as, in the last analysis, based on a rather unquestioning reversion to more orthodox humanistic themes and modes of enquiry that he considers out of step with the “postmodern” or “posthistorical” moment. This prompts doubts for Miller about the political effectivity of cultural studies in general. Clearly Miller’s anxieties in this regard resonate with Bill Readings’s own misgivings concerning the effort to renew or reanimate political radicalism, which, in *The University in Ruins*,¹ he takes as an important issue in the orientation of cultural studies (102). For Readings, the end of the epoch of the nation-state brought about by the unstinting globalization of late capitalism and the apparently irresistible rise of transnational corporations has been accompanied generally by a process of depoliticization characterized by “the loss of belief in an alternative political truth that will authoritatively legitimate oppositional critique” (47). This is partly because the dereferentialization of culture that happens alongside the weakening of the nation-state begins to erode the distinction between cultural participation and exclusion, Readings tells us. But it is also because the modern or “posthistorical” bureaucratic state is much less fashioned on the basis of the traditional concepts and politics of national identity, instead reproducing itself mainly in terms of the “non-ideological belonging” (48) of more or less efficient operatives. The previously fundamental relationship between the state and the individual (understood variously in terms of longstanding conceptions of right, contract, and so forth) is therefore increasingly dismantled as the era of “transnationality” or “globalization” takes hold, and it is in these terms that the question of political inclusion or exclusion with regard to the (political) center becomes misleading if not obsolete. This situation is just as relevant for the university. With the onset of the logic and discourse of excellence, notions of communicative transparency within the more or less unified community of the university advocated by the German Idealists—or indeed the transactional models of communication within a horizon of consensus envisaged by the likes of Habermas—become increasingly untenable, even though the “generalized spirit of performativity” (Lyotard) characterizing excellence installs a supposedly cast-iron principle of translatability. This paradox occurs because the paradigm that customarily organizes and regulates the relationship between individual disciplines and the institutional formation of knowledge in general, according to longstanding notions of the shared ideals, principles, culture, and language of the academic community, is closely linked to the very same conceptual framework of

identity and unity that fashions the individual as a particular yet exemplary expression of the nation-state. For Readings, of course, this framework is irredeemably eroded in the “posthistorical” setting of the nation-state’s decline. It is precisely in this setting, then, that the university is in “ruin,” and this “ruin” cannot be addressed or resolved by any sort of traditional politics, since this would rest upon ideas and practices that the situation itself renders obsolete.

The impact upon Miller’s recent work of Readings’s description of the ruined university of excellence is perhaps most pronounced, therefore, where Miller develops his account of certain types of cultural study as somewhat out of step with the contemporary “post-modern” or “posthistorical” moment as one of “ruin” and “remains.” (This is the case despite the fact that whereas Miller underlines what he sees as the persistence of notions of reference and identity within the institutional and disciplinary formation of cultural studies, Readings places the emphasis instead upon a crisis of orientation in cultural studies as it is faced with the dereferentialization of culture and the problem of cultural participation this entails.) Indeed, in contemplating the “remains” that may survive (on condition of) this situation of “ruin,” Miller might well have resorted to Readings’s idea of a “*pragmatic scene of teaching*” (153) to offer an alternative to the image of cultural studies that emerges from his own work: that is, of cultural studies’ structural reliance upon the coextensivity of the knowledge of cultural subjects, on the one hand, and knowing subjects of culture, on the other. In *The University in Ruins*, Readings advocates the decentering of teaching today. This decentering entails just such a “*pragmatic scene of teaching*” as one that dispenses with the idea of the transmission of messages between preconstituted subjects understood as more or less autonomous or sovereign (in a traditional liberal, humanistic education, this locates the teacher as authoritative magister and the student as—notwithstanding—a free citizen free to partake of academic freedoms), in favor of a notion of “teaching and learning as sites of *obligation*” (154). Here, “in place of the lure of autonomy, of independence from all obligation,” comes an insistence that “pedagogy is a *relation, a network of obligation*” (158) constituted dialogically, and therefore *on condition of the other*. Such a network or relation radically interrupts or suspends orthodox notions and practices of agency, identity, and communicability. Miller’s “Literary Study in the Transnational University” would, however, suggest the following kind of argument: to the extent that cultural studies (as both an archive of academic study and a disciplinary procedure) draws upon

and reactivates a formal analogy between knowledge of subjects and the subject of knowledge, it will be inclined to recreate something like the orthodox model of communication in the classroom, despite various attempts to undertake or promote radical sorts of dialogue, plurality, openness, inclusivity, and exchange.

If theorists of the effects of “globalization” or “transnationality” such as Readings and Miller remain critical of the project of cultural studies, and if their work calls upon us to rethink its institutional and pedagogical strategies and ambitions, then such a rethinking nevertheless requires further reflection and development. In part, this is due to the fact that Miller’s (and to a lesser extent, Readings’s) depiction of cultural studies has been taken by some as far too partial and at times a bit ill-informed, failing to account fully for variants in the field as well as new work and perspectives within cultural studies that in fact operate to question and transform rather than reinforce the very same kinds of traditional concepts and procedures with which Miller in particular tends to associate the “discipline” in general. Above and beyond this criticism, however, the intellectual or critical “positions” with which these critics might themselves be associated beg a further kind of questioning. Both these critics have worked, written, and researched in fields strongly influenced by what is sometimes called “high” theory, and more specifically, their analyses and perspectives obviously owe a debt to deconstruction and to the traditions of thinking upon which it draws. In offering strong analyses of some important aspects of cultural studies, not least its institutional, disciplinary, and pedagogical setup, the work of Readings and Miller therefore calls us to reflect on deconstruction’s relation to teaching, its thinking and practice of teaching, especially in relation to the interplay with “culture.” Via a return to Derrida, we will therefore discuss the import of “teaching deconstruction” in view of the problem of “culture.” Close attention to Derrida’s work (and his teaching) may well provide us with a way of imagining precisely the kind of “network of obligations” in the classroom or lecture hall to which Readings gestures, whereby teacher and student remain embroiled upon the difficult, aporetic ground of teaching as an event both within and beyond “tradition,” which one can neither simply take nor leave. However, moving beyond the choice that is implied in the work of Readings and Miller, between viewing cultural study as either largely an ineffective symptom of or a rather sterile backlash against “posthistoricality” and “globalization,” my own inquiry will trace a perhaps more productive approach to the institutional,

disciplinary, and pedagogical instability of “culture” within Derrida’s work on culture and the gift. Here, via Derrida’s reading of Mauss, we find that the founding of cultural discourse or interpretation upon the “concept” of the gift founds the possibility of teaching today upon an unteachable situation, which might nonetheless give rise to a teaching in, of, or for the university that “remains.”

Teaching, Culture, and the Gift

For Derrida, the theory and discourse of “culture,” which has characterized an important feature of academic study in the humanities for some time now, inevitably and somewhat centrally raises the question of teaching. In *Given Time*, Derrida suggests that the interdisciplinary study of “culture” in fact rests upon the idea or motif of the gift as that which provides a way for academic discourse in the humanities and the social sciences to transcend or subsume more straightforward forms of “cold economic rationality,” by asserting the “symbolicity” of this very same “rationality.” For Derrida, as we will see, the work of Marcel Mauss constitutes a turning point in the historical development of this sort of study. Moreover, in thereby attempting to *give* an *account* of the gift, this very same kind of academic investigation leads to the experience of a fundamental aporia, since the gift—if there is any—must necessarily be diminished and even annulled at the moment it is accounted for. As Derrida points out, acknowledgment or recognition of the gift unavoidably involves giving something back, thus effectively subjecting the gift to a certain type of economic exchange that militates against its very idea. This implies that the study of culture, from which all sorts of accounts proceed, in fact rests upon that which, in a sense, must remain unaccountable. However, this aporetic situation not only intimates that the teaching of “culture” itself happens in an unteachable situation (as we will see, a similar sort of problematic also surrounds deconstruction itself). It also raises questions of the responsibilities (or, indeed, the irresponsibility) of any such teaching, which I will suggest need not only be negatively marked, but that might be affirmed as opening on to a new experience or possibility of responsibility or of the “ethical.”

In two essays, then, by Jacques Derrida—“The Time of the King” and “The Madness of Economic Reason,” collected together in *Given Time*—it is the discussion of the relationship between gift and exchange found particularly in Mauss’s *The Gift* that is seen to spark a vast shift from traditional forms of economism (those predicated on

more rudimentary base-superstructure or foreground-background divisions), through anthropology and sociology, structuralism and linguistics, to contemporary cultural study and interdisciplinary work generally in the humanities. For Derrida, Mauss's insistence in this study on the centrality of the concept of the gift epitomizes the pivotal moment at which social thought tries to transcend or exceed "cold economic rationality" by asserting economic reason's "symbolicity," thus affording, as Derrida puts it, "an account of religious, cultural, ideological, discursive, esthetic, literary, poetic phenomena," all organized under the general rubric of the "economic" (42). (Readings would doubtless view the interdisciplinary discourse of "culture" as a weak substitute for the erosion of longstanding notions of communicative transparency discerned by German Idealists within the more or less unified horizon of the university.) Resorting to the gift as a key question within economic thought and reason, then, allows academic discourse ultimately to imagine access to "*total social fact*"—or, in effect, culture²—by rethinking, disposing, and deploying the "economic" within the problem of the gift.

Now in *The Gift*, Mauss argues that gifts (in archaic societies in particular) function to establish complex systems and networks of exchange, reciprocity, debt, obligation, status, and deferment. However, while Derrida acknowledges the concept of the gift as "related to economy," he nevertheless asks "is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange?" (7). In other words, for the gift truly to exist or to be given, reciprocity, obligation, debt—as particular formations of the general principle of exchange—must be absolutely dispensed with or forgotten. The gift once identified as gift inevitably bears "the mark of a duty, a debt owed, of the duty not-to . . . even not to give back," although of course the acknowledgment of a gift as gift cannot avoid giving something back, in the form of the acknowledgment itself (this need not even take the form of gratitude since, as Derrida points out, a gift can amount to "hurting, to doing harm" because it "puts the other in debt"). Hence, recognition of the gift "gives back, in the place . . . of the thing itself, a symbolic equivalent" (12–13)—just as Mauss gives a symbolic equivalent, his book *The Gift*, in recognition of the gift which, ostensibly, it is about, but which, according to Derrida, it also effectively annuls through the particular kind of exchange (between the gift and *The Gift*) taking place. Thus the gift, as soon as it is acknowledged as gift (via academic parlance, wisdom, or teaching, for

example), leads by way of patterns of real and symbolic investment to property rights and relations that ruin it *as* gift. For the gift to be possible, the “ritual circle of the debt” (23) incurred by giving must therefore undergo what Derrida terms “effraction” or interruption, in a time that, paradoxically and impossibly we might think, constitutes itself as an instant. This—perhaps unattainable—spontaneity is nevertheless vital, because the gift, if it is to exist at all, cannot exist in a time characterized by deferral, by temporal lag or delay, through which patterns, cycles, circles of investment, accumulation, deferment, debt, and return unavoidably return. Yet formulating the concept of gift involves a recognition—“someone *intends-to-give* something to someone”—which obviously requires or takes a time. To this extent, as Derrida is well aware, the philosophical contemplation of and return to the problem of the gift—even the knowing *giving* of a formula that suggests the gift’s possibility/impossibility—leads us not away from methodological problems (those associated with Mauss, for example) but brings us straight back to the heart of them.

Crucially, this would furthermore suggest serious implications for teaching (that is, for *giving an account*) in the era of the interdisciplinary study of culture (on the aporetic “grounds” or impossible yet necessary condition of the gift).

The paradox of the gift as acknowledged by Derrida therefore threatens to trap cultural and critical discourse in a circle or cycle whereby the problem is compounded in the very process of unraveling and *teaching* it. As Derrida himself notes, the very context of his paper “The Time of the King” is characterized by “an unsigned but effective contract between us [addresser:addressee/donor:donee—the speaker and his audience, but now also the writer and the reader], indispensable to what is happening here, namely that you accord, lend or give some attention and some meaning to what I myself am doing by giving, for example, a lecture” (11). Even if dissatisfaction is expressed on receipt of the gift (the *teaching*) Derrida gives the donee (audience/reader), “even if in a little while we were to argue or disagree about everything,” nevertheless sufficient “good faith” is shown or enough respect and “credit” paid the event of such a teaching that it fulfills the terms of a contract, a calculated exchange. Yet this return to the logic of contract, and to the “ritual circle of debt,” generosity, and gratitude that typifies and surrounds conventions of public speaking and teaching in the academic setting, annuls any gift Derrida might hope to give, subsuming the much-regarded and wished-for “object” of analysis (namely, the gift itself, which, as we

have said, would also seem to establish the conditions of possibility for teaching in an age of the interdisciplinary study of culture) under the dense fabric of intellectual exchanges, investments, and approbations that intrinsically oppose it.

It is this very problem (a problem of *teaching*) that Derrida struggles with toward the end of his lecture. Here, he insists, “If one must *render an account* (to science, to reason, to philosophy, to the economy of meaning) of the circle effects in which a gift gets annulled, this account-rendering requires that one take into account that which, while not simply belonging to the circle, engages it and sets it off in motion” (31): that is, the gift itself, which exists both within the economic circle, contracted almost inevitably “into a circular contract” or logic of exchange, but which crucially also appears as the “first mover of the circle,” the prior or suppositional term of the “someone *intends-to-give* something to someone” upon which the circle or cycle, the whole economy, spins. It would seem that what Derrida is saying here is that the paradoxical and unresolvable conditions of possibility/impossibility of the gift produce themselves as a kind of incalculable madness, generating an irrational excess in excess of the circle’s economy, this “otherness” harboring the potential perhaps for a way out of the circular trap in which criticism seems to be caught with regard to the problem of the gift. And yet to *render an account* to someone or something (reason, philosophy, the economy of meaning) of this excess would surely entail a return to the logic of contract and calculation that this excess exceeds but also relentlessly “sets off [in] motion”? Indeed, Derrida in the same passage describes this “account-rendering” in terms of “the contract between us, for this cycle of lectures,” recognizing once more the ironic impossibility underlying the conditions of possibility of his lectures, his teaching, on the gift. Subsequently, Derrida wrestles with the need to render an account, if only of the possibility of a simulacrum of the gift, which in turn entails for him a question of desire: what impels Derrida toward this account-rendering? Why would he wish to commit himself, to obligate himself, to the impossible task of rendering an account of the gift?

The question is in one respect arrived at naturally, since, as we have seen, the issue under discussion provides a model, paradigm, or analogue for the difficulty of academic discourse and practice (teaching) itself: *giving an account*. But, of course, the problem is given a further twist when we recall that for Derrida, contemporary academic knowledge in the humanities—insofar as it deploys a discourse of culture in

a characteristically interdisciplinary institutional setting—is impelled by the gift itself. Cultural criticism or cultural studies, when speaking of the economic in ways that go beyond cold economism, must necessarily be speaking of the gift, since according to Derrida it is the category and concept of the gift that has allowed cultural study to maneuver itself into this position, to open its discursive formation of the economic as the discursivity (and, thereby, the interdisciplinary economy) of the economic. For the study of culture, the gift is always inseparable from the economic since without it, the economic could not be transposed into and spoken of according to its own terms of “culture.” Culture as an object of study or the organizing term of (inter)disciplinary activity in the humanities might therefore be thought to facilitate an academic discourse founded on the category of gift, which itself will therefore be required—even if this is not explicitly acknowledged—to work within the context of, to have recourse to, and thereby implicitly to *give an account of* the gift. And of course Derrida has drawn our attention to the impossible (impossibly tangled and fraught) conditions of such a process. Although again we need to note that this impossibility lies at the origins of cultural criticism’s possibility, since to say anything at all about the economic, and by extension about anything at all (since cultural criticism’s object is ultimately “*total social fact*” located within the “symbolicity” of the economic), it must somehow speak of the gift.

Hence, mirroring the problem of the impossible yet necessary possibility of the gift for contemporary cultural criticism and study, Derrida contemplates the paradoxical calling that urges him “to answer . . . for a gift that calls one beyond all responsibility” (31); that is to say, a gift that at once insistently calls for and (in absolute terms) renders impossible (a) *response* and *responsibility*. Thus, pursuit of the difficult question of the gift, even of the excess and irresponsibility of the gift, nevertheless again compels Derrida to move *responsibly* within the circles of credit, debt, deferment, respect, generosity, and gratitude/reward that constitute the economy of academic teaching, discourse, and community: this returns him and us to the impossibility of simply *giving* an account, of course.

The issue of (ir)responsibility therefore arises at the moment Derrida finds himself struggling under the burden of a need to account for the tantalizingly unattainable object of his interest (the gift), which is unavoidably “other,” the necessary yet impossible “other,” at the heart of his discourse (as well as at the core of cultural discourse); but which, it seems, is ceaselessly displaced and lost in the very process of

naming, identifying, speaking of it, *teaching* it. In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida’s reading of the philosophy of Levinas turns upon similar issues. In this essay, Derrida pursues the problem of otherness identified in Levinas’s claim: “If the other could be possessed, seized, and known, it would not be other” (91). The unattainability, by definition, of otherness within (academic) discourse and knowledge both sparks and frustrates the language and concept of the other, to the extent that the *phenomenon* of the other cannot encounter the other without friction and violence (just as cultural theory cannot encounter, know, or teach the gift as its founding principle without the experience of aporia, confusion, and conflict). And since the other *as* other cannot truly be included or spoken of within a discourse of the other, the friction or violence generated by any such discourse produces only a kind of violence against itself; just as the gift-account, since it requires the very same acknowledgment that entirely undermines it, suffers similar kinds of self-inflicted damage, perplexity, and disarray. Thus Derrida remarks that “discourse, therefore, if it is originally violent, can only *do itself violence*, can only negate itself in order to affirm itself” (130). However, this violence against itself is of course necessary for discourse to produce itself, to sustain itself, to be and to speak. Such oddly productive violence characterizes the antagonistic simultaneity of recognition and neutralization of the other within discourse (a simultaneity of the kind we have located in a study of culture predicated upon the gift).

In “Violence and Metaphysics,” however, it would seem difficult to ignore or repress the violence of a discourse of the other (that is, of discourse *itself*, which must always—impossibly—give itself to something, someone, or some other), without risking compounding the very same kinds of discord and turbulence that set the problem in motion. Even if we might imagine from a reading of Levinas that violence could be abolished by recognizing and respecting the irreducible alterity of the other, nevertheless such “eschatology which animates Levinas’s discourse would have to have had kept its promise already, even to the extent of no longer being able to occur within discourse as *eschatology*” (130). The possibility of an end to violence can only be stated through discourse—that is, through violence.

If the gift, as the sign of the symbolicity of the economic upon which the era of the interdisciplinary study of culture is founded, “calls one beyond all responsibility,” then nevertheless the obligation to render an account, to answer for, to *teach*, entails a violence that a critical discourse of culture would seem to effect as a condition of

its response (to the call of the gift). And for which the question of responsibility or of the “ethical” inevitably arises.

Teaching Deconstruction

Given that Derrida himself implicitly allies the question of the discourse and study of “culture” to a problem of teaching, with teaching thereby being found to be insistently or relentlessly “in” deconstruction, how might we account for the teaching given *by* deconstruction?

In all the literature written over the last twenty or thirty years concerning deconstruction as a philosophical or literary-critical practice, relatively little *concerted* attention has been devoted directly to the question of deconstruction and teaching, or, to go further, deconstruction as teaching, as perhaps *a* teaching.³ In one respect this is unsurprising, since it has often been the case that “deconstruction” has been presented and defended by its best proponents as neither a traditionally constituted philosophical system tending toward its own coherence and closure, nor an easily reproducible, stabilizable method of inquiry or analysis, nor a readily communicable or transposable “object” of cognition. As is well known, rather involved and complicated discussions have abounded in the critical attention paid to the writings of Jacques Derrida concerning the strongly complexified status, for deconstruction, of the “concept” and the “example,”⁴ of the relation of the particular to the universal, of transcendental, singularity, iterability, repeatability, communicability, and so forth. Thus, the usual instruments of learning and teaching, and indeed many of the methods and assumptions underlying them, seem so thoroughly brought into question by deconstruction itself that it is no easy matter to explain how deconstruction might actually *determine* itself pedagogically, although undoubtedly, in an obvious sense, “deconstruction” is taught all the time.

Of course, many of Derrida’s published writings have often stemmed from work done in seminars or lectures given on specific occasions, with the singular and performative aspects of such events often being carefully preserved and, indeed, presented as a condition of the thinking that takes shape in his various texts. Not least due to his involvement with *Graph* from the mid-1970s onward, Derrida himself has written directly at some length on the question of teaching, although insights into Derrida’s thoughts about how to teach deconstruction itself—if indeed any such thing were possible—are perhaps to be considered rare. Alongside the comments we have already looked at in *Given*

Time (which, although they deal in some manner with quite wide-ranging questions surrounding the issue of teaching, nevertheless fall well short of a *statement* of deconstruction's general relationship to pedagogy in all its forms), those pursuing the question of deconstruction and pedagogy might find a starting (and perhaps a stalling) point in the famous opening section of "The Double Session," with "quotations on the blackboard" that are "pointed to in silence." Alternatively, there is some discussion in *Living On: Borderlines* concerning the topic of the institution, language, and teaching. One might also turn to Derrida's various analyses of the thought of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger in its relationship to pedagogy and to educational institutions, particularly where questions of the language, politics, and thinking of nationality and nationalism are concerned.⁵ And in wider terms, of course, it should be recognized that a fairly constant interest in the university and in the institutional context of deconstruction itself runs throughout Derrida's writings, culminating most obviously in essays such as "Mochlos" and "The Principle of Reason," as well as suggesting itself in those texts that concern the setting up of the International College of Philosophy or the work of Greph, found in *Who's Afraid of Philosophy* and *Negotiations*. In the former work particularly, the question of teaching looms large, notably the teaching of philosophy at the time of the proposed Haby reforms in France. Nevertheless, amid these various writings, it remains possible to say that a clear and fully sustained statement on deconstruction's "actual" relationship to the teaching of itself, or a definitive guide to its own "teaching," has still not readily been forthcoming. Is this responsible or irresponsible on Derrida's part? I think one can speculate that this situation may provide a way for Derridean deconstruction to experience more fully fundamental problems and questions associated with teaching itself. That is to say, the performative dimension of teaching as an *event* (beyond the subject of a performative) forces deconstruction to assume or submit to rather than simply declare or resolve the pedagogical issues and problems with which it must necessarily concern itself. While bearing these broader, introductory comments in mind, then, I want concentrate for the remainder of this chapter upon two particular texts by Derrida, "Otobiographies" and "*Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand*," where—in some way or other—the question of teaching does raise its head (or rather, where it turns an ear, or raises a hand). This happens, in these texts, so as to engage once more issues of culture, community, communicability, and belonging, on condition of which academic and cultural discourse may well take place, today

or in the past, but also according to which it may also experience certain de- or trans-formations within the university that remains.

Deconstruction and Academic Freedom

Before coming to some particular remarks by Derrida on the topic of teaching and academic freedom—a topic that must inevitably re-engage questions of the subject, agency, knowledge, responsibility, and pedagogy, as well as of (academic) culture and community—I want to begin by establishing a setting for these remarks in terms of the overall focus of the essay “Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name.” Here, Derrida moves around and within the question of (a) teaching in the (proper) name . . . of Nietzsche. However, Nietzsche as a proper name—with all the effects a proper name induces—implies and underscores not just *a* teaching but a plurality of teachings: teachings of and for Nazism, but also of Derrida and of deconstruction (among many others). For Derrida, the politics of the proper name and the question of teaching in the name (of Nietzsche) takes us to a “place of a very dense crisscrossing of questions” where “we must approach selectively, moving between the issue of pedagogical institution, on the one hand, and, on the other, those concerning life-death, the-dead-the-living, the language contract, the signature of credit, the biological and the biographical” (22). Derrida indicates that we might pursue in these very densely crisscrossed questions a rethinking of the relations of a Nietzschean legacy and the cultural and educational institutions of Nazism, in a perhaps more restricted sense, but also that we will inevitably be called to touch upon wider problems concerning the relationships between scholarly and pedagogical mastery, the authority and legacy of the signature and the proper name, and the possibility or necessity of receiving or hearing any (such) teaching “otherwise,” with the ear of the other. In this essay, then, Derrida confronts the doubleness of teaching as, on the one hand, the supposed manifestation and perhaps inescapable effect of authoritative, self-crediting self-presentness, where the pedagogue or *magister* is concerned, but also, on the other hand, of teaching as unavoidably a different, anachronistic, untimely address to an “other,” and indeed a response called forth by an “other,” which—here, in Derrida’s attention to Nietzsche’s writing—inevitably occurs precisely as an effect of the supposed manifestation of self-presence and self-identity on the part of the magisterial teacher. (Derrida writes this of Nietzsche’s “autobiographical” and somewhat didactic text *Ecce Homo*:

“the life that he lives and tells to himself (‘autobiography,’ they call it) cannot be *his* life in the first place except as the effect of a secret contract, a credit account . . . an indebtedness . . . it cannot be honoured except by another.” Thus, “he does not live presently” [9] and “it is by doing violence to himself that he promises to honor a pledge in the name of his name, in his name and the name of the other” [10], even in the form of “I and I who recite my life to myself” [14].) Since the question of the effects of an authoritative, self-crediting pedagogy and the complex problem of teaching’s legacy and return here supplement each other according to a logic of the interlacing of *différance*, Derrida shows that we are called upon to witness, in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* and other texts, the complicated interplay between the living and the dead. The proper name alone inherits the credit opened up by autobiography (a “life of . . .”), for example, and this proper name is a name of death. More widely, it might be suggested that this interplay between the living and the dead, and between the legacy and the proper name, in fact structures the histories and relations of the academic institution itself. Certainly, as Derrida goes on to show, it is this interplay between the living and the dead (between so-called living and dead languages and living and dead cultures, as well as living and dead masters) that imposes itself precisely on academic institutions of the sort described and critiqued by Nietzsche, raising the issue of a thinking of the state in the age of the Enlightenment. In the specific case of Nietzsche’s understanding of his contemporary educational institutions as vehicles of the state, what is evident is a disfigurement of the mother tongue accompanying a return to a dead, paternal language. As Derrida writes: “Not only is the State marked by the sign and the paternal figure of the dead, it also wants to pass itself off for the mother — that is, for life, the people, the womb of things themselves. . . . How an umbilical cord can create a link to this cold monster that is the dead father or State — this is what is uncanny” (34–36). For Nietzsche, then, his interest in the state obviously entails thinking the state “otherwise” in relation to what Derrida has described as a statist problematic of education within modernity since the time of the Enlightenment.

Leaving aside the broader concerns of Derrida’s essay, concerns that nevertheless impose themselves on everything he has to say from the outset, Derrida prefaces his discussion with some very interesting remarks. At the beginning of “Otobiographies,” itself a text originally presented as a lecture at the University of Montreal in 1979 and followed by roundtable discussions involving a select assembly of distinguished colleagues, Derrida has this to say:

I would like to spare you the tedium, the waste of time, and the subservience that always accompany the classic pedagogical procedures of forging links, referring back to prior premises or arguments, justifying one's own trajectory, method, system, and more or less skillful transitions, reestablishing continuity, and so on. These are but some of the imperatives of classical pedagogy with which, to be sure, one can never break once and for all. Yet, if you were to submit to them rigorously, they would very soon reduce you to silence, tautology, and tiresome repetition.

(3–4)

For Derrida, it is neither that the academic conventions of a more or less orthodox pedagogy can simply be ignored, surpassed, or abandoned, nor that they permit themselves to be unquestioningly defended and thereby unproblematically reproduced. Rather, any teaching necessarily partaking of pedagogical tradition that tries nonetheless to remain wholeheartedly devoted to an unsupplemented reinscription or conservation of the method or the system that allows and enables it to set out will inevitably dwindle into circularly self-justifying practices that actually inhibit and eventually preclude everything to do with the *event* of (a) teaching: of teaching as a singularly performative activity and a finally incalculable form of address to—but, perhaps more so, *from*—the other. One can therefore neither simply take nor leave “classic pedagogical procedures,” and in fact, one must to some extent both take (partake of) and leave them at one and the same time in order for teaching to take place at all. (On closer inspection, then, Derrida's remarks would in fact seem to raise important questions concerning the possibility of a responsible standpoint on quite difficult and complex issues.) In the face of this complication of otherwise easily polarizable positions on the issue of pedagogical tradition, Derrida therefore proposes a “compromise” to his audience. This has to do with a deconstructive procedure that presents its practitioner as engaged in some sort of settling of accounts on a number of problems (however ironic or impossible this may seem, it is of course also unavoidable), rather than aspiring to the teaching of “truth” as such. Derrida anticipates that, for some, such an approach will seem too “aphoristic or inadmissible,” while others will accept it as “law,” and yet others will “judge [it] to be not quite aphoristic enough.” While it would be easy enough to translate such categorizations into very familiar groupings, perspectives, or positions regarding Derridean deconstruction in general, what is perhaps more interesting here

is that, on the basis of just this “compromise,” whereby deconstruction presents itself as neither just entirely inside nor outside “classical pedagogy,” Derrida begins to question or, one might even say, *recalculate* the possibilities of academic freedom in the very process of what would seem to be an appeal to it.

Derrida insists that, since he does not wish to “transform myself into a diaphanous mouthpiece of eternal pedagogy” (4), a fountain of self-proclaimed truth, untrammelled authority, and self-sustaining mastery (Derrida himself already having indicated the inevitable atrophying of any such teaching, although also its unavoidable persistence to some extent), his “compromise” or procedure is therefore one that would seem to somewhat liberate his audience or the “students” of his teaching, so that “whoever no longer wishes to follow may do so.” “As everyone knows, by the terms of *academic freedom*—I repeat: a-ca-dem-ic free-dom—you can take it or leave it,” he says (4). Here, Derrida not only alerts our attention to the somewhat contradictory elements inscribed within our usual evocations of pedagogical tradition, which stress both teacherly authority and freedom of inquiry. More than this, a certain ironic tone becomes evident, underlying what seems to be a quite deliberately repeated and emphasized insistence on academic freedom itself. For Derrida has already shown that any worthwhile teaching (such as deconstruction, for instance), positioned in an ambivalent or equivocal relation to “classical pedagogy,” neither simply frees nor binds the event or activity of (a) teaching in relation to (a) tradition. Derrida’s (teaching of) deconstruction in regard to the teaching of Nietzsche obviously cannot offer, to the audience or student of Derrida, a straightforward choice between unencumbered intellectual freedom, on the one hand, and absolute bondage to pedagogical mastery, on the other. Just as Derrida, by his own admission, can neither simply take nor leave “classical pedagogy,” and (for that matter) since any teaching worth the name must both take and leave it simultaneously, those that heard Derrida speak at Montreal in 1979 would, similarly, finally be bereft of any such choice forming the basis of a conventional appeal to academic freedom. To agree with everything Derrida would have to say, to “take” deconstruction in undiluted form, would be to absolutely submit to and thereby necessarily obliterate its teaching: that is, ultimately, *to take leave of it*. On the other hand, to absolutely reject or wholly take issue with, to entirely take leave of Derrida’s discussion or approach from the outset would necessitate, quite impossibly, either a complete departure from the conventions

of academic exposition that Derrida insists constitute the minimal level of intelligibility of his (or indeed any other) learned address, or otherwise would manifest an absolute defense of “classical pedagogy” —in which case, any dispute with Derrida, any supposed “taking leave” of him, could never take the form of an absolutely diametrical opposition, for reasons he himself already presupposes and makes clear. One can therefore never simply “take it or leave it” in regard to Derrida’s lecture, or for that matter, in regard to the teaching of deconstruction, perhaps even teaching itself, in general. Thus, it is not just that “classical pedagogy” and “academic freedom” as clearly identifiable categories or forms constitute contradictory or somewhat opposed elements that vie with each other, bringing an awkward tension to bear on accepted notions and norms concerning scholarly tradition and convention. Rather, it is that *both* “academic freedom” and “classical pedagogy” are themselves traversed or crosscut by differential traits that actually, paradoxically, bind them together according to the logic of the supplement, of the remainder, or of the “counter” or double bind.

It is this kind of recognition that orients Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche’s *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (1872). Here, Derrida observes that Nietzsche’s recommendation of the very strictest linguistic discipline, “as a counter to the kind of ‘academic freedom’ that leaves students and teachers free to their own thoughts or programs,” is not intended simply to “set constraint over against freedom” (33). Rather, for Nietzsche, it is possible to discern a more fundamental type of constraint underlying conventional appeals to academic freedom in the university, one that consists precisely in the fact that such constraint, as Derrida puts it, “conceals and disguises itself in the form of *laissez-faire*” (33). “Through the said ‘academic freedom,’ it is the State that controls everything,” Derrida remarks in discussing Nietzsche’s text. “In fact,” he notes, “the autonomy of the university, as well as of its students and professor inhabitants, is a ruse of the State.” From this point of view, “Nietzsche’s lectures can thus be read as a modern critique of the cultural machinery of the State and of the educational system that was, even in yesterday’s industrial society, a fundamental part of the State apparatus” (33). Such a perspective, emerging here from “*Otobiographies*,” might be linked to Derrida’s discussion of a statist problematics of education after the Enlightenment, which Derrida himself associates with one of the principal proper names in the philosophical tradition: Hegel. A fuller discussion of this problematics, found in the essay “The Age of

Hegel,” is one in which Derrida undertakes a patient and detailed historico-sociological analysis of the complex interplay between particular kinds of liberal and enlightened discourse on the one hand, and, on the other, the “mobile, subtle, sometimes paradoxical dynamic” of the given forces of civil society that in fact also emanate from, flow into, and circulate within certain missives Hegel writes to a representative body of the Prussian State: the Ministry of Spiritual, Academic, and Medical Affairs (which Derrida terms a “State bureaucracy in the process of organizing the nationalization of the structures of philosophical education by extracting it, based upon a historical compromise, from clerical jurisdiction” [4]). This is a correspondence, then, in which one can detect a very determined discourse concerning educational institutions “in the age of European civil service” (11), as Derrida puts it, being traversed by the differential traits that organize and distribute the complex relations of academic freedom and institutionalized constraint within an emerging statist rationale taking shape in the wake of the Enlightenment. Deconstruction’s reading of the philosophical tradition’s relation to educational institutions and their statist problematics in the age of the Enlightenment therefore establishes a setting in which Nietzsche’s (and indeed Derrida’s) suspicion of any appeal to “academic freedom” might be understood in terms of a rigorous rethinking of the complexly intertwined relations between academic freedom, orthodox pedagogy, and politico-institutional constraints. We cannot just “take” or “leave” these phenomena, their concepts and effects, without such a rethinking—which itself would neither simply partake nor take leave of them. One important implication here might be that the aporetic condition of (a) teaching (of deconstruction, for example), whereby one can neither simply *take it* nor *leave it*, itself provides a setting in which to use Derridean deconstruction—even as it thinks the *prehistory* of “postmodernity” or “globalization,” a prehistory that is obviously entwined with the era of the nation-state, the traditions of which, however, one might nevertheless neither simply *take* nor *leave*—to imagine the kind of dissensual academic community advocated recently by critics like Bill Readings and J. Hillis Miller. This would be a community not simply bounded by a horizon of consensus and sustained by the sort of communicative rationality advocated by the German Idealists or, more recently, Habermasian thought. Nor would it be a community underpinned by freedom of dissent as a notion indissociable from traditional claims to academic freedom—a notion that in fact presupposes at the more fundamental level an entirely common and shared understanding of

academic protocols and conventions. Dissensus of the kind that leaves all those engaged in the scene of teaching unable to either take it or leave it obviously implies a complicated network of relations and obligations that nevertheless *leaves open* the question of responsibility or of the “ethical,” precisely because, in the very event of teaching, such a question remains irreducible to the rationality and rational ground of autonomous subjects, or of *the* autonomous subject.

Monstrosity and the Performative

I want to conclude by returning to the performative dimension of deconstructive teaching discussed earlier. In his essay “Literary Study in the Transnational University,” J. Hillis Miller revisits the well-known encounter of Derridean deconstruction with the speech act theory of J. L. Austin. As Miller notes, for Austin, a speech act “depends for its efficacy on an elaborate context of protocols, rules, institutions, roles, laws, and established formulae. These need to be in place before the performative utterance is made” (179). Comprehensibility therefore depends on a complexly preconstituted framework establishing the conditions of formulation, transmission, and reception of any communication. However, this Austinian performative also presupposes the preexistence of a self as agent able to recognize, comprehend, and perform in the “context” in which speech acts can meaningfully take place. For Miller, the “self” or subject as agent and, indeed, the idea of a delimitable and coherent “context” to which a speech act might be said to “belong,” are characteristic features of the entire ensemble of concepts and categories that the experience of “transnationality” or “globalization” calls into question.

In contrast, then, Miller describes an “alternative kind of performative” that “creates the norms and laws that validate it.” Each such performative “constitutes a happening that changes decisively the surrounding context. It responds to a call or demand from an ‘other’ that can never be institutionalized or rationalized” (179). Hence the call of the “other,” which in this formulation brings the speech act into being, would have to preexist any subject or agent of cognition or communication. Here Miller, in affirming that the very idea of a speech act in this formulation is therefore a catachresis, is called on to quote Derrida: “As Derrida puts it, such a speech act is a catachresis that ‘while continuing to work through tradition emerges at a given moment as a *monster*, a monstrous mutation without tradition or normative precedent’” (179).⁶

If deconstruction not only affirms but engages in just such an “alternative kind of performative” in its teaching, or indeed *as* a teaching, then, via Derrida’s “Otobiographies,” we have already described how, precisely by “continuing to work through tradition,” it nevertheless gives rise to “mutations” (*leaving as taking, taking as leaving*) that also interrupt or exceed “tradition” or “normative precedent.” But the word *monster*, italicized for emphasis here, must surely be seen as a strong and somewhat shocking term to deploy when describing such “mutations.” Does deconstruction in its teaching or as a teaching really give rise or give birth to *monsters*? What can the “monstrous” or the “monster” really mean, raising its head or its hand (or turning an “other” ear) in the midst of deconstruction’s teaching?

In “What Is Called Thinking?,” Heidegger embarks on a thought of the gift, and a thought of the hand, that would in turn render thinking itself irreducible to the dictates of utility, trade, and technics that in various ways underpin all activity governed by the requisites of capital. Obviously, this thought of the gift and of the hand would therefore necessitate, in this very same setting, a thinking of the problem of university teaching itself. Heidegger writes that “the hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hand of the other. The hand keeps. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a (monstrous) sign.”⁷

In establishing some sort of relation between “man” and monstrosity, this passage provides the basis for a number of reflections that arise in Derrida’s essay, “*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger’s Hand.” Here, Derrida evokes and explores the weight and burden of the word *Geschlecht* in regard to the German philosophical tradition after the Enlightenment, and particularly in relation to the work of Heidegger himself. For Derrida, *Geschlecht* is a more or less untranslatable term that nevertheless variously comes to mean “sex, race, species, genus, gender, stock, family, generation or genealogy, community” (162), according to a number of somewhat fraught contexts that determine its sense and usage at different moments in this tradition. In broader terms, then, Derrida is seeking in this essay to embark once more on a series of reflections concerning philosophical nationality and nationalism in German, not least as part of a serious engagement with the problem of Heidegger’s relation to Nazism, which is to some extent put aside here but treated more fully in texts like *Of Spirit*. Derrida negotiates the term *Geschlecht*, therefore, in order to try to think and move among various notions of belonging that, in the German philosophical tradition since

the Enlightenment, determine different accounts of the national (both in the sense of national and of racist or biologicistic ideologies), as well as accounts of linguistic idiomaticity, and of the relations of humanity and animality that might also be taken to determine belonging where *Geschlecht* is concerned. It goes without saying that, for any essay that wants to evoke the topic of (the politics of) Heidegger's teaching (including, since it could hardly be excluded, the Rectoral Address of 1933) and its relation to a wider philosophical tradition, these are very deep waters indeed. Nevertheless, if it is possible both to recognize and set aside for a moment the obvious political stakes of any such discussion, one interesting aspect of Derrida's essay is the way in which it takes a number of Heidegger's texts to provide a setting for a closely woven set of questions having to do with nationhood, humanistic learning, the *Geschlecht* of the human, and the monstrosity of "man" in the hand that signs, carries, extends itself to the other, and (thereby relatedly) teaches. These questions would clearly impose themselves on the issue of the future of the university and the humanities, and of the (ruined) relations of teaching, learning, culture, community, and nation-state in the age of global capital, which have so interested critics like Bill Readings and J. Hillis Miller in recent times.

Heidegger's hand, the hand that raises its head or hand in "What Is Called Thinking?" is avowedly monstrous. This is the hand that crafts, gives, signs, and teaches in ways that interrupt or exceed all the various activities that characterize the bureaucratic and technocratic regimes of the modern university as the place of science and technics serving the wider interests of capital. But, asks Derrida:

Why "monster"? . . . What is *un monstre*? You know the polysemic gamut of this word, the uses one can make of it, for example concerning norms and forms, species and genus/gender: thus concerning *Geschlecht*. I shall begin by privileging here another course [*direction*]. It goes in the direction, the *sens*, of a less known sense, since in French *la monstre* (a changing of gender, sex, or *Geschlecht*) has the poetico-musical sense of a diagram that *shows* [*montre*] in a piece of music the number of verses and the number of syllables assigned to the poet. *Monstrer* is *montrer* (to show or demonstrate). . . . *Le monstre* or *la monstre* is what shows in order to warn or put on guard.

(166)

In the very context of questions of "norms and forms," of belonging and community — questions that have imposed themselves within

and upon the thinking of the academic community ever since the days of German Idealism — Derrida finds a particular sense or type of monstrosity inscribed within the discourse or thinking of *Geschlecht*. Here, to show, to demonstrate, to alert attention, to warn, to instruct, or to *teach* is monstrous. Why monstrous? Turning to part of a well-known poem by Holderlin, “Mnemosyne,” which Heidegger returns to in “What Is Called Thinking?,” Derrida gives us to read Holderlin via the translation by Becker and Granel, the translators into French of “Was heisst Denken?”:

We are a “monster” void of sense
 We are outside sorrow
 And have nearly lost
 Our tongue in foreign lands

Leaving aside that which would lead him back too rapidly to questions of nationality and nationalism, Derrida concentrates on the “we, monster” of this evocation (167). (Here, it should be noted that certain effects attend his decision to read the French translation, since “*Ein Zeichen sind wir; deutungslos*,” the line from the poem on which Derrida concentrates, is more frequently translated as “we are a meaningless sign.” The sign may be not just meaningless but also “monstrous,” yet it is surely monstrous *as* sign.) Whether this “we” to whom our attention is drawn by Derrida is taken to indicate “man,” humanity, nation, or some other sense of *Geschlecht*, the monster that signs, “shows,” or “warns,” is singularly striking:

since, showing, signifying, designating, this sign is void of sense. It says itself void of sense . . . [W]e are sign — showing, informing, warning, pointing as sign toward, but in truth toward nothing, a sign out of the way . . . in a gapped relation to the sign . . . display [*montre*] that deviates from the display or monstration, a monster that shows [*montre*] nothing. This gap of the sign to itself and to its so-called normal function, isn't it already a monstrosity of monstrality, a monstrosity of monstration?

(167)

Setting to one side for a moment the various ways in which Derrida tries to locate this interrelation of monstrosity and sign in the broader framework of the development of Heidegger's thought, the monstrosity of the sign as described here would nevertheless seem to resonate with and reinvolve just the “alternative kind of performative” outlined by Miller. Instead of just pointing toward and remaining in

the grip of “an elaborate context of protocols, rules, institutions, roles, laws, and established formulae” that, in rather static ways, “need to be in place before the performative utterance is made,” this alternative kind of performative “creates the norms and laws that validate it,” and thereby necessarily shows in the (monstrous) form of showing nothing. Such monstration is therefore monstrous in the “gapped relation” of the sign to itself and to its “so-called normal function,” which of course has to do with the logics of presence and reference. Paradoxically, however, this monstration would at the same time obviously continue “to work through tradition” (to borrow Derrida’s phrase), since Derrida himself shows how the very question of monstration and monstrosity arises in the vicinity of questions of *Geschlecht* (of belonging and community; of [national] culture; of species and genus; of “man,” humanity, and animality; and of “norms and forms”) that not only characterize a long-standing philosophical tradition, but that may even be thought to supply the very conditions of possibility for a thinking and realization of the Enlightenment university itself. Akin to the idea of “monstration” Derrida pursues via a reading of Heidegger’s essay, then, the “alternative kind of performative” Miller associates with Derridean deconstruction would similarly work “through” tradition—here, more specifically, a tradition of *Geschlecht* or “belonging” to be discerned both in the “ruins” and in the “remains” of the university today. Yet it is important to recall that the performativity we are associating with the (Heideggerian) hand that shows and teaches as a de(con)struction of tradition is one that nonetheless “emerges at a given moment as a *monster*, a monstrous mutation without tradition or normative precedent” (to reprise Derrida once again). Not only would this facilitate (or, indeed, render inevitable) “mutations” proliferating in excess of the bureaucratizing and rationalizing forces of the scientific and technocratic university and indeed, the legacies of “belonging” that are tied to notions of (national) culture. It would also give a clue and a cue to the aporetic problem of teaching deconstruction as unavoidably the teaching of that which nevertheless remains virtually unteachable *as such*.

Such monsters as we are describing are the monsters of man or of man’s hand. Not least, this is insofar as they both embody “otherwise” and thoroughly deform the various projects of *Geschlecht*, which in fact underpin the essential traditions of the university and of the nation-state since the Enlightenment. These manmade monsters, monsters of man, might be affirmed as fertile mutations that productively distort the longstanding endeavors of humanistic study.

“The Fidelity of a Guardian”: The “Double Keeping” of Jacques Derrida

View of the University

“The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils” — perhaps one of Derrida’s best known and most influential texts on the question of the university institution — was first presented, in English, in 1983, as the inaugural lecture for the Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large Chair at Cornell University.¹ As Derrida notes in his paper, this was a time when he was closely involved in a complicated planning process that would eventually lead, that same year, to the establishment of the International College of Philosophy in Paris.² As we have already said, the political context for such an initiative was the election of a Socialist government in France in 1981, on a platform that included the proposals by Grephe to maintain and extend the teaching of philosophy in the French educational system. These proposals emerged in the wake of a groundswell of resistance to the so-called Haby reforms, which prompted the Estates General of Philosophy, held at the Sorbonne in June 1979. The activism of Grephe and the Estates General helped obstruct and reverse the proposed Haby reforms, and furthermore, a government committee was set up to explore the possibility of an international college of philosophy in France. “The Principle of Reason” must therefore be situated and read in terms of this “background” — one in which the discipline of philosophy and the institution of the university raise questions that,

for Derrida, demand both philosophical investigation and practical action. Indeed, in the various texts by Derrida associated with this period, the interrelationship between a series of well-rehearsed binaries—theory and practice, thought and deed, philosophy and activism, “basic” and “end-oriented” research—is subjected to an unremitting deconstructive interrogation. Here, Derrida repeatedly calls for strategic yet singular negotiations that recognize the heteronomous interdependency and supplementarity of such supposed “pairs” of opposites, notably in the interests of a more astute “politics” (as we shall see).

“The Principle of Reason” pursues such questions and issues, then, in view of the singular setting of Cornell University. Among a series of wordplays linked to the topology or scenography of Cornell as a campus university with its own architectural and geographical landscape and its own institutional discourse and history (or “topolitics”), Derrida links the question of the university’s *raison d’être* to that of the foundation of the university “with a view to what?” The question of the *view* from Cornell is therefore set in play by the importance it acquires in the very setting up of the institution. Derrida tells how Cornell’s first president, Andrew Dickson White (in whose name Derrida comes to be sponsored and to speak as a professor-at-large), persuaded the university’s trustees to reject the idea of a site “closer to town” in favor of another “at the top of East Hill,” on the twofold grounds of an inspiring panorama and the practical consideration of room for future expansion of the university (133). Here, then, the view from Cornell is linked both to the university’s “point of view,” its mission, ethos, inspiration, as well as its carefully calculated economic rationale; and its founding “in view of,” its reason for being. Indeed, for Derrida, the question “why the university?” *verges* on another: “with a view to what?”—where the *verge* itself reconstitutes the complex interaction between the philosophy that might be found at the university’s origins and the landscape (“topolitical” as much as “natural”) that establishes its institutional setting and setup (130). And since the view from Cornell’s heights is sharply vertiginous, this landscape is characterized by the “alternatives” of “expansion” (motivated by the expansive view of the “gorge” below) and “enclosure” (prompting proposals for the erection of protective barriers “to check thoughts of suicide inspired by the view”), which, in turn, translate the intense life-death relation which typifies the Romantic sublime (itself not unconnected to the histories of the modern university’s “reason for being”) (133–34).

If from the outset the idea of closing off the view provoked strong reaction from Cornellians, on the grounds that the university's very inspiration somehow inhered in the magnificent panorama it afforded, nevertheless the question of precisely what *might* be seen from its (point of) view (or from the perspective of its "institutional scenography" [133]) takes up much of Derrida's lecture. Indeed, more generally, Derrida reflects upon what remains *invisible* in or to the vision of the university. By way of allusion to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Derrida shows how, "from its first words on, metaphysics associates sight with knowledge" (130). Thus, sight has long been held as the privileged sense in the scene of desire-to-know. Nevertheless, Derrida suggests that sight alone may never be "enough" where teaching and learning are concerned. Not only is the faculty of hearing a vital element in the equation (and, as we have already discovered, Derrida elsewhere indicates that, in the university, we might need to hear otherwise, with the ear of the other), but it may acquire its particular resonance at the *expense* of vision: Derrida playfully suggests that "we have to know how to shut our eyes in order to be better listeners" (131). Furthermore, by reference to Aristotle's *De anima*, Derrida reopens an ancient distinction between animals with "hard, dry eyes, the animals lacking eyelids," which become terrifying in that they ceaselessly *see*, and "Man," "the rational animal," who is possessed of "that sort of sheath or tegumental membrane (*phragma*) that serves to protect the eye and permits it, at regular intervals, to close itself off in the darkness of inward thought or sleep" (132). "The university must not be a hard-eyed animal," insists Derrida, undoubtedly mindful of a complex series of relations including surveillance, power, control, mastery, knowledge, and desire, which accompany an unremitting gaze—such as in the Heideggerian "caricature of representational man," endowed with "hard eyes permanently open to a nature that he is to dominate, to rape if necessary, by fixing it in front of himself, or by swooping down on it like a bird of prey" (139). (At one moment in the essay, Derrida questions the Kantian proposition that the university should be governed by an idea of reason that covers "the whole field of what is presently teachable," [134] on the "grounds" [more and less than a ground] that the singularity of the scene of teaching, learning, writing, or reading—the unavoidable participation or "performativity" in regard to the object of enquiry—fundamentally undermines the possibility of a detached theoretical vantage point from which to view the totality of the field. Thus, in preparing himself "for the scene I will encounter as I speak . . . I feel

like a hunted animal, *looking in darkness* for a way out where none is to be found” [132, my italics].) Contrary to the desires of some Cornellians, then, one must in fact “lower the sheath,” raise the barrier, “adjust the diaphragm,” or narrow the sight, precisely in order to do justice to the *vision* of the university in more general terms (132). Not least, this is since the vision of the modern university (not just Cornell) is founded on a gorge, an abyss. Granted authority, legitimacy, and license since the Enlightenment by dint of the principle of reason, the question of the grounding of this principle is itself unanswerable, impassable, aporetic:

Are we obeying the principle of reason when we ask what grounds this principle that is itself a principle of grounding? . . .
Are we dealing here with a circle or with an abyss? The circle would consist in seeking to account for reason by reason. . . .
The abyss, the hole, the *Abgrund*, the empty gorge would be the impossibility for a principle of grounding to ground itself.

(137)

The idea or principle of reason that founds the modern university cannot itself be questioned or explored according to the precepts or practice of reason, since this presupposes a circular and tautological logic supposedly foreign to reason itself. And, in precisely this set of circumstances, any appeal to the self-grounding nature of reason leads to an impossibly heteronomous situation akin to the one that arises when we ask “what is the legality of the law?” For Derrida, the intractable nature of the problem does not imply a necessary move toward “irrationalism,” “obscurantism,” or “nihilism,” but rather brings into play an *other* rationality, perhaps more faithful, more attentive “to reason’s call” (138). For, surely, anybody “who tries to think through the possibility of that summons” must serve as a better guardian of the tradition of reason than others that “do not want to hear any question about the reason of reason” (138).

Nevertheless, following Heidegger, it therefore becomes possible to say that the institution built upon the principle of reason is also built on what must remain hidden in that principle, so that the “principle of reason installs its empire only to the extent that the abyssal question of the being that is hiding within it remains hidden, and with it the very question of the ground” and of the grounding of the ground (139). One of the effects of this suspension of the modern university—with all its interest and investment in positive knowledge—over a “gorge” is that it disrupts, dislocates, or deconstructs the distinction

between “basic,” “fundamental,” or “pure” research (research that is undertaken without a direct or immediate “view to,” as it were) and research that is “end-oriented” (“research that is programmed, focused, organized in an authoritarian fashion *in view* of its utilization” [141]). For such end-oriented activity in the interests of positive and applied knowledge (or technology) proceeds precisely to the extent that it leaves unquestioned the question of its ground, so that it cannot therefore escape the “circle” and “abyss” of the principle of reason while nevertheless unquestioningly reproducing reason’s precepts and practices, its norms and programs. (Derrida cites the example of the varieties of sociology, which “whatever conceptual apparatus they may have, whatever axiomatics, whatever methodology” never fundamentally question “scientific normativity” or the “objectification . . . which governs and authorizes their discourse” [149].) Thus, the vision of end-oriented research is maintained only to the extent that it loses sight of the very ends of its own ends, as it were. (The ends to which “end-oriented” research can be put are also “limitless,” unending, and therefore by no means always immediately in view, as in the (re)appropriation of scientific and technological advances by the State, the police, the secret service, or the military, a turn of events that can happen in countless, inventive ways.) Furthermore, since, as Heidegger reminds us, metaphysics *is* (or implies, or facilitates, or serves) a technics, what is produced in the field of “pure” or “basic” research can of course “always be used” (144). (Or can always be *of use*—even if only to keep otherwise potentially critical intellectuals busy in professional or career terms. Or, more broadly, can always be useful in upholding and resecuring the linkage between representational man and technological man, which involves a chain of connections running from metaphysics, knowledge, and expertise to mastery, technology, and instrumentality; from the university to its “outside”; and so forth. These are only some of the ways in which “basic” or “fundamental” research can be made to serve vested interests all the better for its supposed impartiality, as Derrida again shows in “The University Without Condition” [206].)

One must be attentive to the way in which this distinction between basic and end-oriented research unravels, then, not just to engage in abstract philosophizing or formal cleverness, but to better grasp a concrete set of conditions and relationships in the interests of a more astute political negotiation—more astute, for example, than any “politics” that might simply wish to defend “pure” research on the grounds of academic freedom, disinterestedness, and autonomy, and relegate

“end-oriented” activity as impure, derivative, partial. (“Ends” are not the be all and end all, for sure, but neither can they simply be brought to an end or even made “secondary” in some simplistic sense. One should be very wary of ends, then, but also wary of any perspective that imagines that, in an ideal world, the pressure that ends exert in some form or another might be dispensed with entirely.) Such a political negotiation would involve “a double gesture” or “double postulation,” observing—tirelessly, and with great caution—a strategic rhythm that plays itself out between the barrier and the abyss (150). Relatedly, the traditions of the university must be ensured in a very particular way, one that entails both a certain guardianship or “keeping” within a partitioned zone, and a renewed exposure to the (un-viewable) view of the “gorge” that inspires the university’s “vision”:

It is this double gesture that appears unsituatable and thus unbearable to certain university professionals in every country who join ranks to foreclose or to censure it by all available means, simultaneously denouncing the “professionalism” and the “antiprofessionalism” of those who are calling others to new responsibilities.

(150)

The suggestion here is that while (tellingly) contradictory names may be hurled from either camp, both traditional scholars and university activists of a standard leftist stamp fail to situate—and thus to understand—this call to a new kind of responsibility precisely because such a call *cannot* be situated according to those conventional oppositions that in fact give shape and structure to the very set of problems Derrida is trying to address and rethink. Thus the university or, for that matter, a counter-institution set up to question, renew, or transform the university’s vision cannot—as I asserted in an earlier section of this book—simply serve “outside” interests or direct and immediate ends, since this would be to miss the question of the metaphysical foundation and abyssal principle of grounding that always structures and informs its “reason to be.” And to miss such a question, unanswerable though it may be in terms of foundational thinking, would be to risk conforming too closely to the chain of connections that link metaphysics, representational man, and technological, “political,” or military instrumentality. But nor can ends simply be wholly shirked or shunned, since this risks exposing the university to “unrecognized ends” (153) or to its own marginalization or irrelevance. Instead, the university must assume responsibility for the divisibility of its own

trait, entering into a complex and tireless negotiation with its own impossible heteronomy in order to keep open the possibility of a coming of the other (and, therefore, of a future) beyond the twin figures of sovereignty and domination.

The impossible heteronomy of the university (the divisibility of its trait) means that it is caught between an unviable impulse to withdraw into its own fold(s), by way of traditional assertions of the university's rationality, unity, and autonomy, and a contrary desire to "represent" or "reflect" society. This, in fact, it has done—rather complicatedly—only on a "double basis," by giving society the chance for reflection in more than one sense. On one level, the university offers a self-reflection of society's "identity" in the mirror-image of its "organic" or "organicist" institutional body. On another, the university provides the conditions of possibility for a kind of reflection that implies (thoughtful) detachment or (contemplative) distance from the social world. Like a "prosthetic body" or supplementary "technical device," the university has therefore "*reflected society* only in giving it the chance for reflection, that is, also, for *dissociation*. . . . The time for reflection is also the chance for turning back on the very conditions of reflection" (154).

To turn back on "the very conditions of reflection" involves the effort, however impossible it may be, to bring such conditions into view. At the same time, in a certain way, it entails turning one's back on "reflecting" society. Indeed, it may even imply a turning of one's back on "reflection" in a much broader sense, in just the same way that to raise the fundamental-impossible question of reason's grounding in a noncircular or nontautological format leads us to suspend, hesitate, or "blink" over reason's customary practice, its norms, forms, laws, and programs. To negotiate "reflection" in the university therefore entails a complex relation to the "visible," in which, as Derrida puts it elsewhere in his lecture, "it is not a matter of distinguishing . . . between sight and nonsight, but rather between two ways of thinking sight and light" (139). Here, the university is imagined by Derrida as a "new optical device" with which "one could finally see sight, could not only view the natural landscape, the city, the bridge, and the abyss, but could 'view' viewing" (154)—although, of course, according to the logic we have been following here, to "view" viewing would no longer simply be a matter of rendering visible in normative terms. Instead, paradoxically, one could only "view" viewing by giving up the conventional distinction "between sight and nonsight" in favor of this other way of "thinking sight and light." Such a "double"

thinking is what distinguishes the faithful guardian of the university, since this double structure of reflection found at the (divisible) origin of the university calls for attentiveness to hitherto unrecognizable forms of seeing, hearing, and thinking, not least if the university is indeed to remain open to the possibility of a future beyond the impasse of sovereignty and domination. In other words, the true guardian must keep “what he does not have” and “what is not yet” (154–55). He must keep faith with, keep watch over, in the blink of an eye, in a tearing-up of time, a singular responsibility to what is “neither in his keeping nor in his purview” (155). This “double keeping or guarding” demands of the university’s faithful guardian that she gather in the form of a non-gathering, a gathering of what cannot be gathered: the (body of the) university, its origins or foundations, its vision, its traditions, its future, its “knowledge,” its teaching, what can be heard or seen of it or in it, its very *light*.

How might we attribute to Derrida himself this peculiar “fidelity of the guardian” (one that does not exclude itself from a certain betrayal, in order to “keep even the chance of a future” [154])? How will Derrida have performed such “double keeping”? I doubt there is a single text by Derrida that would not allow some kind of illustration or reading in these terms (an incalculable economy—a double keeping—binds them according to an always divisible trait, a sharing and a singularity in which what is kept remains always in question—the very chance of the future). But I want to single out just one, a singular example, fittingly I hope, since it deals with the university, teaching, and the gathering of light, precisely at the (torn up) time that marks the advent of the counter-institution (Grep) and the question of the anthological (the gathering of flowers) in *Glas*. My example will therefore be the essay “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends.”³ And I choose this particular text since, here, the question of guardianship is less a matter of “keeping” knowledge (as it might be construed in constative or informational terms or in terms of “content”) than one of keeping *faith* with the responsibilities of (the) profession, such as they come to be described, more than two decades later, in Derrida’s “The University Without Condition”:

Constative utterances and discourses of pure knowledge, in the university or elsewhere, do not belong, as such, to the order of the profession in the strictest sense. They belong perhaps to the craft, career, the *métier* (“competence, knowledge, know-how”), but not to the profession understood in a rigorous sense. The

discourse of profession is always, in one way or another, a free profession of faith; in its pledge of responsibility, it exceeds pure techno-scientific knowledge.

(214–15)

Here (as in the paper to which we are about to turn), the discourse of the professor takes its cue and earns the right to its name — precisely, that of *profession* — on the strength of speech acts or singular *oeuvres* in which what *happens* as an event cannot be assimilated, mastered, exhausted, or saturated by knowledge-based academic discourse or by informational conceptions of truth-content or value. Instead, keeping faith with (the) profession — far in excess of professionalism or professionalization (which cannot and should not, however, be entirely discarded) — entails a particular kind of performativity, the assumption of a certain theatricality, and an openness to the event. And amid such theatricality, performativity, or event-ness, we find entering in once more as irreducible conditions the “double keeping” and double way of “thinking sight and light,” sound and sense, all of which reinvoke the complex “institutional scenography” and dramaturgy to which Derrida alludes at Cornell. Lastly, Derrida’s profession, his double and perhaps duplicitous guardianship in “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends,” not only shares a divisible trait that opens on to other texts such as *Glas* but which may even open on to the future: a future that, as Derrida puts it in *Specters of Marx*, unfurls “without presence” in the “here-now.”⁴ For the interplay we find in “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends” between the gathering and non-gathering of light entails a certain virtualization of the “actual” teaching body — both of Derrida and, by extension, of the university (present-without-presence). This means that Derrida’s essay can productively be situated alongside more contemporary readings of today’s university, for example, Samuel Weber’s “The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge.” Here, Weber tells us that, up to this point, traditional academic scholarship saw its advancement as the pursuit of the *not-yet-known*, as if the unknown could be construed as just the negative other of knowledge. But with virtualization, today “the unknown becomes, as it were, the element or *medium* of knowledge, not merely its negative other.”⁵ For Weber, virtualization *as the condition of knowledge and of the university today* problematizes Bill Readings’s account, in *The University in Ruins*, of the dereferentializing *self-referentiality* of the University of Excellence. If virtualization *in and of the university* remains to be thought as a

question of the future, then just as “The Principle of Reason” unravels the conditions of sight and nonsight, visibility and invisibility at the heart (or the eye) of the university’s vision, so “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends” assumes and performs a certain virtualization (or *actuvirtualization*) of the teaching body more than two decades before Weber’s essay was written. Thus, long before its time, it keeps open the question of the future, tying its possibility to a series of relations and resistances shaping up around the “virtual.” For all these reasons, then, I would like to think of “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends” as one sign of the “fidelity of a guardian” engaged in a certain “double keeping.”

How a Teaching Body Ends and Where It Begins

At the very beginning of a seminar (1974–75), on the occasion of a single class, in something like a theater, cinema, or reception hall (since the classrooms of the Ecole Normale Supérieure prove too small and lack the necessary security), here we find Derrida, then, nearly a decade earlier, teaching:

So, here I am the teaching body
I—but who?—represent the teaching body, here in my place,
which is not indifferent.

(90)

Toward the end of the address, in which Derrida painstakingly analyzes the complex array of forces and interests that surround the Ecole Normale, which determine the professional function of the *agrégé-répétiteur* and the expectations placed upon candidates for the *agrégation*, which give rise to the history and question of national education and philosophical instruction in France, and which occasion the emergence of Greph in 1974, we encounter a quite extraordinary . . . what shall I call it? . . . passage, display, performance, series of last words, send-off:

In what way is this a glorious body?
My body is glorious. It gathers all the light.

(90)

A quip, a parody, a comico-theatrical rendition both of religious sanctification, Christ-like mastery, and enlightened illumination—the humor of which derives first of all, of course, from the electrical spotlighting that floods to excess the radiant teaching body of

Jacques Derrida. Epiphanic revelation is here exposed as the technical orchestration of light and optics, supporting and producing the distribution of spatial, visual, aural, and bodily relationships in the classroom, linking and separating in very particular and highly determined ways (hierarchy, deference, surveillance, silence, questioning, etc.) the teacher and his students or audience, as well as the—presumably—“invisible” technicians. Such exposure in fact serves to reflect or redouble the situation that the seminar itself seeks to analyze: a complicated network or machinery of “powers” and “forces in conflict, dominant or dominated forces, conflicts and contradictions (what I call *effects of différance*)” (79) within “a heterogeneous and divided agonistic field wracked with constant struggle” (69)—namely, the historico-ideologico-politico-institutional field of pedagogy—means that “there could therefore never be one teaching body or one body of teaching . . . one homogeneous, self-identical body suspending within it the oppositions (for example, the politics) that take place outside it” (80). The wondrous gathering of light into the teaching body therefore includes the originary supplement of the other, since this body only produces itself, or raises itself up, on condition of a series of divided or antagonistic relations with others, where antagonism can be defined, as Laclau and Mouffe have put it, “not from full totalities but from the impossibility of their constitution.”⁶

Thus, the teaching body is “glorious in that it is no longer simply a body” (90). In another parody of ascension and messianism, the Christ-like body transcends itself *as body* in a way that transforms and overdetermines rather than simply dispensing with this spectacle of physical forms, forces, relationships. This body, the teaching body, is, precisely, no simple body (rather than becoming “a body no longer”). What is no longer “simple” about this body is perhaps less a matter of theological intrigue than it is something to do with the advent of a certain virtuality or *actuvirtuality* (actual-virtuality) crosscutting to its very center this scene of teaching:

A body that in turn produces itself by erasing itself as the barely visible, entirely transparent, representation of both the philosophical and the socio-political corpus, the contract between these bodies never being brought into the foreground.

(90)

This body is visible as phantasm, phantasmic body, virtual image as physical effect of the machine. And it is constituted as itself, too, by what, in it, remains invisible. (Light gathers by way of a language or

discourse—“My body is glorious. It gathers all the light”—by means of which a nonequivalence, a nongathering, also occurs: the light that gathers is not and cannot be visible in this discourse or indeed in this text Derrida gives us to read, which emerges as or in something like the space of literature.) Indeed, the “erratic character of a certain remainder” (90) that is bound to accompany this teaching body as an effect of *différance* is at the same time “sublimated in the representation of at least one other teaching body”—the generality or “corpus” of pedagogical tradition, the philosophical institution, or national education—which it is supposed to translate with absolute discretion. This is the entire “corpus” of which the “glorious” teaching body of Derrida should therefore be “at once a part and a whole”—according to a complex and divided logic which is coming to light here.

Two lines of interest extend or emanate from this logic.

First line: The way in which “all light” gathers into this teaching body of Derrida (as the one who, on precisely this occasion, declares his own initiative in forming Greph) calls to mind the necessarily fragile reduction of the entire discursive practice—and conflictual force field—of psychoanalysis to the proper name of “Freud,” as analyzed by Samuel Weber in his essay “The Debts of Deconstruction.”⁷ Indeed, here Weber suggests an affinity between, on the one hand, this fragile reduction of psychoanalysis to Freud’s name as “origin,” and, on the other, the “noncontingent limitation at work in the Oedipus complex” described by Derrida in *The Post Card*, whereby the latter—the Oedipus complex—constitutes itself as a “reductive, regulative fiction, a part masquerading as the whole” of what Derrida describes as the “nebulous matrix” of the *fort-da* (106–7). As Derrida points out, what goes under the name of “Oedipus” might be said to distinguish only one of the “threads” or “sons” of this “nebulous matrix, with its chains of fusions or fissions, its permutations and commutations without end, its disseminations without return.”⁸ Nevertheless, as Weber notes, it becomes extremely difficult to account for such apparently unavoidable or “noncontingent” reduction, when just such reduction would seem to be “the condition of the possibility of *accounting* in general” (106). This aporetic situation surrounds the Oedipal reduction being discussed here, and also presumably envelops the circumstances in which the complex and unstably interwoven matrices of “psychoanalysis” are reduced to the name of “Freud” (not to mention those in which Derrida’s “glorious” teaching body “gathers all the light”). From this point onward, then, the “noncontingency” under discussion means that one cannot dispense with an

account of, as Weber puts it, “the manner in which an irresistible process of repetition assumes the aspect and the allure of a *proper name*” (108). Yet such repetition is one of the *fort-da* discerned, as we have just noted, in psychoanalysis, which more specifically plays itself out in a process of doubling that ties the conditions of *possibility* of the account to the conditions of *impossibility* of accounting itself (since an account can happen only on condition of the very same reduction that the account is itself required to describe or explain). If the proper name acquires its “allure” only via a process of reduction that ties it to a repetition that must be accounted for *as a function of the reduction that gives us the proper name*, and yet for which one can never adequately account, then the fragility of the proper name in regard to the “nebulous matrix” that provides its setting suggests not just impossible possibilities but imposes densely knotted and ultimately incalculable relations of desire, debt, disavowal, possessiveness, resentment, guilt—in this “interminable story,” as Derrida has put it, of the making of a name (of Freud, but also of Derrida—*as double-keeper*):

Benefit is derived, always, from this glorious erasure, from the glory of this erasure. It remains to be known by what, by whom, in view of what. Accounting for it is always more difficult than one believes, given the erratic character of a certain remainder. The same goes for all the supplementary benefits derived from the very articulation of these calculations, for example, here, today, by he who says: “I—but who?—represent a teaching body.”

(90)

Second line: a text first published in the same year as this seminar takes place, the same year as the founding of Greph (1974)—Derrida’s *Glas*, on the very question of “gathering” (among others). The gathering of flowers, here, as much as of light and of texts as figures of the body or of a body (where the figure would be no more “simple” than the body).

In *Glas*, Derrida uncovers the root of anthology—of the anthological—in the gathering of flowers. Yet in an immediate and obvious way, this rootedness (reference, grounding, literalness) becomes highly complicated in view of the flower as “the poetic object par excellence” or the very “figure of figures” so far as rhetoric is concerned.⁹ From which we must gather that the stem is perhaps less rooted than gathered. But how is one to *gather*—or comprehend—the flower, if it in fact determines the entire field within which—and of

which—it becomes the principal figure? A maddening, deconstructive logic gathers itself up here so as to arrest, block, impede gathering itself.

Glas gathers together Hegel, Genet, Sartre, visibly and invisibly, along with so many others. . . . *Glas*, with its two great columns, its two (tree-)stumps of writing, standing rigidly upright like pillars, like towers, or like tombstones, risking perhaps a fall into the deadening (castrating) monumentalization of the work. But two columns that are also wound about or wound around—two columns that indeed grow up from the ground—by what is planted and propagated in *Glas*, so as to compose the text “in liana and ivy” (18). “Liana and ivy”: namely, that which weaves, braids, binds, grafts, overlaps, and sews together the parts of the text that would otherwise appear to stand apart, banded erect. Genet, for example, “has made himself into a flower. While tolling the *glas* (knell), he has put into the ground, with very great pomp, but also as a flower, his proper name, the names and nouns of common law, language, truth, sense, literature, rhetoric, and, if possible, the remain(s)” (12).

It follows that the style of *Glas*, at its peak, would have everything to do with “the erectile stem—the style—of the flower” that, when the bloom flowers at the stem’s summit, nonetheless sees “the petals part” (21–22) and the flower head divide. The part of the flower (a point of de-part-ure?) in *Glas* concerns, then, this problem of the flower *as* an indispensable part, figure, or example of the whole of rhetoric or poetics (philosophy or literature are also necessarily implicated here)—which the flower nevertheless partitions, sets apart, distinguishes, determines, delimits *in general* in its function as precisely “the poetic object par excellence” or the very “figure of figures” (perhaps one might risk saying the “proper name, the name and noun”—yet the *as if* pronounces itself before the *as such* here). Thus, the flower as “figure” of the anthological effect or function (that of gathering) cannot simply be “gathered” or understood as the representative part of a larger whole or an entire body (which might alone furnish a unified framework, perspective, or standpoint from which decisively to *comprehend*), since it is the flower that *also* sets apart or gathers up that whole (body) as distinct, recognizable, apart. If, as Derrida therefore notes, the flower comes to “dominate all the fields to which it nonetheless belongs,” then, in a certain way, it simultaneously stops “belonging to the series of bodies or objects of which it forms a part” (14). By effectively setting apart that generality or “corpus” that would set it apart as exemplary figure or instance, the

flower becomes something more or something other than just another example of the whole (of rhetoric or poetics), so that in a certain way it therefore exceeds, overwhelms, interrupts, threatens to break the very same (daisy) chain to which it is strung. The flower, as anthological figure, function, or effect—as what is gathered—thus becomes, as Derrida puts it, “(de)part(ed)” (15). This powerfully recalls a certain virtualization or *actuvirtualization* of the teaching body in which all light is gathered—or, in other words, the ghost-effect that accompanies the resplendent presentation of this “glorious body.” No longer just a bit of a larger whole, but the very part that actually allots or partitions a generality, thereby effectively deconstructing its normative workings, the flower holds or harbors in itself “the force of a transcendental excrescence” (15). This “transcendental excrescence” suggests an odd outgrowth or projection, an “extra” part that both enlarges a figure (the flower), making it larger than the whole (of itself), larger than the rhetoric or poetics it comes to distinguish or define, but which also distorts, exceeds, ruptures, or interrupts the entire economy and very idea of a whole or of a generality of which it nevertheless remains an (excrecent) part. Obviously, one can detect here the logic of supplementarity inscribing itself at the very origin of what is supplemented. The anthological (gathered/not-gathered) “part” becomes an outgrowth, supplement, and origin of another body, which it both constitutes and deconstitutes, constructs and deconstructs. The teaching body, for example . . .

The flower—the anthological part that is (and is not) gathered—is “(de)part(ed),” then, by force of this “transcendental excrescence” that sets it apart from the “series of bodies or objects of which it forms a part.” The anthological (gathered/not gathered) part is therefore singular. The singular is not to be understood here in terms of that which is just uniquely individual. Rather, this “part” is singular in the sense that it is what insistently remains, in perpetual deconstruction if you like, after the problematic of “transcendental excrescence” which we have just described has come full circle. It is what grows out of this (near groundless) “ground.” (Or, it is perhaps what “appears” in the play of light, optics, visibility, and invisibility in which Derrida’s teaching body is cast.) It is in this sense also that the anthological or gathered/not-gathered “part” is, to recall Derrida’s term, “(de)part(ed).” It is “(de)part(ed)” in a ghostly sense, as that which nevertheless remains as remnant once the part and the whole are subjected to “the force of a transcendental excrescence” accompanying the anthological. These ghostly remains of the anthological

or “(de)part(ed)” part are therefore always already “at work in the structure of the flower”—the structure of the anthological as that which gathers—as a “practical deconstruction of the transcendental effect” (15).

To gather (flowers) is not only to weave, braid, bind, and graft, then. It is still, irreducibly and inseparably, to cut, to cut the head, to decapitate. As in Genet’s *Our Lady of the Flowers*, of which Derrida says, in *Glas*: “To be decapitated is to appear—banded, erect: like the ‘head swathed’ (Weidmann, the nun, the aviator, the mummy, the nursling) and like the phallus, the erectile stem—the style—of a flower” (21). To appear . . . like a ghost. To gather, then, is to decapitate, but decapitate so as to appear, like the appearance of a ghost, perhaps bathed in light.

Earlier, in this first class of the 1974–75 seminar at the Ecole Normale, the scene of his “Teaching Body” essay, Derrida tells us that the teaching body raises itself up as “transcendental phallus” (81)—so that the university, in its function as an institution that produces *signs*, is always bound to constitute forms of “knowledge” that are “belated,” derivative, secondary, lagging behind. But what does the anthological condition—*the gathering of light*—do to such an erectile authority, even to the very essence of the university (which must therefore gather itself “otherwise”)? What does it do to the “transcendental phallus” at the moment all light gathers itself to the “glorious” teaching body?

If “pedagogical practice always lags behind mores,” a proposition that perhaps neglects a certain heterogeneity in their relations, but which does not appear, globally, very questionable, then the outdated structure of teaching can always be questioned as repetition. That does not make less necessary any other specific analysis but rather concerns a structural invariant in teaching. It originates in the semiotic structure of teaching, the *practically* semiotic interpretation of the pedagogical relation: Teaching delivers signs. The teaching body produces (shows and puts forward) signs, or, more precisely, signifiers supposing the knowledge of a prior signified. In relation to this knowledge, the signifier is structurally second. Every university puts language in a position of belatedness or derivation in relation to meaning or truth. That the signifier—or rather the signifier of signifiers—is now placed in the transcendental position in relation to the system changes nothing: the teach-

ing structure of a language and the semiotic belatedness of a didactics are reproduced insofar as they are given a second wind. Knowledge and power stay on the level of principles. The teaching body, as organon of repetition, is as old as the sign and has the history of the sign. It lives from belief (what, then, is belief in this case and on the basis of this situation?) in the transcendental signified. It comes back to life, more and better than ever, with the authority of the signifier of signifiers, that of the transcendental phallus, for example.

(81)

Toward the end of his talk, Derrida suggests that the production of his teaching body through a gathering of light—in which we have discerned the anthological effect of a deconstructive relation of “part” to “whole”—entails a “cadaverization of my body” (91). Since the teaching body gathers all light in a way that also “erases” this body as “the barely visible, entirely transparent representation of both the philosophical and the sociopolitical corpus,” it appears as a “fascinating neutralization.” It fascinates by “playing dead,” by appearing to sever itself from the living tissue or anatomy, the “corpus,” which in truth vitalizes it—although this is precisely how it *becomes* a (teaching) body, while no simple body, the very “figure of figures.” Thus, this body is also, paradoxically, vitalized by the apparent severance—and it only *plays* dead. Yet it is “erected in the rigidity of the cadaver: stiff but without strength proper.” As Derrida notes, while it might be possible to detect a “vague equivalence between the negativity of death and that of a removal of writing” in the very movement of this logic or this discourse with which we are faced during the seminar, the body is nevertheless indispensable to this scene, and is insisted upon as much as deconstructed: “All the rhetorics of this cadaverizing erasure, then, are body-to-body relations,” relations of one (teaching) body to another, one corpus to another. Thus, the body is intractable in teaching, and in the very question of teaching, despite all those forces, interests, or effects that combine so as to “pretend to suppose or make one believe that my body has nothing to do with it.” Here, then, is how the teaching body ends and where it begins: gathered up by a “cadaverizing erasure,” it assumes the condition of the *actuvirtual* (actual-virtual), *as if* it were dead: an extraordinary double-keeping.¹⁰

Auditing Derrida

As long ago as 1995, a special issue of the *Oxford Literary Review* (17) was devoted to the topic of “The University in Ruins.”¹ The obvious reference in the journal’s title to the work of Bill Readings was triply underscored in its pages. The volume was dedicated to Readings, who had been killed tragically in an air crash during the previous year. The first essay in the collection, “Dwelling in the Ruins,” was by Readings himself. And the editorial introduction, written by Timothy Clark and Nicholas Royle, drew heavily on Readings’s contribution to the debate about the contemporary “crisis in the concept of the university” (4) — a crisis with ramifications that rapidly extend far beyond the conceptual realm. Thus, following Readings, the introduction speaks of the increasing “domination of market-oriented criteria of evaluation and control” in today’s universities, and the “growing dominance” within them “of criteria of value based on what Lyotard calls performativity — the maximization of ratios of input to output gauged in terms of an institution’s contribution to the enhanced self-perpetuation of the broader socio-economic system in which it is supposed to inhere” (4). Clark and Royle show how this situation gives rise to a “managerial appeal to a rhetoric of transparency and accountability” that serves to disguise the historical transformation of the university in terms of a self-evidently necessary “response to economic imperatives.” Such managerialism “often takes the form of establishing a common currency of criteria whereby intellectual

life can be compartmentalized and disciplines, departments, institutions or individuals compared, gauged and also—of course—set off against each other in a marketplace” (5). Thus, with the decline of the traditional idea, ideology, and cultural politics of the university inherited from the Enlightenment, a process described by Readings as “dereferentialization”—which devastates the university’s “content” by subjecting its activities to the tautological self-definition of “Excellence”—is accompanied by a growing atmosphere of audit.

Since it attempts to work through this logic, by means of which “Excellence” operationalizes itself at every level of the university, the introduction to this edition of the *Oxford Literary Review* is titled, fittingly enough, “Editorial Audit.” As Clark and Royle point out, audit doesn’t just find ways to evaluate its “object.” To a significant degree, it produces “fundamental changes” (5) in the university itself. This occurs on every plane. Scholarship is redefined as “research output,” to be calibrated into units of production that might be assessed according to criteria informed by economic and managerial pressures. The particular character of disciplines or departments undergoes continual redefinition and restructuring as the university succumbs to the modularization of its degree programs in the interests of administrative flexibility and control, which is in turn perceived—or presented—in terms of a need to be responsive to the marketplace. This set of circumstances is usually rebranded according to a weak idea of (the popularity or desirability of) “interdisciplinarity.” And audit systems are continually invented to “reflect” the very changes the self-same culture of audit helps to produce. Indeed, the instability of the “object” provides the rationality for new tiers, new regimes of evaluative machinery, shorn of any responsibility for the transformations and upheavals that, of course, they seek merely to capture in, say, a statistical picture of the academic world. Audit changes not just universities, departments, disciplines, and scholarship. It changes individuals. Scholars find it hard to avoid becoming professionalized as “career academics.” Academic work is often done to score career points, or it is pursued in the unspoken knowledge that its auditable value—increasingly, the sole indicator of merit—remains wholly indifferent to the nature of its intellectual claims or, indeed, its political orientation or implications. An ideology of assessable expertise or competence changes the stakes of risk-taking. Thus, it is hard for academics not to become passive or inward looking, even when their work might be thought to present a challenge at the conceptual level to the very system within which it is produced. In this context, one

might even say that to write a book such as this one, which ostensibly wants to challenge or rethink the contemporary university in all its characteristic forms, is inevitably just a self-regarding exercise, merely adding a further dimension of self-reflexivity to the production of academic “content” to which the system remains profoundly indifferent. One must be wary of this unavoidable risk, and endeavor to take it into account. At the same time, of course, to leave unacknowledged or unexplored the deep-seated impact—and constitutive force—of Excellence and audit would be to condemn academic work *in advance* to its current fate as an expression of self- or minority interest, a fate that the forces of managerialism, professionalization, and accountability have devised for it.

While the logic that unfolds from the pages of *The University in Ruins* and the “Editorial Audit” plays itself out in numerous and varied ways in different universities and different countries, it is telling that there is a transatlantic quality to the special edition of *OLR* in question here. The editors—British academics—take their cue from a British scholar whose reputation and career took shape alongside teaching posts at Oxford, Syracuse, and, finally, Montreal, and whose most important work was published by Harvard University Press. In addition, the contributors to this volume (of whom J. Hillis Miller is one) are drawn from both British and American backgrounds. The onset of a culture of audit is perhaps more rampant in Britain, where it is governed and regulated by state control and public management of UK universities. No wonder, then, that the editorial introduction concentrates on this particular aspect of the changing face of the university, or that more recent editions of UK-based journals have continued to focus on the same kind of issues, one example being a 2004 issue of *Parallax* (10, no. 2) entitled “Auditing Culture,” which includes contributions on accountability, government, public relations and the auditing of universities, the concept of an “audit society,” and ideas of “culture and management”—the last by Zygmunt Bauman. In contrast, North American academics contributing to these sorts of special issues of “theory-led” journals tend to spend longer analyzing the impact upon the university of globalization, consumerism, new technology, debates about citizenship in the post-civil rights era, and so forth. This is certainly true of the “North American” contributions to *OLR* 17. Another example would be a 2001 edition of *Diacritics* (31, no. 1), on “Theory, Globalization, Cultural Studies, and the Remains of the University.” This is not to say that American theorists have completely overlooked the implications of the rise of “Excellence” in

terms of an increasing culture of audit. Nor is it to say that they have simply limited themselves to Derrida's analysis, in "The University Without Condition," of the way in which vested interests in the university often cunningly exploit the humanities' sense of disinterestedness for their own ends, cultivating the "sponsorship" of science and technology departments in order to bring about a funding differential by means of which the humanities can effectively be coerced into fulfilling certain kinds of requirements and providing certain kinds of programs. While such a picture does appear to be closer to the American experience than to the current state of affairs in Britain, any image of the humanities' relative freedom from regulative constraint is fast being eroded in many American universities, according to rhythms of acceleration that depend upon the specific orientation, organization, and resourcing of individual institutions (the pace is quickened everywhere by a picture of rapid defunding). In other words, audit is coming to America. In some institutions, at some levels of the university nationally, audit (comprising performance targets, monitoring regimes, and systems of evaluation) is beginning to produce as much as evaluate its "object." And many if not all American academics recognize this. Indeed, much of the language and terminology of audit is just being reimported.

In Britain, meanwhile, the endgame of audit is becoming plainer all the time. The "Editorial Sounding" that introduces the "Auditing Culture" edition of *Parallax* states that "this issue . . . owes its initial impetus to a resolutely singular moment: the RAE [the Research Assessment Exercise, a national audit regime devoted to the evaluation of research and scholarship in the United Kingdom] fuelled closure of the former *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* at Birmingham University—an institution of singular importance for Cultural Studies' own founding myth."² At the other end of the spectrum, meanwhile, Michael Berloff, the current president of Trinity College, Oxford, has recently predicted that within the next two decades, Oxford will opt for independence and withdraw from the system of state funding, due to government interference in its student admissions. However one views the elitism which often fuels Oxbridge dons' disdain of the UK government's commitment to widening participation (which leads to quotas for state school recruitment being continually raised), it is clear that the public-management techniques that accompany the current model of state funding will inevitably result in the withdrawal of elite universities from the state system, limiting access to those that can pay considerable fees. The so-called Russell Group,

comprising the top nineteen higher-education research institutions in the country, will instead operate in a global marketplace, raising enough cash through endowments to go it alone. Here, one might be tempted to say that the United States is coming to the United Kingdom, so that the complex connections between “globalization” and “audit,” between public management techniques and the law of the marketplace, need more careful consideration than the simple distinction between the British and American university (probably no longer tenable in view of “globalization”) would imply.

In their “Editorial Audit,” Clark and Royle begin to explore dictionary definitions of the word “audit.” In particular, they concentrate on its connection with ideas of accountability and the authority this entails or implies. But they also draw on a more “obsolete sense of ‘audience’ or ‘hearing’” that “bears witness to the etymology of the word ‘audit,’ viz. the Latin *audire*, to hear.” “Redeploying this so-called obsolescent sense might permit us to suppose that new ways of thinking (in and outside) the university would be, first of all perhaps, new ways of hearing, right up to or maybe especially including the paradox of trying to engage with the *unheard of*,” they write (9). In what follows, I attempt precisely to redeploy this “obsolescent” or now almost *unheard of* sense, in order to suggest that the audit culture of today serves not only to silence academics and intellectuals but also to expose itself (in the university that remains) to *unheard of* ways of hearing and to impure yet undismisable testimony, promising to emerge as the “other” of its own deconstructible trait.

Balancing the Books

Let’s begin, then, by drawing attention to the range of meanings, the polysemic gamut, of this word “audit.” “Audit,” “auditory,” “auditorium”: in the first place, it puts us in the lexical and etymological vicinity of a *hearing*, and therefore an audience. To audit is to examine, to reckon (reckon up, reckon upon, or reckon with), but also, inseparably, it is to *hear*: An audit can be defined, for example, as an examination of accounts (in the *OED*, a “periodical settlement of accounts,” a “solemn rendering of accounts”) *by reference to witnesses*. Thus, an audit unavoidably entails a space (or spaces), a procedure or protocol, a process or structure, that is inextricably linked to the auratic, to the juridical, and especially to a certain theatricality, each in turn being closely connected to the other. As a hearing, or in its irreducible relation to a hearing (this “other” term hidden within itself),

an audit ultimately cannot suppose or uphold its own self-contained space or logic of identity, and by extension it cannot without a certain irony assert a consistent principle or set of principles at work, a pure systematicity being rigorously upheld, a formally reliable “internal” mechanism or methodology being confidently put in place. Instead, it simply must call for, address itself to, or take its cue from the *other*. Of course, the various derivations of this little word “audit” frequently imply the attempt to restrict, determine, institutionalize—and thereby stabilize—the space of what is auditable. Yet, notwithstanding this obvious fact, it is precisely in this very same context that a “relation,” a call, an address to the (ear of the) other becomes indispensable. The auditable is thus framed by a space whose borders are marked by the trait of a certain deconstructibility, by a limit that is continually dislocated at the very moment the audit seeks to impose and define itself, to make itself at home in this or that particular place, to assert territorial rights. The situation of audit, including the irreducible supplement of a *hearing* (in the confines of an auditorium, perhaps), would therefore obey the law of the parergon, whereby the delineation of the aesthetic form of the work, and by extension the identity of the object of cognition, turns out to depend upon the contour, border, or frame as its enabling condition. The constitutive function that the frame thereby acquires makes it an indispensable element in the composition of the object’s “form,” so that it cannot in turn be located so decisively as just the limit of the object, merely the “outer” edge of its formal properties. And, as Samuel Weber has told us, “just this participation” of the *other* in the Same “would require another frame,”⁵ not least if the auditable is therefore to continue taking *place* at all. And then, as this frame once more partakes of its constitutive function as an indispensable element in the composition of the “thing” in question, *another*. And then *another* . . . Such a situation, for Weber, comes close to describing what he means by theatricality (without, of course, giving it a simple form). An ongoing goings-on, a ceaseless dislocation that puts place continually into play. And that, at every turn, not only profoundly disorients the distinction between the “actors” and “audience” (in and of an audit, for example), but that also fundamentally undermines the taking of a disinterested, extraterritorial position—a standpoint—from which one might attempt judgment itself.

From this point of view—one that links the audit to a certain (one might say impossible) territorialization of space as place, or a theatrical goings-on—the figure of the Auditor might nevertheless recall Heidegger’s technological man, who “in the midst of beings [*physis*] to

which he is exposed [*ausgesetzt*], seeks to gain a stand and to establish himself” by means of a “process of mastering beings,” a process that is “supported and guided by a knowledge of beings. This *knowledge* is called *techne*.”⁴ In the university, however, it is no easy matter to gain a stand, as Derrida, reading Kant, has shown us. In “Mochlos,” Derrida suggests that just as the founding of the law cannot simply be a juridical question or matter, one either of legality or of illegality, so the founding of the university cannot merely be treated as a “university event,” bearing instead a kind of structural relation to an alterity that in fact precedes the distinction between the “inside” and the “outside” of the university “itself.” Since “there can be no pure concept of the university . . . due very simply to the fact that the university is *founded*,”⁵ a legitimation crisis arises and imposes itself from the outset, one that also raises the question of orientation in and for the university. Through a close reading of Kant’s *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Derrida suggests that Kant attempts to contain and control the violently disruptive and divisive energies of this intractable crisis by reducing it, localizing it, insisting on its nature as mere “conflict” rather than out-and-out “war.” Thus, as Derrida puts it, Kant “propos[es] for it a solution that is properly ‘parliamentary’” (28): the university is reconceived as a “faculty parliament.” In this solution, the higher faculties (theology, law, medicine) occupy the right bench and defend the statutes of government, while the left bench is occupied by the philosophy faculty, which offers “rigorous examinations and objections” in the name and pursuit of truth. The opposition that results from this “parliamentary solution” for Kant serves the higher purposes of a “free system of government” and therefore resolves conflict into a more fundamental image of unity and accord. However, borrowing from Kant’s own essay, “What Is Orientation in Thinking?,” Derrida points out that right and left are not classified or recognized according to “a conceptual or logical determination,” but only from “a sensory topology that has to be referred to the subjective position of the human body” (31). This means that as “directions,” left and right cannot be fixed in universal terms according to incontrovertible logical determinants or objective principles, so that the “parliamentary” opposition between left and right into which the university’s conflicts are projected and attemptedly resolved by Kant offers a no more reliable source of orientation for the university. As Timothy Bahti has put it, “when we use corporeal directions we mean, ‘Be like me,’”⁶ and therefore we address the other’s right as if it were a left, the other’s left as if it were a right. The resultant confusions between my left and another’s right

potentialized by this situation can be located not just in the subjective position of the human body, of course, but also in the sensory orientations collectively of parliamentary members within a body politic of modern, democratic, Western society developing after Kant. Thus, as Bahti points out with regard to certain modern institutions of government, “in the parliamentary situation, the left—the ‘opposition’—is located from the perspective of the president or the speaker, but the speaker’s left is obviously the left’s right” (62). Just at the point of seeking direction, then, the body (the “parliamentary” body of the university, for example) is suddenly disoriented, unbalanced, off-balance. Where exactly *are* we? In the university, technological man—Audit Man—indeed struggles to find his place or gain a stand. And so the idea of a “balance-sheet” so closely connected to the dictionary definition of our little word “audit” occasions a small burst of laughter.

The Ear of the Other

Perhaps, for the sake of laughter, we should try to *audit* deconstruction or Derrida. First of all, this means we should try to *hear* him. But how would one go about auditing or hearing Derrida?

In the previous chapter, we saw how “Otobiographies” announces itself by way of the attunement of an ear for deconstruction. At the beginning of the lecture, Derrida adopts a tone that seems just a little frivolous and yet, we can’t help but feel, unnervingly serious at the same time. It’s difficult to hear exactly where the accent falls here. Derrida says he wants to spare us “the tedium, the waste of time, and the subservience that always accompany the classic pedagogical procedures.” That is to say, he wants to loosen the restrictive garb of a traditional exposition, with which, nonetheless, “one can never break once and for all.”⁷ However, while the demands of classical pedagogy cannot simply be abandoned in their entirety, neither is it possible to adopt them with absolute rigor, since this “would very soon reduce you to silence, tautology, and tiresome repetition,” Derrida tells us. In other words, the host of academic conventions that surround orthodox pedagogical discourse and practice cannot just be adopted or assumed as a shared set of conventions permitting reliable auditability, but nor can they be rejected, replaced, critiqued, evaluated, or otherwise *calculated* from the stable ground of an extraterritorial vantage point. Rather, while the minimal relation to pedagogical tradition is unavoidable (a universal culpability, if you like), teaching will inevitably contract into a self-justificatory

circle if it attempts to remain absolutely dedicated to preserving the system, method, knowledge, or discourse that sets it in motion. For this would cancel in advance the possibility of the *event* of teaching, its performative singularity or incalculability as a form of address to—and *from*—the other, an other that ultimately surpasses the dialogical interplay or indeed the model of communication that it seems to invite. It is not possible, therefore, either simply to take or leave “classic pedagogical procedures.” In fact, in a certain way one must both take (partake of) and leave them for teaching to take its—therefore unplaceable—place. Parergonal double-bind again. At second glance, then, Derrida’s remarks—flippant or jokey though they might sound on first hearing—begin to raise important questions concerning the (im)possibility of a responsible standpoint on a number of complex issues having to do with teaching, accountability, auditability. As we have already seen, since one cannot simply choose or decide in the face of a conventional distinction or division (namely, between “taking it” and “leaving it”), precisely because the division unstably redivides in the form of an always deconstructible trait, Derrida proposes a “compromise” to his audience. Here, instead of speaking the truth according to an accepted model of disclosure or explication, deconstruction enters into an always risky and provisional settling of accounts on a number of problems. Once more, this settling of accounts is, needless to say, an impossible task, at least if one hopes for closure, balance, or resolution. Yet, of course, at the same time, it is therefore always necessary, unavoidable, and, as such, always ongoing. Derrida foresees that such a pedagogical approach or program will seem too “aphoristic or inadmissible” to many, while others will receive it as “law,” and some will “judge [it] to be not quite aphoristic enough” (4). As I have already noted, such responses could very easily be recast into a series of well-known standpoints according to which deconstruction is routinely “audited” (by those who wish to “take it” as much as those who want to “leave it”). But there is a more significant feature of Derrida’s “compromise,” which is worthy of particular mention here. For it is precisely on the basis of this “compromise”—according to which deconstruction refuses to place itself on either side of “classical pedagogy”—that Derrida begins to recalculate the limits and possibilities of the said “academic freedom” that in fact establishes the very *grounds* for just such an “auditing” of deconstruction.

Now, you will recall that in “Otobiographies” Derrida declares that he does not intend to “transform myself into a diaphanous mouthpiece of eternal pedagogy” (4). While its discourse undoubtedly resonates

with (and within) the teaching body of the professor, the audibility of deconstruction is here not reducible to the figure of the “mouthpiece” —including the entire ensemble of concepts of which this figure customarily speaks and of which much more could doubtless be said (for example, of the mouth as the “mouthpiece” of the head as the very seat of reason, the sovereignty of the subject, the living presence and indivisible truth of its speech, and so forth). Deconstruction must announce itself and be heard “otherwise” than by way of the mouth as “diaphanous mouthpiece.” Having already indicated the unavoidable deterioration of any teaching that models itself wholly upon the untrammelled authority and mastery of the professor, Derrida therefore adopts this “compromise” procedure that would appear —paradoxically, perhaps —to set free those that follow him: “As everyone knows, by the terms of *academic freedom* — I repeat: a-ca-dem-ic free-dom — you can take it or leave it” (4). Here, it is not just that the conflict or tension between teacherly authority and freedom of inquiry is exposed as an inextricable part of classic pedagogy. More than this, the repetition (for emphasis) of “academic freedom” doubles Derrida’s discourse with a certain degree of irony. Strong assertion is, precisely, belied rather than strengthened by repetition. For Derrida has already shown (and must now repeat by enacting it) that any worthwhile teaching —itself a category from which deconstruction cannot be excluded, if one follows Derrida’s logic here —simultaneously frees and binds one in relation to tradition. Derridean deconstruction of Nietzsche’s pedagogy in this text obviously cannot offer to the audience or student of Derrida a simple choice between unfettered intellectual liberty, on the one hand, or unremitting devotion to the pedagogue, on the other. By his own admission, Derrida can neither simply take nor leave “classical pedagogy,” precisely because any teaching worth the name must both take it and leave it simultaneously. Thus, those that hear Derrida give this lecture are, by the same logic, ultimately deprived of any such choice forming the basis of a traditional appeal to academic freedom. Derrida has already told them as much, although since the message itself does not arrive by way of the “mouthpiece,” the discourse calls for an altogether different and perhaps impossible attunement, which the ironic tone both invites and blocks. Or, rather, one might say that this tone redoubles a certain blockage. For to agree with everything Derrida says would be to “take” deconstruction in undiluted form (however impossible this might sound) —but the logic at work here dictates that such absolute consent would bring teaching to an end, forcing us to take our leave. On the other hand, to wholly take issue with and

therefore take leave of Derrida's discourse right from the start would entail either (1) a total departure from the traditions of academic exposition that Derrida insists constitute the indispensable condition of intelligibility of his learned address (or, for that matter, any other) or (2) an absolute conservation and defense of "classical pedagogy" in its most traditional guise—in which case any refutation of Derrida, any such "taking leave" of him, could never take the simple form of a clear-cut opposition, for reasons that are enacted as much as explained in this text. That one can therefore never simply "take it or leave it" in regard to "Otobiographies," deconstruction, or indeed teaching itself, once more reactivates the problem of the parergon, the question of theatricality, the predicament of judgment, and the quandary in which "audit" finds itself. Just as Derrida takes the stand, then, it is virtually impossible to reckon with or count upon the event that perhaps takes place here, or—in other words—to audit what one hears. And this calls for a different kind of response and responsibility. As we have already said, being able neither to simply take it or leave it leaves us in the impossible yet unavoidable position of a dissensual academic community, neither bounded by a horizon of consensus and sustained by a conventional rationality of communication nor defined by freedom of dissent as a notion that in fact guarantees, at bottom, the indivisibility of academic tradition, protocol, and community. Dissensus of the kind that leaves all those engaged in the scene of teaching unable to either take it or leave it suggests a highly complex field of negotiation, but one that nevertheless allows the question of responsibility or of the "ethical" to resonate—even if this can only be "heard" according to an acoustics that remain a bit impossible, a bit mad. In the very event of teaching, the question of responsibility is reopened precisely because it cannot simply be reduced or referred to the rationality of the subject as autonomous, sovereign, volitional, self-conscious, free, etc. Inevitably yet a bit impossibly, a theatrical or parergonal space is opened, in which responsibility, obligation, indebtedness, accountability, or auditability all need to be recalculated "otherwise," by means of an "other" ear that can never simply hear or audit.

"Where There Is Evidence, There Is Not Testimony"

The idea of the audit as a *hearing* suggests two concepts, themes, or motifs that appear to be closely related but, as Derrida points out, may in fact be incommensurable with one another: evidence and testimony. Evidence—an "evidence-based approach"—is one of the

mainstays of the current Quality agenda in Britain, which itself serves to refine and further operationalize the ethos of Excellence. And, of course, evidence and testimony when taken together form a crucial part of a juridical technique or technics that includes the theatrical and the auditory. (Taking the stand, as much as taking a stand.)

Testimony and evidence, then, seem to go hand in hand. But the relationship of testimony to evidence in the sense of factual “proof” or reliable information is problematized by Derrida in a number of texts. In “Demeure: Fiction and Testimony,” for example, Derrida explains how testimony can only justify its name on the strength of its radical incommensurability with an informational or knowledge-based conception of truth. He writes: “But if the testimony always claims to testify in truth to the truth for the truth, it does not consist, for the most part, in sharing a knowledge, in making known, in informing, in speaking true.”⁸ (It may be interesting to note here that Derrida’s argument in this section of “Demeure” brings us close to his remarks about profession in “The University Without Condition,” where “constative utterances and discourses of pure knowledge, in the university or elsewhere, do not belong, as such, to the order of the profession in the strictest sense. They belong perhaps to the craft, career, the *métier* (‘competence, knowledge, know-how’), but not to the profession understood in a rigorous sense. The discourse of profession is always, in one way or another, a free profession of faith; in its pledge of responsibility, it exceeds pure techno-scientific knowledge.”⁹ The discourse of the professor takes its cue and earns the right to its name—precisely, that of profession—on the strength of speech acts or singular *oeuvres* in which what *happens* as an event cannot be assimilated, mastered, exhausted, or saturated by knowledge-based academic discourse or by informational conceptions of truth-content or value.) Thus, in “Demeure,” Derrida goes on:

As a promise to *make truth*, according to Augustine’s expression, where the witness must be irreplaceably alone . . . testimony always goes hand in hand with at least the possibility of fiction, perjury, and lie. Were this possibility to be eliminated, no testimony would be possible any longer; it could no longer have the meaning of testimony. If testimony is passion, that is because it will always *suffer* both having, undecidably, a connection to fiction, perjury, or lie and never being able to be obligated—without ceasing to testify—to become a proof.

(27–28)

Paradoxically, perhaps, once testimony is judged “true” in the sense of becoming factual evidence, reliable information, knowledge, or “proof,” it ceases to be testimony in the strictest sense. It loses what is distinctive or specific about testimony, which has to do with profession, faith, passion, and (thus) the possibility of fiction or literature. (Profession, yes, but also the secret, since testimony holds in reserve what can never ultimately be exposed to “demonstration” or “proof.”) Derrida therefore continues: “if testimony thereby became proof, information, certainty, or archive, it would lose its function as testimony. In order to remain testimony it must therefore allow itself to be haunted. It must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the *possibility*, at least, of literature” (29–30).

Here, while testimony undoubtedly remains absolutely irreducible to knowledge or information (in part because there is always a strongly performative and affirmative dimension to testimony that exceeds reduction to an order of discourse construed as simply informational or constative), it is also important to note that testimony’s “function” (as Derrida construes it) remains complexly tied to the inextricable possibility of its own impurity. If testimony endures as testimony on the strength of its profoundly nonsymmetrical relation to forms of proof, information, knowledge, or evidence, nevertheless testimony “itself” does not consist of a pure essence or uncontaminated self-identity, since, as Derrida himself tells us, testimony entails parasitism, the radical impurity of an undecidable co-possibility of truth and lies, testimony and fiction. (This inextricable interplay of fiction and testimony, truthfulness and lying, also surrounds Derrida’s discussion of perjury and witness in “‘*Le Parjure*,’ Perhaps,” where the “perhaps” modalizes and keeps open the question in unavoidable ways, dividing each term from itself as much as from the other, not least according to complicated contexts and conditions of performativity, temporality, and eventhood that the essay endeavors to reconstitute. Taking one point of departure as the question of perjury in regard to the personal history of Paul de Man, storytelling and friendship loom large in this essay, in particular among a long list of professors [de Man, Henri Thomas, the Chaliers, Hillis Miller, Derrida], giving rise to a situation in which a story can be told, via Thomas’s *Le Parjure*, of “truth without knowledge”¹⁰—one that must nevertheless be “inscribed” [and, indeed, reinscribed] in an institutional setting, an “academic context” and “narrative framework” [199] [such as that of Derrida’s own essay], precisely as the condition for its “secret, singular truth”

[201] to be kept in reserve before the committees, the courtrooms, and the universities spoken of in the text.) In “Demeure,” then, testimony consists of an inseparable admixture, the hybrid potentiality of literality and literarity, in which the possibility of literature is opened as the possibility of a “function” (or, rather, a complex series of functions, relations, networks, histories, contracts) rather than as the expression of an essence. Furthermore, if, as Derrida argues on several occasions in this essay, the possibility of “literature” indeed resides not in a literary essence but in literature’s “precarious” and “unstable” function (that of “the unconditional right to say anything”), then this function takes shape in regard to a complicated set of historical conditions that include the “juridical institution,” “acquired rights,” and the “Roman figure of citizenship” (24)—in short, “the history of rights, of the State, of property, then of modern democracy in its Roman model as well as its Greek one, linked to the history of secularization” (26) and so forth. “No exposition, no discursive form is intrinsically or essentially *literary* before and outside of this function it is assigned or recognized by a right” conferred by the “social body,” insists Derrida (28). Thus, testimony is necessarily impure not merely because it is haunted by the risk or chance of the fictional, but because it is parasitized by a literary possibility that itself opens up on the strength of the precarious “function” of literature as an institution (although, at the same time, of course, any “literature” worthy of its name, for Derrida, outstrips or outdoes its—always unstable—institution as an unrepresentable excess or irreplaceable singularity). For this reason, then, the ever-possible “literarity” that crops up in the vicinity of testimony unavoidably links testimony itself to the discourse of literature, literature as “function,” which itself already harbors a grammaticality, a rhetoricality, a technics, the conditions of iterability and institutionalization (however unstable and ambivalent these may be), and so forth. So, testimony cannot ever be simply reduced or assimilated to that chain of parasitical inhabitants (fiction, literary possibility, the literature-function) that constitute its impurity, but it must *suffer* them nonetheless. (Testimony “does not consist, *for the most part*, in sharing a knowledge” [my italics], writes Derrida in “Demeure,” choosing his words carefully here.) Testimony must suffer or endure its “other” with a passion that registers its inassimilable difference, just as literature “*must suffer everything precisely because it is not itself*” (28). In the strongest possible sense, then, testimony is inextricably the *other* rather than just the opposite of “proof.” (Indeed, in the closing section of this book, in a dialogue with Christopher

Fynsk, I note how the contemporary “evidence-based” evaluations of the disciplines of literature and philosophy in the United Kingdom cannot—try as they might—dispense with an irreducible dimension of trust or faith.) This partial linkage rather than absolute separation of testimony in relation to the fields of knowledge and institutionalization proposes or presupposes a powerful dynamic of conflict and resistance, in which testimony perhaps acquires much greater potential and more intensive force than if it were simply imagined as just “outside” or “above” the grip or grasp of the “evidentiary.” (In another text, “A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text’: Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” Derrida says that the distinction or “frontier” between testimony and proof is “uncrossable *de jure* but *de facto* crossed.”¹¹ Even at the levels of language usage, etymology, and translation, which one cannot forego, “in practice the confusion always remains possible, so fragile and easily crossed can the limit sometime appear, and whatever language and word is used” [188]. Thus, for example, “the sense of ‘proof’ regularly comes to contaminate or divert the sense of ‘bearing witness’” [188]. Yet precisely because, in another fundamental sense, testimony simply cannot be reduced to “a demonstrable theoretical truth . . . a piece of information or a report, a procedure of proving or even an exhibit in a trial” [182], this harbors a destabilizing or even subversive potentiality: “For it to be assured as testimony, it cannot, it must not be absolutely certain, absolutely sure and certain in the order of knowing as such” [182]. While the effort to convert testimony into a form of “proof” is prevalent everywhere, nevertheless the moment testimony as testimony is respected to even the smallest degree [that is, on the grounds of belief rather than proof] or credited as a valued and meaningful part of the [legal] system on something approaching its own terms, the [contaminating] possibility of its unreliability must be admitted.)

As “Demeure” unfolds, Derrida sets himself the extraordinarily difficult task of thinking the paradoxical power of that which is irrecoverable to knowledge—of that which remains “secret”—in the attestation of a testimony. And this has to do with the divisibility of testimony in relation to presence: on the one hand, to testify is always and necessarily to “do it *at present*,” “in the first person and in the present,” indivisibly (and thus reliably), without “technical interposition” or “technical agency” (“one cannot send a cassette to testify in one’s place”); on the other hand, however, there must be a temporal sequence—sentences, for example—and, above all, these sentences must promise their own repetition and thus their own “quasi-technical

reproducibility” according to a structure of repeatability that “carries the instant outside of itself” and thus *divides* (32–33). The very conditions of possibility of testimony also harbor their own impossible condition, meaning that—at the very point of attestation, apparently so vital to testimony itself—something indispensable to testimony must be kept in reserve or must be kept secret. Here, we arrive at the point at which testimony simply cannot be made to speak, fully, in—or by right of—its own name. (The problem of the “secret” that testimony withholds is only intensified as one redoubles one’s efforts to orchestrate a scene of “reliable” attestation: a courtroom.) Testimony attests to this unrecoverable “secret” precisely as it speaks—a provocation, a resistance indeed, borne of its own impurity or divisibility.

During an interview with Bernard Stiegler conducted in 1993, two years before “Demeure: Fiction and Testimony” was first presented as a conference paper, Derrida tackles the question of testimony and evidence in a similar way:

A testimony has never been or should never be mistaken for evidence. Testimony, in the strict sense of the term, is advanced in the first person by someone who says, “I swear,” who pledges to tell the truth, gives his word, and asks to be taken at his word in a situation where nothing has been proven—where nothing will ever be proven, for structural reasons, for reasons that are essential and not contingent. It is possible for testimony to be corroborated by evidence, but the process of evidence is absolutely heterogeneous to that of testimony, which implies faith, belief, sworn faith, the pledge to tell the truth, the “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” Consequently, where there is evidence, there is not testimony. The technical archive, in principle, should never replace testimony. It may furnish exhibits or evidence, within the theoretical order that is the order of evidence, and must be foreign to the element of credit, faith, or belief implied by the testimonial pledge.¹²

The example Derrida uses to illustrate this idea of the heterogeneity and structural incompatibility of evidence and testimony is the Rodney King verdict, after the 1991 trial in Los Angeles, which concerned police brutality and racism. The videotape of King’s beating may well have served “as an exhibit, perhaps as evidence, but it did not replace testimony” (94)—and in fact it was inadmissible as testimony, so that the young man who held the video camera was himself required to attend the trial, take the stand, and swear before the jury and the court

“that it was really he who held the camera, that he was present at the scene, that he saw what he shot” (94). The technical recording could not count as testimony in its own right: the hearing needed to *hear* the testimony of an “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” “Technics will never produce a testimony” (94), Derrida therefore concludes (illustrated here by the technology of the video recorder). On the other hand, however, testimony:

as witness *borne*, as attestation, always consists in discourse. To be a witness consists in seeing, in hearing, etc., but to bear witness is always to speak, to engage in and uphold, to sign a discourse. It is not possible to bear witness without a discourse. Well, this discourse itself already harbors technics, even if only in the form of this iterability implied by the oath, to say nothing of this technics already constituted by the minimal grammaticality or rhetoricality which an attestation requires. Hence the apparent contradiction: technics will never make a testimony, testimony is pure of any technics, and yet it is impure, and yet it already implies the appeal to technics.

(94–95)

(Incidentally, Derrida says much the same sort of thing in “De-meure”: “technical reproducibility is excluded from testimony, which always calls for the presence of the live voice in the first person. But from the moment that a testimony must be able to be repeated, *techné* is admitted; it is introduced where it is excluded. For this, one need not wait for cameras, videos, typewriters, and computers. As soon as the sentence is repeatable, that is, from its origin, the instant it is pronounced and becomes intelligible, thus idealizable, it is already instrumentalizable and affected by technology. And virtuality” (42). We have already encountered questions of divisibility and virtuality, alongside those of teaching and —implicitly— of testimony, in the previous chapter on Derrida’s “teaching body.”)

Now, it strikes me that, particularly in Britain, the “audit culture” affecting higher education today, along with other public (and indeed private) institutions and organizations, reconfigures the relations between evidence and testimony in very specific ways. In the first place, although we began by insisting that an audit, right down to its etymological and lexical roots, irreducibly implies a *hearing*, nevertheless it seems impossible to deny that today’s “audit culture” tries its best to minimize testimony at the expense of evidence. In a sense, this suggests an effort to somehow dilute the juridical effect or quality of its

proceedings, to detheatricalize and deauralize the audit. Many of the bodies and agencies involved in today's audit culture, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, have a vested interest in presenting themselves as engaged in something other than a *hearing*, and there are many people today who recognize that the supposedly benign and progressive attitudes underlying this kind of discourse only thinly conceal other motives that are all the more brutal for being surreptitious. In higher education institutions in Britain, therefore, the changing balance between testimony and evidence is illustrated by the fact that teaching is rarely if ever inspected these days. Instead, documentary evidence is technobureaucratically produced and assessed, both internally and externally. It is approved, archived, cross-referenced, checked for consistency and appropriateness, verified, disseminated, and thereby and thereafter tested as evidence alongside and against *itself* in such a way that the testimonial support offered in the past by the classroom, for example, is dispensed with as far as possible. Testimony, we might say, is no substitute for evidence these days. Testimony, hearing, the auratic, the juridical, and the theatrical connotations and conditions of an audit—all of these must be diluted, minimized, excluded as far as possible, if the incalculable, aleatory, and ambivalent effects so inimical to the audit culture of today (those we have discussed already) are to be avoided.

However, this set of circumstances we are calling “audit culture” represents less of a simple reversal of that which Derrida finds in the Rodney King trial (where evidence was no substitute for testimony) than a shift in the balance of forces between testimony and evidence taking place in a significantly different institutional and political setting, which similarly demonstrates a certain heterogeneity or incompatibility, a persistent tension or ongoing struggle between the two. For, in the Stiegler interview, Derrida once more goes on to show that, while testimony and evidence simply cannot be harmoniously integrated or synthesized, they necessarily continue to function—non-symbiotically, indeed intensely antagonistically—as the irreducible supplement of each other. They cannot make their peace but nor can they go their separate ways. Thus, while there are those—on both sides of the debate—who would happily concur with the idea that the testimonial support of the teaching inspection is wholly alien to the technics of an “evidence-based approach” to Quality and Excellence, nevertheless we should be reminded, on reading or hearing Derrida in this (videorecorded) interview from 1993, that just as testimony functions *as* testimony only by recourse to forms and structures of

discourse, writing, recording, and therefore technics, so “evidence” can never be pure of, can never simply take leave of, testimony. Try as “evidence” might to avoid everything associated with the structure and effects of the testimonial, right down to and including the signature (and which of these so-called Quality documents, under the current British system, are ever signed by anyone?—their mode of validation, verification, or authentication is instead by reference to other documents, which are in turn verified and authenticated by reference to others still), testimony remains a contaminating element, a foreign body in the field of evidence. This is to the extent that, as Derrida tells us, testimony is bound to drift into the technical domain (if even only at the minimal level of the making of a sentence) that in turn characterizes the evidentiary. Testimony is destined to infect evidence, since its discourse cannot ever avoid being “polluted” by evidence in all its technical manifestations (one thinks of outlines of seminar sessions in course handbooks, records of staff-student committee meetings, staff appraisals and other minutes, all of which in different ways carry testimony into the evidentiary). Hence, on closer inspection it is not just the case that “where there is evidence, there is not testimony.” The radical heterogeneity or incompatibility of the two does not preclude evidence (“the technical archive”) being drawn into a tension or struggle with the testimony that ceaselessly drifts its way. And what Derrida has to say about evidence and testimony suggests that this tension could never simply be pacified by diplomatic negotiation or accommodation, nor even dispelled by legal repatriation. (Far from being “authentic” or voicing itself “authentically,” testimony instead takes exception to that body [of evidence] from which it can never decisively be expelled.) So that, if testimony is bound to bother “evidence,” despite all its best efforts to the contrary, then, by extension, the “evidence-based approach” of Quality and Excellence can never hope to avoid parergonal effects of the auratic, the theatrical, the juridical (effects of testimony in excess of the certainty or knowledge often demanded of it). In other words, the audit can never so decisively distinguish itself from a *hearing* after all. It may well try to obliterate its own signature, but in the end, it cannot wholly avoid *witness* or *witnesses*. A hearing after all, then: and who will be the judge of that?

The Ear of the Other II: The Library Oath . . .

But let us return to that point at which testimony simply cannot be made to speak *fully*, in or by right of its own name. That point at

which, by dint of the impossible conditions of possibility of testimony, something ineliminable in testimony must nevertheless be held in reserve or be kept secret, precisely at the point of attestation or witnessing, a point apparently so vital to testimony itself. We have already said that the question of the “secret” held or withheld by testimony is only exacerbated in and by the attempt to orchestrate a scene of “reliable” attestation or witnessing. We called this a courtroom, but there are other places, other scenes of such witnessing, belonging to other institutions, including the university. And perhaps especially, *today’s* university, which, as we said earlier, places such emphasis on the reliability of its “evidence-based” mechanisms for evaluation and audit. In such institutions, too, then, testimony attests (and does not attest) to that which is irrecoverably divided or doubled—and thus that which remains reserved, equivocal, ambivalent—precisely as it speaks. Once more, this offers a provocation, a resistance, a counter-auditability (implying a different order of reckoning), stemming from the intractable impurity and divisibility of testimony, witness, profession, promise.

This section might just as well have appeared under this extended subheading: “Promising, or, what may happen when one *is* asked to swear in the vicinity of the university institution.” The text is *The Post Card*, belonging perhaps to a bygone era, and staging itself in a setting that cannot but appear a little antiquated and nostalgic. But the university oath demanded of Derrida in *The Post Card* suggests problems and issues that cannot simply be consigned to the past, if we are right in saying that the university continues to institute itself on the strength of a certain leap of faith, in fact on the irreducible divisibility of “truth” between evidence and testimony, an abyssal grounding indeed:

Did I tell you, the oath that I had to swear out loud (and without which I would never have been permitted to enter) stipulated, among other things, that I introduce neither fire nor flame into the premises: “*I hereby undertake . . . not to bring into the Library or kindle therein any fire or flame . . . and I promise to obey all rules of the Library.*”

(*The Post Card*, 19 July 1979)¹³

Here, Derrida is speaking of the requirement that must be fulfilled by all visitors to Oxford’s Bodleian Library, to which he wishes to gain admission in order to view the original illustration by Matthew Paris of Socrates and Plato, reproduced on the postcard that forms the

subject matter of many of the entries that make up his “Envois.” And the promise that Derrida is compelled to repeat is, perhaps, bound to be repeated here, at the very moment I cite this passage from *The Post Card*. But is this promise, to which I testify by dint of quotation, just citation or citation of citation? Is a cited promise, or the citation of a promise, less binding, or does it return with uncanny force? Is the citation of a promise—with all the undecidability of the promise’s renewal—a species of false testimony, and if so, does it diminish responsibility or render us more deeply culpable? What happens to the visibility and visible force of the quotation marks, as Derrida is called upon to speak “out loud” in swearing the oath?

Quoting the quotation again:

“I hereby undertake . . . not to bring into the Library or kindle therein any fire or flame . . . and I promise to obey all rules of the Library.”

If one could imagine—alongside Derrida, accompanying Derrida—the necessity of reading the quotation “out loud,” it would not be possible to see the two ellipses that punctuate this sentence in the text (the three little dots that show us that something is missing after “I hereby undertake” and, again, after “fire or flame”). And, indeed, since *The Post Card* does not present us with the declaration in full, we are left to wonder, what exactly has been left out, here, in (re)citation, of the oath? And how—to what extent—would the implied missing content alter the pledge Derrida claims to have made? I hereby undertake . . . dot dot dot . . . *what?* With what sort of additions, moderations, modifications, extensions, or perhaps even provisos? Not to bring into the Library or kindle therein any fire or flame . . . dot dot dot . . . what other, other than fire or flame, is incinerated here—and by what force, other than that of the fire and flame that are openly stated and refuted, here, in the cited parts of the promise?

This all seems a bit improper. At the same time, however, it is possible to say that citation—here, repetition that sifts, selects, censors, *burns*—is, for once in *The Post Card*, presented according to something like the “rules”: the ellipses are appropriately marked, as in all good scholarship, rather than carelessly lost amid *The Post Card*’s errant—and perhaps insupportable—convention of “the blank of 52 signs” (4). While taking the Library oath, or rather while recounting his promise, while citing the promise he was made to recite, Derrida *for once* seems to obey all the rules, just as he promises, or, rather, just as he has promised. But who is to say that “proper” citation—implied here

by the convention of the ellipsis (the set of three dots to indicate the omission of words “needed to complete construction or sense,” as the *OED* puts it) is indeed fully observed in this recitation of promise? Or rather, who (or what) is to say that we can decide the difference between proper and improper citation, just because an established convention is adhered to? If one refers to the full declaration required by the Bodleian Library, for example, it does seem as though the ellipses found in Derrida’s (written) rendition of the oath in fact look more ominous than they turn out to be, perhaps as part of a deliberate attempt to make the cited oath serve some other function in the question of a postal code, logic, or principle. This effect (namely, that of using ellipses to effectively “reweight” the value or import of both the stated and unstated parts of the promise) would be achieved precisely by masking such a maneuver according to all the signs of good scholarly presentation. Leading us, unwittingly, to imagine words, phrases, or injunctions *other* than those that have actually been omitted; words, phrases, or injunctions that would indeed be “needed to complete construction or sense.” Thus, one might ask whether improprieties of citation are ever entirely avoided (by means of adopting proper citational conventions, for example) in such recitation.

In the postcard dated 3 June 1977, we find written (with, I should like to say or swear out loud, an ellipsis of three dots that I myself insert, as well as — I promise — three blanks “of 52 signs,” which I omit here) the following:

and when I call you my love, my love, is it you I am calling or my love? You, my love, is it you I thereby name, is it to you that I address myself? . . . when I call you my love, is it that I am calling you, yourself, or is it that I am telling my love? and when I tell you my love is it that I am declaring my love to you or indeed that I am telling *you*, yourself, my love, and that you are my love.

(8)

A declaration of love is always destinal, promissory, and, as such, bound by all the tele-effects of *The Post Card*.

If I were to declare or speak this sentence, this proposition, this attestation, out loud, you could not know whether I was referring here to *The Post Card*, uppercase italics, the name or title, or the object or referent “itself,” lowercase: the postcard. So that, needless to say, it helps to have the material support, the subjectile, of the written text (this one that you are reading, now), rather like the card on which

the Library oath is written. Although, of course, just like a declaration of love, in order to become *really* binding the Library oath (perhaps even my own declaration) must ultimately be spoken out loud, that is, lifted from the subjectile or support that binds. (This would imply a super- or supratechnics of the oath, of the voice, of testimony, of the “out loud” and the destinal or promissory, an essential extra in excess of the technics of which it nevertheless forms a part.) In the postcard dated 3 June 1977, then, Derrida asks whether, technically speaking, when one speaks of one’s love, one can ever do more than merely apostrophize (admittedly, a clever technique) in the *name* of love? It seems impossible to know, finally, if in speaking the language of love (in declaring or repeating promises of love, in affirming one’s love), whether one is just quoting oneself. Whether testimony yields to the testamentary force and effect of a dead letter.

And, of course, in *The Post Card*, one encounters these problems in Oxford. On 10 September 1977, Derrida writes:

Is it the name which comes back . . . and of course you will never know, when I pronounce or write their names, of these two dogs, if I am speaking of them or of their names. This is the problem of “‘Fido’-Fido” (you know, Ryle, Russell, etc. and the question of whether I am calling my dog or if I am mentioning the name of which he is the bearer, if I am utilizing or if I am naming the name. I adore these theorizations, often Oxonian moreover, their extraordinary and necessary subtlety as much as their imperturbable ingenuity, *psychoanalytically speaking*; they will always be confident in the law of quotation marks).

(98)

Let us *speak*, then, of this problem of “‘Fido’-Fido.” Let us try to pronounce it. The problem of “‘Fido’-Fido,” is, in a sense, precisely that of the punctuative marks, particularly the quotation marks, in Derrida’s text. If I had to explain the problem of “‘Fido’-Fido” out loud, I would need a find a way to make these quotation marks speak. I would have to say something like this: “the first Fido is given in single inverted commas, the second is not, to stress the proposed difference and, indeed, the comparison—regulated or stabilized by the hyphen that joins and separates them—between the referent and the name, the object and address. But the whole thing, the pair itself, this couple of dogs (as Derrida at one point—if you will permit the citation—calls Socrates-Plato), all of it gets encased in double inverted commas in Derrida’s text. (And re-encased, here, in a further set of

double inverted commas, since in order to accompany Derrida in his promise or oath, I am trying to show how I would explain the problem ‘out loud,’ by recourse to the conventions of reported speech.) In this (re)doubling of citational effect, are we therefore speaking of the problem ‘itself’ (‘Fido’-Fido: single inverted commas surrounding the first recitation of the name)? Or are we speaking of the name we have given the problem (“‘Fido’-Fido”: the double inverted commas encasing the whole, which themselves acquire the undecidable status of a supplementary addition that nevertheless entails the constitutive force of the problem itself, a redoubling effect that enfolds and impels the problem’s original twist). This *other* law of quotation marks (other than the law in which Ryle, Russell, or even Oxford has confidence) — an irreducible law, perhaps a lawless law — undermines confidence in the very *statement* (the propositionality) or even the *sayability* (the call or appeal) of the problem. An Oxford problem, which nevertheless finds its recitation in lover’s discourse, in the ‘retro loveletter’ of the postcard, and in the Library oath — where, in reciting the promise ‘*I hereby undertake . . . not to bring into the Library or kindle therein any fire or flame . . . and I promise to obey all rules of the Library,*’ it remains undecidable whether one speaks of fire or flame with or without quotation marks. Whether one is just reciting their names. Whether the fire or flame of which one speaks, about which one promises, upon which one *calls*, would ever therefore really burn. In this sense, although in one respect the recited promise burns with elliptical omissions, indicating with more or less (im)propriety the place of incineration, it is impossible to say whether Derrida will have broken his promise. For nothing may in fact burn. Like the postcards themselves, for example. “All this because you didn’t want to burn the first letters,” we find written in *The Post Card* — but who is this ‘*you*’? Is Derrida once more apostrophizing in the name of love? (‘you would have burned everything, and nothing would have arrived’ [23]: the irreducible, constitutive possibility of non-arrival of the destinal. Is ‘*you*’ really only a name, like that of love, which Derrida is just ‘telling’ himself? No one and nothing to burn, perhaps; perhaps ‘all this’ already burning itself up: the suicidal trait of the cinder, which violates its own name, its own identity, its own logic, its own law).” (I remember to add, at the end, the closing mark of citation, since this long passage is what I would have to *say* about “‘Fido’-Fido.”)

Perhaps nothing burns.

Then again, by virtue of the very same “law of quotation,” which decides nothing, it is just as impossible to say (here, perhaps, out loud)

whether the rules of the Library will indeed have remained—miraculously—intact, untouched by that “tongue of fire” that burns into the “recently destroyed correspondence” with its blanks “of 52 letters” (3–4) (or, for that matter, which incinerates letters all the more stealthily according to the orthodoxy of a trinity of dots). Whether proper citation keeps its promises any better, or whether the recitation of an oath “out loud” can ever ensure that fire or flame are not introduced into the premises. Or, in other words, whether what burns indeed burns precisely when nothing burns. 7 September 1977: the postcard speaks enigmatically of “a holocaust without fire or flame” (71): archive fever, “library apocalypse” (11) (5 June 1977). What is in fact missing, what is burnt up or incinerated, in Derrida’s partial citation of the Bodleian oath, is the promise “not to smoke in the Library”—a promise, perhaps, not to burn-without-burning.

I repeat, I will have repeated: “*I promise to obey all rules of the Library.*”

Archive Fever

Audit culture seems to imply archive fever. Since, as we have just seen, every discourse, including that of testimony, is prone to a technics of inscription and archivization, it comes as no surprise that in *Archive Fever* Derrida shows how the history of psychoanalysis is not only the history contained in its archival records, but that psychoanalysis is more fundamentally the history *of* its very archivization. For psychoanalysis—as a machine for the analysis of testimony—is also nothing less than archival thinking itself, archi-vo-analysis, archive fever. Archivization doesn’t just come afterward, even as an unavoidable contingency, but instead constitutes the very hallmark of the psychoanalytic. This archivization of psychoanalysis, then, is in turn “determined by a state of the technology of communication”¹⁴ that does not merely lie on the *outside* of psychoanalysis. On the other hand, however, neither is this “state” just on the “inside” of psychoanalysis as its internal, formal, essential characteristic or property. Instead, the very formation and character of psychoanalysis as archi-vo-analysis is irreducibly linked, Derrida tells us, to the technical and technological conditions surrounding archivization in Freud’s time:

One can dream or speculate about the geo-techno-logical shocks which would have made the landscape of the psychoanalytic archive unrecognizable for the past century if, to limit myself to

these indications, Freud, his contemporaries, collaborators and immediate disciples, instead of writing thousands of letters by hand, had had access to MCI or AT&T telephonic credit cards, portable tape recorders, computers, printers, faxes, televisions, teleconferences, and above all E-mail. . . . I will limit myself to a mechanical remark: this archival earthquake would not have limited its effects to the *secondary recording*, to the printing and conservation of the history of psychoanalysis. It would have transformed this history from top to bottom and in the most initial inside of its production, in its very *events*. . . . The archivization produces as much as it records the event.

(16–17)

We might wonder about the implications of this historical shift for audit culture today, particularly in the sense that such a shift threatens to render “unrecognizable” the technical substrate of the evidentiary upon which it relies (what happens when serial versions of Quality documents circulate and proliferate by e-mail correspondence and e-mail attachment within the institution, for instance?). Be that as it may, one writing machine that psychoanalysis is able to consider in its own day is the *Mystic Pad (der Wunderblock)*. We might consider this, Derrida tells us, “a technical model of a machine tool, intended, in Freud’s eyes, to *represent on the outside* memory as *internal archivization*” (13). However, referring to his earlier text, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” Derrida reminds us that:

Freud does not explicitly examine the status of the “materialized” supplement which is necessary to the alleged spontaneity of memory, even if that spontaneity were differentiated in itself, thwarted by a censorship or repression which, moreover, could not act on a perfectly spontaneous memory. Far from the machine being a pure absence of spontaneity, its *resemblance* to the psychological apparatus, its existence and its necessity bear witness to the finitude of the mnemonic spontaneity which is thus supplemented. The machine—and, consequently, representation—is death and finitude within the psyche.¹⁵

For Derrida, then, the machine is death and finitude within the psyche and therefore the death drive is at the origin of the Freudian archive; it is the “original proposition,” the latest news, which stops psychoanalysis becoming “a lot of ink and paper for nothing,” a secondary body of evidence, an unoriginal technology, an empty-handed

writing that ultimately says nothing, or nothing new (8–9). Yet the death drive is simultaneously that which “not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory, as *mneme* or to *anamnesis*, but also commands the radical effacement, in truth the eradication, of that which can never be reduced to *mneme* or *anamnesis*, that is the archive, consignation, the documentary or monumental apparatus as *hypomnema*, mnemotechnical supplement or representative, auxiliary or memorandum” (11). The otherwise “apparently useless expenditure of paper, ink, and typographic printing” accompanying the production of the psychoanalytic archive is only justified, insofar as Freud is concerned, by “putting forward the novelty of his discovery,” that of the death drive, the “silent vocation” of which is to “burn the archive,” “incite amnesia,” and thereby refute “the economic principle” of the archive as “accumulation and capitalization of memory on some substrate and in an exterior place” (12). In this sense, the *Mystic Pad* is itself the originary supplement or prosthetic of the Freudian archive, or of psycho-archivo-analysis, or of psycho-archivo-fever. It is not just part of a “secondary” technical machinery that comes afterward. Moreover, this also implies once more that the fever that causes the psychoanalytic archive to *burn* doesn’t just belong to psychoanalysis as its “internal” property or as an essential (psychic/nontechnical) character trait. For this archive fever yet again burns the very distinction between the “inside” and “outside” of psychoanalysis. Thus, if the death drive leaves psychoanalysis empty-handed, burnt up with a fever, causing the archive to always work “*a priori*, against itself” (12), then the death-driven archivization that causes the archive to burn so feverishly cannot simply be limited to psychoanalysis “itself.” And if Derrida’s *Archive Fever* is the paper or taper that sets the archive ablaze beyond psychoanalysis “itself,” then today’s audit culture lies no more on the outside of the double bind that this book details than does testimony lie purely on the outside of an uncontaminated body of evidence. Archive fever is death-driven, all the time destroying what it produces, with a feverishness that is more akin—or more conducive—to laughter than to a “solemn rendering of accounts.”

The Age of Audit

In *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings suggests the decline, at the end of the twentieth century, of longstanding expressivist or synecdochic relations between individual and community, discipline and

university, and, crucially, university and nation-state. These kinds of relations underpin the thinking of, for example, the “human,” the “social,” and the determination of “rights” as an expression of modernity after the Enlightenment. It is such a decline that therefore brings about the erosion of a notion of communicative community in the university as advocated by the German Idealists, one that founds a tradition of the very Idea of the university that runs all the way through to the likes of Habermas. Amid the ruins of communicative community, then, Readings envisages the possibilities of this “community of dissensus,” as he terms it. This—perhaps impossibly fluid—grouping would found itself on a rather groundless commitment to “thinking without identity.”¹⁶ The midwife, or parent even, of such a dissensual community would be none other than the “dereferentialized” University of Excellence itself, now utterly Idea-less, a machine geared entirely to its own optimal performance, without any concern for the grounding and coherence of its contents. Yet such a community of dissensus, insofar as it would be characterized by the activity of “thinking without identity,” could only produce research findings and “objects” for study that were “systematically incapable of closure” (128). Thus it would necessarily be incompatible with the strictly calibrated measure of Excellence. Yet the dissensual community would, again, therefore not simply be a dissenting one, engaged in full-frontal opposition with regard to today’s academic institutions. As a product or offspring of the ruined university of Excellence, it would mark and re-mark the disoriented non-self-identity of the contemporary institution, its incommensurability with itself. Or, to put it another way, it would expose and indeed enact the “two-left-footedness” of today’s university. This would not only mean that the evaluative thinking of dissensual communities would transvalue the evaluations of Excellence. It would demonstrate the “out-of-jointness” of Excellence with itself.

In other words, the university of Excellence seems to have two left feet. Excellence/dissensus constitutes a non-self-identical double: this “pair”—if it is one—suggests the two-left- (or two-right-) footedness of the university today. The university takes its stand only to “walk on two feet,” undecidably two left or two right feet: just the motif Derrida has used in “Mochlos” to describe the (disoriented) founding and footing of the Enlightenment university as a “parliamentary faculty” envisaged by Kant in *The Conflict of the Faculties*. In this sense, the university of Excellence was always going to deliver old news. News that is already as old, then, as Kant. Or, to risk alluding to a too

familiar pairing, which is older than Hegel. But, then again, what is the age of Hegel?

And if I may be permitted to evoke my own experience . . .
I remember having learned, in my twelfth year—destined as I was to enter the theological seminary of my country—Wolf’s definitions of the so-called *idea clara* and that, in my fourteenth year, I had assimilated all the figures and rules of syllogism. And I still know them.

And he still knows them.

Hegel in his twelfth year. You can see the scene from here.¹⁷

This is Derrida, in 1986, on the first page of his essay “The Age of Hegel,” quoting Hegel’s letter of 16 April 1822 “To the Royal Ministry of Spiritual, Academic, and Medical Affairs.” While writing, Hegel remembers an age or a time between his twelfth year, when he’s eleven, and his fourteenth year, when he’s thirteen: a time when he’s twelve! A lot of dates and numbers to reckon with, but can we reliably count (on) them? (Hegel is also fifty-two here; that is, when he writes the letter. Exactly from *where*, then, do we “see the scene,” this little piece of theatre contrived by philosophers or philosophy?) One minute we are adding, the next subtracting, to count precisely upon the coincidence of the number with the age. Yet Excellence counts on just this coincidence of the age—its own age—with the number, the points score, the teaching or research rating of an institution. The RAE, for example, is an adding machine in and of the age of Excellence.

Going back to Hegel, all these complex calculations are going on in a letter to the Ministry of Spiritual, Academic, and Medical Affairs. The letter is part of a special report commissioned by the Ministry, “by a State bureaucracy in the process of organizing the nationalization of the structures of philosophical education by extracting it, based on a historical compromise, from clerical jurisdiction,” as Derrida reminds us (4). Not just a “minor” text, then, but a significant landmark in a statist problematics of education, or of modernity’s institution of reason. While Hegel may well have thought that the rationality of philosophical instruction might “culminate most universally and most powerfully in the concept of the State” (5), his recollection of (the age of) childhood, and of the “already-not-yet” of philosophy—at once a matter of private confidence, philosophical demonstration, and public address (Hegel is at once already a philosopher, engaged in philosophy, and not yet a true philosopher, learning mechanically

by rote, at twelve) — this recollection finds Hegel foundering, in the manner of an “already-not yet”: “advancing or foundering, with more or less confidence, in the techno-bureaucratic space of a highly determined State,” says Derrida. A State to come, for philosophy or by way of philosophy, which, for philosophy, nevertheless already *is*, as the letter itself presupposes. In such a state, in relation to such a State (which, according to a somewhat maddening temporality, “already-is-to-come”), it is no wonder that Hegel advances and founders at once, to’s and fro’s, “with more or less confidence” (with two left feet?). Again, we might remark the simultaneity of this “more” and “less,” the simultaneity of addition and deduction as the characteristic feature of an apparently (although only apparently) self-same state, the state (State) of Hegel, which has everything to do with his age. In letters to the minister written during the same period, Hegel frets over the State’s provision for him in his old age, and for the family after his death. Hegel is in a state, when he thinks of his age (now adding years on instead of taking them away, although still during the same period of 1822, of course), and he wants — however impossibly — to be definite about numbers, specifically about sums (fittingly, though, these are described by Hegel as “supplementary revenues.”) He wants to be sure about — to audit — his currency (in both a broad and narrow sense) with the State.

Narrowly, he wants assurances of money for the future (that is, insurance), in the interests, supposedly, of future philosophical research. “I dare anticipate the realization of these benevolent promises only in connection with Your Excellency’s noble plans for the development of knowledge and the education of the young, and I regard the improvement of my own economic situation only as a subordinate element in this totality,” writes Hegel (13). (This sounds uncannily like the language in which British academics have to apply for external funding to a variety of bodies outside their own institutions.) But how can one be sure that the age of Hegel, or indeed of philosophy, is indeed *current* with the State (or, indeed, the state) Hegel finds himself in, “advancing” and “foundering,” more or less? A State or state that “already-is-to-come”? And, of course, this moment of a State-sponsored, techno-bureaucratic institutional reformation of philosophical education does not just belong to the age of Hegel. It also relates to the age of Derrida, and to his involvement with Greph during the 1980s, going toward a report to the French government on the reformation of philosophy’s pedagogy and institution; the latter involving the question of the “proper” age of a philosophical education, in at

least its double sense—forming more or less the brunt of “The Age of Hegel.”¹⁸ Furthermore, it is not just the age of Derrida that is involved here. Rather, where the techno-bureaucratic institutional reform of education, including philosophy, is concerned, all this relates to our age, too, the age of Excellence, Quality, audit culture, and the RAE, all of which I would call—appropriately enough, by missorting the letters—“Raelity.” And no doubt, it relates also to the future, the future RAE, and beyond. “Already-not-yet”: is this temporality, already, or yet (not yet), Hegelian?

“There is a Hegelian hierarchization, but it is circular, and the minor is always carried, sublated . . . beyond the opposition, beyond the limit of inside and outside in(to) the major. And inversely. The potency of this age without age derives from this great empirico-philosophical cycle” (33). And yet, according to the temporality at work in the vicinity of Derrida’s reflections on “The Age of Hegel,” we do not seem to be able to count on things ever coming full circle within a self-realizing totality. (As I will suggest in a moment, R is never quite R.) Nevertheless, the doubling that occurs in the formulation “age without age” is itself telling, as it posits a repetition with a difference, indicated of course by the preposition “without.” Far from underlining an atemporal structure or cycle of recurrence, “age without age” in fact suggests here the non-self-identity or non-coincidence of the “age” of Hegel with itself, a sharply disjointed temporality, along the lines perhaps of the missorted letters and the miscalculated sequence or sequentiality of Raelity.

But let us go back to R. “On, then, on to R”: remember Ramsay in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*? Eighteenth letter of the alphabet. A number, therefore, by which we calculate another coming of age. Manhood perhaps (Law of the Father). First letter of (the age of) Raelity, when (albeit by dint of a missort) we all grow up and face today’s realities, the realities of audit. On, then, on, from the philosophical mind and memory of H. to the “splendid mind” of R.:

For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. . . . But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in

the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q—R— Here he knocked his pipe out, with two or three resonant taps on the ram's horn which made the handle of the urn, and proceeded. "Then R . . ." He braced himself. He clenched himself. . . . A shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter R. In that flash of darkness he heard people saying—he was a failure—that R was beyond him. He would never reach R. On to R, once more. R—¹⁹

Perhaps like an RAE panelist engaged in the activity of auditing academic output, Mr. Ramsay hopes to have "no sort of difficulty," no difficulty of any sort, in sorting letters, not just letters of the kind sent by Hegel, but papers, made up of letters and sent as if they were letters, together with covering letters, to the panels of the RAE. For Ramsay, the number of letters are ranged "all in order," from A to Z. Although, of course, "on, then, on to R" always seems to entail a counter-movement, a counter-trajectory and temporality: "back to Q." A rather tiresome repetition, always going back, time and again, to Q. Progress stymied by a compulsion to repeat. To and fro between Q and R, on or back to R, which in the quoted passage does not always come after Q. Judgment of R is never simply judgment of R, then, but depends on the prior evaluation of Q. An evaluation (of Q) that in some sense is yet to come, or which in a certain way arrives after itself, only in the experience or moment of the judgment of R (which, of course, is not then the same as itself). R (that is, Ramsay) is only "sure" of Q at the moment he is "on to R" (where certainty itself ends or is suspended). Time "out of joint." The number of letters, all ranged in order, with no difficulty of any sort, suddenly subjected to a missort. Not unlike Raelity itself.

Judgment of R (Ramsay) is never, then, simply judgment of R (the letter R). The letter collides yet never quite coincides with its recipient, never quite arrives in the capital (that is, the initial of the proper name). Judgment of R is never simply judgment of R precisely because of this noncoincidence that characterizes their coincidence. Instead of a reassuring look in the mirror (R is R, therefore the sure identity of knowledge and the subject remains visibly intact), we have a disconcerting blink, right where it ought not to be, just where it was hoped to find the transparent, self-evident, self-identical grounds

of knowledge (“If Q then is Q—R—”). “A shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter R. In that flash of darkness he heard people saying—he was a failure—that R was beyond him. He would never reach R. On to R, once more. R—.”

Here is Derrida again, on or in the blink of an eye. Here he is, writing on the institution, on memory and sight, and on the question of the vision of the university, what is envisaged by the university, and so forth:

Opening the eyes to know, closing them—or at least listening—in order to know how to learn and learn how to know: here we have a first sketch of the rational animal. If the University is an institution for science and teaching, does it not have to go beyond memory and sight? In what rhythm? To hear and learn better, must it close its eyes or narrow its outlook? In cadence? What cadence? Shutting off sight in order to learn is of course only a figurative manner of speaking. No one will take it literally, and I am not proposing to cultivate an art of blinking. And I am resolutely in favour of a new University Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). Still, I shall run the risk of extending my figuration a little farther, in Aristotle’s company. In his *De anima* (421b) he distinguishes between man and those animals that have hard, dry eyes [*ton sklerophtalmon*], the animals lacking eyelids, the sort of sheath or tegumental membrane [*phragma*] which serves to protect the eye and permits it, at regular intervals, to close itself off in the darkness of inward thought or sleep. What is terrifying about an animal with hard eyes and a dry glance is that it always sees. Man can lower his sheath, adjust the diaphragm, narrow his sight, the better to listen, remember and learn. What might the University’s diaphragm be?²⁰

Here, Derrida implies that thought, learning, knowledge of any kind itself requires “regular intervals” at which to pause, rest, evaluate. And the RAE, it goes without saying, comes at regular intervals, in order to undertake evaluation exercises. At night, in the dark, their relationship is an uncanny one, however. The “intervals” that Derrida describes as vital to knowledge, learning, and thought are precisely not characterized or presided over by the intensely unremitting stare of Ramsayesque “hard, dry eyes” dedicated to the spectacle of transparent, self-evident self-identity (Q is Q, R is R). While such

a piercing gaze might suggest the punctual, punctuating, puncturing advent of the RAE, Derrida (long before time) reminds us that the “interval” that actually facilitates thought, prompting us to evaluate knowledge and to remember learning, is characterized by the blink of an eye, the passage of darkness. In this sense, Ramsay’s failure, in a “flash of darkness,” would possibly (spectacularly) redeem itself. No need, then, to simply bemoan and wholly repudiate the intervention or insertion of the interval. But the interval will not just aid illumination or transparency, since it must also entail a suspension, a forgetting, a darkness, played out (against and within the light) according to the rhythms of a blink. The institution built on the principle of reason is also, if we follow Heidegger, built “on what remains hidden in that principle,” Derrida tells us, so that the “principle of reason installs its empire only to the extent that the abyssal question of being that is hiding within it remains hidden, and with it the question of the grounding of the ground itself” (10). Just as, in Derrida’s “Mochlos,” the footing of the institution is found on uncertain foundations, so the vision of the university proceeds from what remains concealed. However, this raises the question of responsibility, in that critics, professors, academics working at “multiple sites [on] a stratified terrain” with “postulations that are undergoing continual displacement” need to observe “a sort of strategic rhythm” playing itself out between the “barrier” and the “abyss,” between the protected horizon, the secured partition, of the university space and the invisible and unthought bottomless chasm on which this is founded. Yet this “strategic rhythm” is, necessarily, ultimately incalculable, unforeseeable, and as such cannot ever merely be “observed.” Indeed, it is the unprogrammability of this “rhythm” that raises the very issue of a nonmechanical responsibility. As it pulsates unprogrammatically between the barrier (horizon of vision) and the abyss (hidden and unseen), this “strategic rhythm” is therefore one that Derrida associates with “the blinking of an eye” (17).

Auditing Derrida, then, our hearing is always in a certain sense that of the *other*, our balance is “off,” we are in the midst of an impure yet undismissable testimony, the very age or time is more or less incalculable, the sequence is out, archive fever causes the “economic principle” to burn. And in the vicinity of this quasi-comic juridico-theatrical space, we experience disorientation, we blink. But, after all, who would take this seriously? Whoever would propose to cultivate an art of blinking? Don’t count on it!

The Claim of the Humanities: A Discussion with Christopher Fynsk

Christopher Fynsk in his book *The Claim of Language* contributes to current debates about the state of the contemporary university by acknowledging the decline in fortunes of those disciplines traditionally associated with the liberal arts, particularly (although by no means exclusively) in North America. Fynsk's analysis of this deterioration draws upon and further extends the terms of discussion set out by Bill Readings and others over the past decade. Thus, the book intervenes in and adds to a burgeoning literature written by academics frequently associated with the "theoretical" approaches found in the contemporary humanities, in which the significance of a variety of factors and forces are brought out in the story of the humanities' decline: globalization; the onset of so-called late capitalism and the transformation of the labor market this has entailed; the advance of technics and technical instrumentality on a worldwide scale; the growing commercialization of higher learning and the rise of institutional discourses, programs, and practices tied to the notion of "excellence"; the changing meanings and values of nationhood, culture, and the subject; and so forth. Fynsk's book is distinctive, however, in that it commits itself to the task of making a case for the humanities—perhaps the most traditional of headings for work that goes on in the field that this name implies—in the face of the rapidly changing set of circumstances to which these various forces contribute. While Fynsk has not been alone in seeking to rearticulate this

name in the strongest possible way—Jacques Derrida, in “The University Without Condition,” has called on the humanities as a way to think the question of the university’s future, for example—this book ties the case for the humanities to what might be called the “claim of language.” The claim that language has upon us amounts to an indispensable condition that cannot but be affirmed, and, for Fynsk, this claim may bring us closer to ethico-political exigencies in a way that, far from establishing the possibility of an extraterritorial vantage point from which to evaluate disciplinary “objects,” opens on to the other as irreducible possibility.

The discussion came about in the following way. One of the editors of the online journal *Culture Machine*, Joanna Zylinska, initially asked me for a review of the book, and I was pleased to accept the invitation, not least because the broader question of the university is one about which I have written at some length in recent years. Indeed, Fynsk himself wrote a short review of my own book on the topic for the journal *Symploke*, in which he raised questions about the project at the same time as applauding certain aspects of my work. So I thought it would be interesting to reverse roles and repay the favor. But as I began to read *The Claim of Language*, I became more and more convinced that a dialogue with the author would prove a much better way to do justice to the book. First of all, the sheer importance of the issues with which the title essay in particular deals seemed to me to call for serious debate rather than just the kind of calculated response that frequently occurs in an academic review (the form or style of which frequently promotes certain recognizable features: intellectual point-scoring; abstract or formal “cleverness”; furtive assertion or defense of one’s own project or perspective; the stealthy introduction of extraneous material outside the scope of the title under review, brought into play so as to gainsay the author; and so on). I had genuine questions about the book, things I was not sure about or did not know if I had gotten quite right, and a great deal seemed to be at stake in what Fynsk was saying. So here was a chance to ask. Second, the growing body of work in this area undoubtedly accompanies a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction with the state of the contemporary university—this almost goes without saying, and yet the obvious truth of such a statement surely calls for (new) forms of dialogue, particularly those that attempt to exceed (or, at least, extend) established academic convention where the question of scholarly review and debate is concerned. So a dialogue with the author, initially written for publication in an exclusively electronic (and free of charge) journal like *Culture Machine*,

a journal already long associated with the question of the university institution as well as that of counter-institutional possibility, seemed to fit the bill much better than a simple review. Such interchanges may indeed prove useful or inventive in developing new networks of academics—and others—dissatisfied not just with the university “as such” but with the play of forces on a worldwide scale that contribute to its contemporary character and plight.

Finally, I was drawn to Fynsk’s thinking about the claim of language as that which calls us to (think) the other as irreducible possibility (at any rate, this is what struck me as a central implication of the book’s ideas and arguments). This seemed to invite not just dialogue but the risk of an exchange that might even turn into an event, which might cause surprise or which might entail the unforeseen. If Fynsk was right about the distinctiveness of the humanities along the lines that the book sets out, then we had to take the chance.

The discussion took place by e-mail over a short period of two or three weeks. During this time, Fynsk was preparing to leave the United States, where he was for many years a professor of comparative literature and philosophy at Binghamton University, in order to take up a chair at the University of Aberdeen in the United Kingdom. This move established one context for the question of the changing fortunes of the university in the United States and in the United Kingdom—a question that demands that painstaking attention be given to both the connections and the discontinuities that inform the “politics” of the university in the Anglo-American world (not forgetting, of course, the complexities which tie American and British institutions to universities elsewhere across the globe). One feature of the discussion, therefore, is that it stages a “transatlantic” encounter and conversation between two academics interested in the predicament of the university today, and brings together different perceptions of the debate in Britain and North America.

SMW: In *The Claim of Language*, which provides the occasion for this discussion, you seek to rethink the essential task of the humanities from a perspective which goes beyond, say, the predominating culturalist and identity politics inherited and developed from a certain reception of “poststructuralism” in the Anglo-American world. Instead, you return to the philosophical tradition which, notably, includes Heidegger, to pursue a thought of the humanities inspired by the claim which language has upon us, one which calls us toward an experience characterized by an openness to alterity, rather than

toward the positive knowledge of disciplinary “objects” within the field. To this extent, while you remain attentive to the problematic nature of any attempt to establish a “ground” for the humanities, you seek to rediscover what might be distinctive about this field in terms which, for you, make possible a renewed ethical and political purchase in the face of contemporary exigencies.

Without wanting to summarize this argument any further, since the ideas and implications it entails will doubtless be drawn out more fully in what follows, perhaps we could begin our discussion with a first line of thinking or questioning prompted by your book. What, indeed, would it mean *in fundamental terms* to call on the name of the humanities? If to call on the name of the humanities is less to anticipate or prepare for its revival along traditional lines (namely, a reassertion of its identity), than it is—via the claim of language—to call on the other or an other (perhaps we should even say: to be called by the other), then isn’t it possible that an appeal to the name of the humanities could be seen as just strategic rather than fundamental? A passing phase, a transitional moment, or a contingency plan, a holding operation or stop-gap measure on the way to some other place, something else, some other incarnation? What, then, are the implications of this different phrasing of your own argument, if to call on the name of the humanities—via the claim of language—is to call on the name of the other, or to call the humanities by an other? Or if it is to find, in the end, the humanities being called by another? Your own book implies that the tradition which includes Heidegger and Derrida seeks to rethink essence in terms of alterity (a fact which you rightly suggest has been badly missed in the Anglo-American reception of so-called poststructuralism), and it is precisely here—and not in the events, arguments, or positions associated with the “linguistic turn”—that we might discover the deeper force of the claim of language. But doesn’t this imply a thought of destination for the humanities in which we must, in the very name of the humanities, somehow replace (subvert?) its own name with another, or an other (which may, indeed, remain nameless)? Or, at least, that we must await such an event, without knowing what it may bring? To say the least, this rephrasing of the fundamental argument certainly seems to trouble the pragmatic aspects, in your book, of a “defense” of the (badly depleted) humanities, if, according to the very claim of language, what(ever) founds it simultaneously puts its name at risk. (Your book begins, of course, with a bold appeal to the very name of the humanities as the starting point of a “defense.”) Or is there a better way of

viewing the negotiation between the fundamental and the strategic here? Might we put the problem differently, or think about it differently? For while the humanities may not *be* the future according to the line of thought unfolding here, equally such a line of thinking makes it possible to say that the question of the humanities is indeed a question *of* the future, and therefore a question that we must, at all costs, retain. An essential question, of sorts, yet one that is always already on the move, as it were. This reminds me of what Derrida says toward the end of “The University Without Condition”: “One thinks in the humanities the irreducibility of their outside and of their future. One thinks in the humanities that one cannot and must not let oneself be enclosed within the inside of the humanities. But for this thinking to be strong and consistent requires the humanities. . . . It is at this always divisible limit that what arrives arrives.”¹ In this sense, the humanities is its own counter-institution, already and yet to come.

For me, this idea of the counter-institutional “possibility” which arises in the name or on the grounds of the humanities calls to mind Sam Weber’s powerful critique of Bill Readings’s *The University in Ruins*, and perhaps helps us to move ahead in its terms. Let me explain why. In his essay “The Future of the University,” Weber takes a close look at the way in which Readings presents the concept and practice of corporate-style “excellence” as a characterizing feature of contemporary academic institutions. As Readings puts it, in a passage quoted by Weber in his own essay, “the appeal to excellence marks the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University, or rather that the idea has lost all content. As a non-referential unit of value entirely internal to the system, excellence marks nothing more than the moment of technology’s self-reflection. All that the system requires is for activity to take place, and the empty notion of excellence refers to nothing other than the optimal input/output ratio in matters of information.”²

Here, Weber detects a problem. Doesn’t the “self-reflection” implied in the movement and measure of excellence—albeit of an apparently extreme technocratic and bureaucratic kind—nevertheless constitute a certain sort of reference? Perhaps even the very kind of self-reference found in that which inaugurates Enlightenment thought, rather than in a “posthistorical” present to which the Enlightenment tradition is irretrievably lost? Weber goes so far as to tie the formation of “excellence” described by Readings to the determination of the Cartesian cogito itself, thereby suggesting that

the supposedly “posthistorical,” “dereferentialized” university which emerges from the pages of *The University in Ruins* in fact repeats and reinscribes long-standing formations, modes, and processes of knowledge, representation, reference, and self-identity. Thus, he writes:

Excellence, like the Cartesian cogito, distinguishes itself from all others, above all from the objects of its representations. It divests itself of all “content” in order thereby to demarcate its own self-identity, henceforth to be determined in nothing but *the process of representing as such*, which is to say, in the process of “doubting” as opposed to the determination of that which is doubted. As its name suggests, “doubting” is *duplicitous*. It doubles and splits itself off from what it doubts and, in so doing, establishes a purely formal relation to its own “performance.” The grounding force of the Cartesian cogito, by which it attains *certitudo*, resides in precisely this doubling, splitting and demarcating movement, which produces a kind of pure performativity not so very different from that ascribed by Readings to the notion of “excellence.”³

On Weber’s view, then, it is as though Readings, in the very attempt to apprehend what is distinctive about the contemporary university (that is, its “excellence”), nevertheless unwittingly repeats a longstanding tendency to view the university as an institution that is essentially self-grounded and self-contained. Far from exposing and confirming the radical transformations to which academic institutions have been exposed and which they have undergone in recent times, Readings might therefore actually be seen to resort to habitual thinking as a defense against the violent shock of change.

Now, while I think that there are other ways of approaching Readings’s book,⁴ it is interesting nonetheless that this critique allows Weber to suggest that Readings’s analysis (which he views as resting on an idea of the pure self-reference of the contemporary university) in fact fails to take into account the complex play of virtualization which constitutes contemporary reality in the world today—a play (or, indeed, an economy) in which dynamic relations of spatiotemporal dislocation fundamentally rule out “self-contained realms or fields.” Leaving aside the question of whether Readings indeed does little more than portray the university of “excellence” in such “traditional” terms, to my mind, this thought of the counter-institutional “possibility” of the humanities includes or suggests a possible opening onto the “other” as precisely *virtual*. In his essay, Weber tells us that, hith-

erto, traditional academic scholarship saw its advance as the pursuit of the *not-yet-known*, as if the unknown could be construed as just the negative other of knowledge. But with virtualization, “the unknown becomes, as it were, the element or *medium* of knowledge, not merely its negative other,” since “virtuality emerges not as a possibility to be realized or actualized” (230). Going back to our discussion of the humanities, this thought of virtuality acquires significance, for me, to the extent that the “other” which may arrive (or which might claim us) in the very name of the humanities would much less give rise to the institution or ground of “new” or “positive” knowledge, than it would come as the medium or trait (of the humanities) which remains irreducibly virtual—or, better, actuvirtual, as Derrida has put it. This is because, as you yourself argue, the humanities—whether in traditional or rediscovered form—involve practices and modes of knowing or experiencing which, at bottom, remain tenaciously distinct from objectification or the epistemological relation established in positive sciences. But it is also because, according to the logic I’ve just been pursuing in relation to your book, the very name of the humanities—or the claim it has upon us, the “claim of language”—gives rise to the counter-institutional “possibility” of an other within itself (“*in* the humanities,” as Derrida says) which, nonetheless, it can never “properly” *be* or become, a “possibility” which could never be “realized or actualized” according to what you term the epistemology of scientific positivism or objectivity, but which nevertheless remains distinct in the humanities (as its opening to the future)—which perhaps, one might even say, is fundamental or essential, if one rethinks essence as, following Heidegger and others, you try to do. (Here, one might recall that Derrida links the question of the humanities as a question of the future to the complex modalities of the “as if”—which do not make possible “the order of the masterable possible” [234], or a performative act which originates in an enunciative “I” seeking to confirm its own power, agency, or standing.)

CF: I have not had a chance to read the Weber text yet, so I hesitate to respond to his argument at any length. Let me just ask the following: was Readings really describing an act of auto-foundation? Was this loop in the “system” to which he points (which is the university inscribed in advanced technology and capital, described here in terms of information theory) understood to be self-grounding and self-containing? I don’t quite read that in the citation you provided, though I concur that the passage invites some questions. In any case,

I guess I tend to think of the appeal to “excellence,” as Readings describes it, as a kind of pseudofoundation, a simulacrum of self-identification that could be discarded and replaced at any moment. “Excellence” is nothing but a placeholder for an earlier self-grounding claim to a civic function or a role in *Bildung* (whose structure does indeed call for a reference to the metaphysics of subjectivity and humanism). But I suppose I should go back to look at the manner in which Readings employs his analysis of the term; I see no need to dispute Weber here, particularly since his interest seems to lie elsewhere (that is, in his determination of “the virtual”). On this matter of “excellence,” though, I suspect it’s worth a bit more attention. Let me just note that I’m not inclined to dismiss the matter of “excellence” quickly—I stumble upon it almost every day. I read, only this week in Binghamton’s most recent mission statement: “Excellence is a delicate state of being; it must be continually recreated.” I’ll leave that extraordinary sentence without comment for now and simply juxtapose to it a remark made to me by a dean of my college some years ago: “Surely, Chris, you cannot expect me to make decisions on the basis of quality?”⁵ The latter was probably the most important utterance I have heard in my twelve years as a department chair at Binghamton.

But let me move on. Weber’s appeal to a Derridean notion of the “virtual” is quite interesting, and I’m sure that I could adopt the term without much discomfort to address what escapes the demands of the principle of reason (to refer to another important essay by Derrida on the university) and haunts every effort to respond to what I termed “the claim of language.” The term also has the virtue of reaching important dimensions of the spatiotemporal disorder of modern technology. But I have purposely not chosen to elaborate that “claim” in the terms of the trace structure explored by Derrida, because I think that too many appeals to this notion by students of his remain formulaic and are couched in a rhetoric of conceptual mastery that implicitly covers a refusal to address a broader set of questions. I am not making a statement there about Derrida (nor about Weber, for that matter)—after all, I devote one of the three chapters in my book to Derrida’s efforts on behalf of the International College of Philosophy, and I meant that discussion to be quite affirmative. Wherever Derrida appeals to a notion of “experience,” he is writing at the level I seek to attain in my book. But I’m trying to accompany deconstruction, not confirm it. And I should acknowledge that there is a point of real divergence in my argument vis-à-vis Derrida (though I consider the distance taken to be still proper to any true “accompaniment”).

The difference actually goes back some way to a disagreement we had ten years ago concerning the question of the human. In a paper presented at the conference “The Futures of Deconstruction,” I tried to indicate how Derrida’s deconstruction of the metaphysics of humanism in Heidegger’s text missed crucial dimensions of Heidegger’s effort to rethink what he called the human “essence.” Derrida took strong exception to my effort to return to the question of the human (as did Sam Weber!). But my subsequent work on this question has convinced me that Heidegger’s notion of “usage” does point to a possibility of taking up the question of the human in new ways. This work, presented in *Language and Relation: That There Is Language and Infant Figures*, is behind my argument that a thought of the “claim of language” can renew this critical question for the humanities (though my “case” for the humanities does not hinge on this topic of the human). I should say that I am quite struck by the fact that the recent text by Derrida on the university (which you have cited) repeatedly asserts the necessity of taking up the question of the human for the cause of the humanities.

Let me say one more word about deconstruction, here, since it informs so many of your questions. Then I’ll turn to your question about the name of the humanities. An important part of my effort in this recent book has been to move beyond reference to any particular philosophical or theoretical movement (associated with a particular name). To be sure, when I develop Foucault’s evocation of the “being of language” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* along Heideggerian lines, I am pursuing a very particular path of argument. But as I tried to assert, I could have started from any number of authors, including Deleuze, Lacan, Lyotard, or Derrida himself. My aim at that moment is to recall a broader tradition of thinking (without trying to contain the names I mentioned there), so before making the step toward Heidegger’s notion of usage on my own line of thinking, I go back to situate Foucault’s phrase in relation to a tradition that includes Heidegger, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Wittgenstein, and then a number of authors from the preceding two centuries. In short, I am trying to break out of the ahistorical character of much theoretical discussion and invoke an intellectual history (with all due caution about what it means to invoke tradition). The step to Heidegger with the notion of “usage” is important because it allows me to raise the question of the human and also to displace the tendency (latent in much reception of poststructuralist theory) to turn language, surreptitiously, into a kind of ground—my aim being to break out of

“the prison-house of language,” or “the house of Being,” for that matter. But I could also have taken this step with others in an effort to show how there is a “claim” in language by virtue of the way it gives relation to alterity. As I suggested above, I don’t believe I need the question of the human (as Heidegger allows me to pose it) to make my argument that (a) *there are* humanities by virtue of the claim of language and that (b) this claim leads thought to engage an other. Currently, I pursue this same question via Blanchot and Levinas. (By the way, I’m going to have to stop this recurrent referral to my title, because I want to avoid jargon as much as possible. Even a phrase such as “the other” slips rapidly into a form of shorthand that is inherently obscurantist.)

So, I try to argue that the humanities should have a vital place in society and the academy by reason of an exigency made on thought by language, or, more properly, by a form of event that occurs in language. What distinguishes the humanities, I argue, is the nature of the response—in other words, “the humanities” are forms of reflection and practice that cannot be described as wholly descriptive or representational in that they are always at grips with something that exceeds their purview (something “virtual,” if you will). The modes of “knowing” of the humanities, in other words, are distinctive, though I am uneasy about drawing sharp distinctions with those of other fields (with those of the social sciences, for example—on this point, I am raising an issue that remains a real question for me). In some respects, this is not so radical an argument; the Rockefeller Foundation report on the humanities of 1981 said that the “medium” of the humanities is language. But I think that my willingness to give this argument an ontological reach (or even “extraontological,” since the thought of usage carries us beyond “being” and even—but I must be careful here—“language”) gives it a different kind of bite. I want to say, for example, that the humanities are at grips with a “real” that exceeds the hold of the concept and any positive form of knowing.

In this latter respect, I try to give real weight to the phrase “there are” humanities; something calls upon their singular existence and *there are* responses that bring this call to language in questioning, reflective forms. Thus, my appeal to the name of the humanities is not merely pragmatic. It’s not merely pragmatic, to put this in another way, because I argue that the humanities have a *pragma*. Granel called this, after Heidegger, “being in the world”—for my part, I add a thought of the event and return to the question of the human via Heidegger’s notion of usage, but I’m not sure we are so far apart in

thinking this “thing” that concerns the humanities. That said, I am not wedded to the name of the humanities (any more than I am to the name of the human—I would be quite comfortable with Jean-Francois Lyotard’s reference to an “inhuman” for this same nonground of experience). There is no proper name for the discursive events I am trying to describe. Indeed, the mode of inquiry I try to sketch in the book under the name of “local” forms of practice is quite open-ended, and I would embrace the notion of a becoming other in/of the humanities. Here, in particular, I do not take the humanities to be an essentially “academic” exercise. I tend to focus on the academy and to speak from my own insertion in it, but I am most interested in the moments when the local forms of engagement I am describing lead beyond the limits of the university.

That said, there is also an important pragmatic dimension to this use of the name of the humanities. I speak very much from my own place as an American academic in this book. I believe strongly that in political matters we must always find leverage in the institutional conditions in which we are situated. I know that “the humanities” do not have quite the same resonance in the United Kingdom as they have in the United States, and I think this is an important fact for the discussion at hand. (I suppose I should consider, in this regard, the meaning of my move to the University of Aberdeen next January, but I’ll put that aside for now.) But in the United States, the name of the humanities bears a powerful resonance. Academic administrators, even the most cynical, cannot afford to dismiss openly the claims of the humanities, even as they turn aside and strip their resources from them. As for myself, I would willingly admit to a certain love for the word that I think is shared by many others. Again, I think it is important to acknowledge where one is speaking from and to assume one’s inscriptions (I have no inclination to deny my classical literary training or even my love for the book, a quite aesthetic attraction to the material object that extends into a passion for collecting in other areas as well). For me, the formulations you have used in your question seem to leap toward an unforeseeable future in an effort to avoid any possible imputation of sentimentality or mournful appropriation—almost as if they are in flight. The watchword strikes me as almost Rimbaudian—one must be absolutely radical, absolutely modern. I think I’m attempting something else. I’m trying to affirm where I am (in a kind of Nietzschean sense—though I cited a Talmudic tale to define this in the book, in the chapter on Granel) and move forward from the real conditions of my work. In this process, I

think I've learned not to be so afraid of those accusations and to attempt always to explore what passions and desires are really at stake in the loves to which I referred above. I find they almost always lead into temporalities and exposures (to "the other") not unlike the ones to which I believe you refer. But quite beyond my love for the humanities is my sense that their name has a mobilizing power in the contemporary context. So we have quite an interesting situation from a political point of view. On the one hand, one can describe the humanities as almost abject in the contemporary sociopolitical context. This isn't true in the most powerful institutions, but it is certainly true in a great many public ones. This institutional abjection is coupled by a kind of symbolic destitution. Not many humanists, at least reflective ones, are now prepared to defend "the humanities" in the traditional sense, and they can't really formulate anything else beyond an appeal to culturalist values. A defense of the traditional notion of the humanities would be preposterous today, even in this time of Republican ascendancy (though even as I write those words, I shudder a bit—who knows what's coming). At the same time, an appeal to "the humanities" can mobilize a very strong symbolic resonance (or at least a haunting echo!). So I am interested in seeing if a transformation of the university can be achieved from this haunted site of destitution. Might we now find, as we confront the radically declining fortunes of the humanities, an exceptional opportunity for a needed rethinking and, by virtue of the force still latent in the name, some real symbolic leverage? In the process, I would indeed hope for a "becoming-other in/of the humanities." I'm sure I won't live to see their name replaced by another one (at least not through this process of "becoming other" I've invoked—the academic market, on the other hand, has other resources), but the idea doesn't trouble me. I guess I would say that I want to put the name of the humanities into play. I don't take that name as something given; on the contrary, I'm attempting a kind of performative and trying to give it a new "send-off." Since I am citing Derrida there, let me add in conclusion that the paragraph you quote from him concerning the way in which the humanities think their outside and their future certainly meets my approval—we need the humanities to move beyond what the humanities have become. And if we follow the "local" practice I try to describe, there is little danger of enclosure.

SMW: As you've just implied, your case for the humanities entails rigorous attention to the question of language—language as a

philosophical question, that is. In his essay “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends,” Derrida says this:

If “pedagogical practice always lags behind mores,” a proposition that perhaps neglects a certain heterogeneity in their relations, but which does not appear, globally, very questionable, then the outdated structure of teaching can always be questioned as repetition. That does not make less necessary any other specific analysis but rather concerns a structural invariant in teaching. It originates in the semiotic structure of teaching, the *practically* semiotic interpretation of the pedagogical relation: Teaching delivers signs. The teaching body produces (shows and puts forward) signs, or, more precisely, signifiers supposing the knowledge of a prior signified. In relation to this knowledge, the signifier is structurally second. Every university puts language in a position of belatedness or derivation in relation to meaning or truth. That the signifier—or rather the signifier of signifiers—is now placed in the transcendental position in relation to the system changes nothing: the teaching structure of a language and the semiotic belatedness of a didactics are reproduced insofar as they are given a second wind.⁶

This implies that the “linguistic turn” was always in danger—as you yourself suggest—simply of giving a “second wind” to the traditional image and function of the university—an image and function which you acknowledge to be so deeply in decline that our best bet is not to hope too “optimistically” for its salvation or return. But equally, if this is the case, isn’t it too “optimistic” to hope for another thought of language which, if charged with responsibility for a renewal of the humanities along fundamental lines, might make a decisive difference in the midst of the university’s “ruins”? I say this as someone who thinks the question of language may still have a great deal of mileage, force, or future, not just in the kind of analyses I myself want to undertake, but more broadly in the field of institutional or, indeed, counter-institutional “possibility.” Yet the question remains, exactly which thought of language could hope to avoid the fate of language in the university as suggested by Derrida in the passage above?

CF: I’ve experimented with the pedagogical relation a number of times (particularly in conjunction with Bill Haver), and I’m inclined to agree with Derrida on that “structural invariant.” Moreover, our pedagogical institutions are quite effective in upholding

that structure—so much so that the greatest resistance seems to come from the students themselves. But I have found that displacement is possible. In fact, I was trying to evoke such a thing near the conclusion of my book, when I described my advanced undergraduate seminar on the topic of “the limits of representation.” By dwelling on the structure of Freud’s case studies (which includes introducing the topic of transference), and then approaching the question of testimony via Blanchot, Lanzman, Levi, and Ota Yoko, I’m able to dislodge the usual assumptions about the nature of the teaching relation and lead the students toward what I call there “an experience with language”—which is to say, an event in which the limits of language are somehow marked. Once again, I want to emphasize that what interests me in that so-called claim of language is an experience with language (to speak like Heidegger) where our relation to language comes into question. Where that happens, the real questions, and the question of the real, occur. Of course, a lecture seminar in which I take that event as a theme or topic of investigation (and I do that too, on occasion) will immediately reinstate the structure to which Derrida refers. And, to a certain degree, there’s no avoiding that thematization, even in the most adventurous and successful seminars.

But I think that your question also points in another direction. Can one, in this late stage of the fortunes of poststructuralism, really hope that a return to the question of language can salvage or restart anything?

First of all, if it is just a matter of elaborating another thought of language (or of its limits), then the pitfall to which I just pointed is inevitable. I wouldn’t see much intrinsic interest in establishing a new theory or philosophy of language, presuming I were even capable of such a thing. (Let me be clear: I might take great satisfaction from such work along the way—but at some point I know the pen would drop from my hand and I would ask what the point might be; this has happened to me more than once.) And I’m not looking to a philosophy or theory to ground our practices in the humanities—that would simply reinstate the oldest thinking about the theory/practice relation (with all the political consequences that attend this structure). I’m simply trying to give the means to think (a) the *exigency* to which the humanities owe their existence (to the extent they exist in something more than an encrusted institutional form), or in relation to which they might exist if we assume the task; and (b) the singular character of the response—that is, what distinguishes the humanities as modes

of knowing and practice. And I believe that existence, here, really is a function of performative acts of teaching and writing for which notions such as “testimony” or perhaps “professing” are vital indicators. As I tried to suggest in the introduction to my book, I do not want to suggest that my account of this exigency is the only possible one, or even that “exigency” is quite the right term. If I can trigger other responses from inspired or angered readers that do the job more effectively (and by that I mean in a more invigorating way—not in a more “adequate” manner since there is no correct or sufficient answer to the exigency in question), all the better. There are certainly risks in this effort (beyond the possibility of a phrase such as “the claim of language” being caught up in a play of jargon). I most fear an anxious clenching to a notion of “literariness” or some aestheticizing posture that would block openings to articulations with other fields in the sciences or social sciences. To affirm that *there are* humanities might induce a kind of defensiveness. But again, I write from a situation where participants in a committee drafting a five-year plan for research at our university proposed barring the use of the term “research” for work in the humanities. The latter, they argued (and I’ve heard this elsewhere) are engaged in “scholarship,” not “research,” since the latter presupposes the capacity to generate funds. In such a situation (and this is just a tiny symptom of the ascendancy of technocratic modes of thinking in the new marketplace) the humanities are destined to a very secondary service role. I believe that a great deal is at stake here of an ethico-political order. I don’t think I need to go on at this point, but I would point to Jean-Francois Lyotard’s meditations on the necessity of honoring the temporalities and forms of thought and what it carries of something he called “the inhuman.”

SMW: Early on in your book, you comment that there was a moment, in the weeks following the events of September 11, 2001—prior to the full interpretative appropriation of the event by the media and authorities—when American public discourse and culture was exposed to fundamental questions, notably about the “human,” for which there were no immediate, reassuring, or consensual answers. And you regret the fact that the humanities were unable to capitalize on this opportunity for a newfound relevance or role. Indeed, this recognition concerning the missed opportunity of the humanities during the period that followed 9/11 in many ways forms the starting point for your analysis of the long-term demise and marginalization of the humanities as an influence or voice in the wider public

or cultural setting—an analysis that shrewdly dissects the appropriative force of the U.S. media and government in the realm of cultural politics in recent years. Yet it is very clear that you don't wish to suggest that the events of 9/11 could take their significance—now, for us—from the opportunity they might have afforded the humanities to revive their mission. The ethical standpoint of your book in general seems, indeed, to point in a very different direction. Moreover, the various responses to the events of 9/11 by influential members of the theoretical community frequently place in question the very notion or possibility that one might be sufficiently able to detach oneself from the “event” or find a ground, a secure standpoint or safe horizon from which to treat it as an object of commentary or critique, to objectify it “as such.” The forces at play in this event—“globalization,” “terror,” “mediatization,” “virtuality,” and so forth—might imply, for some, that a response from the humanities was lacking not simply because of inertia in the humanities (although, of course, this must be part of the story) but, more fundamentally, because an essential or vital response might indeed have entailed somehow giving up the name and ground of the humanities in (thinking) the very experience of the event. Do you agree with this line of thinking? Or is it possible to follow an “other” thought of the humanities—and of the “human” to which the humanities point, in some way at least—according to which the “experience” or “event” doesn't just automatically exceed, outstrip, or render obsolete the name and possibility of the humanities? In what way, if any, is it possible that the humanities might rediscover and assume *in its own name* something more than just, say, a work of mourning? (Derrida suggests something like an anesthetic or pain-killing effect in the ritualized naming of the event—“9/11”—which quickly took place in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, implying that the attribution of a name to the event serves a work of mourning which is perhaps inevitably and necessarily reductive or neutralizing. In this regard, one might ask what is implied by a powerful restatement of the humanities' very *name*, such as we find in your own book and indeed in Derrida's essay “The University Without Condition,” when one thinks of the effects of naming that might be associated with “9/11.”) In short, then, how do you think about the relation between the humanities and events such as 9/11?

CF: I think it would indeed be strange to suggest that the events of 9/11 could take their meaning or significance from an opportunity they afforded the humanities—nothing was farther from my mind.

What I was trying to suggest in that paragraph was that the kind of ethico-political exigency that constitutes a call for something like “humanistic” reflection was quite visible in those weeks after the attacks, and that equally visible was the lack of significant voices from that quarter, particularly from the academy. After reading your question, I fear I may perhaps have left readers with the sense that an “opportunity” of some kind was missed there. But I was writing, rather, with the sense that a need had not been answered, and that the silence was highly symptomatic. Looking back, I see that I did in fact speak of that need in the paragraph in question, and that I was trying to suggest that it had surfaced in a very particular way during the weeks after the events. What I wanted to say was that the dread and anxiety that gripped the “body-politic” at that moment (I use that phrase tentatively, and with “dread” I’m thinking a bit along lines suggested by Bataille) constituted a real ethico-political exigency. I was also quite gripped, for my part, with the question of civic duty and community (I wrote an essay for *Vacarme* entitled, “Peut-on être citoyen d’un empire?”—for me, the question of civic participation had really opened in that moment). It was the role of thinkers in the humanities—along with many others—to find language to bring that dread and confusion into language and some form of questioning, thinking response. My own university’s provost, whom I cite in my essay, remarked to me only a day after the events that she had never felt the humanities were as needed as they were at the time, since so few knew even how to formulate the questions the event provoked, let alone deal with the massive presence of death, the sense of foreboding, and the latent political and social crisis (this is the same person who, just a few months before, had said quite candidly to me, “You know, we don’t think that much about the humanities in our planning”). The fact that individuals from the humanities were not at the table in public discussion was a sign of the difficulties I was trying to point to in those pages. But I could never imagine that the events of 9/11 could serve as some kind of grounding point for the humanities, nor could I sit well with the idea that the events were to be capitalized upon. (Here, I must add that I have a real horror of any tendency to “capitalize” intellectually on events such as the Shoah or 9/11; I find such a capitalization especially offensive when it takes an aestheticizing form.) Again, my feeling was that there was a genuine public exigency in that moment to which the humanities, as a discursive constituency, let us say, did not significantly testify. The events could certainly never constitute a grounding point in the sense that the humanities would have some

privileged role in commentary and critique (implying the detachment to which you pointed). Indeed, one of my most crucial points in the book, as I suggested earlier, is that the notion of response I elaborate does not entail objectification. The point is essential to my argument, because I am suggesting that the form or relation involved in humanistic inquiry diverges from the epistemological relation established in the positive sciences, including sociology or political science. One could even push my argument to the point of suggesting that the humanities are not about interpretation at all (though I think such a statement is potentially misleading—the point would be simply that it is not about deciphering signifiers in search of their signified). This understanding of the modes of knowing and practice involved in the humanities leads me to my emphasis on “local” practice, both in the main essay, and in the essay on Granel in my book.

Now, in your question, you ask whether the lack of strong responses from the fields we associate with the humanities points less to an inertia in those fields than to the fact that a response would have required “somehow giving up the name and ground of the humanities in the very experience of the event.” The phrasing of your question first makes me want to say, “What name and ground—is there still one?” But let me back up and twist your question just a bit. I can’t imagine saying that there should have been a response “in the name of the humanities.” If anything, the humanities would find their calling (their name, if you will) in the response—which involves thinking, among other things, the nature of such an event and the questions that proceed from it. I ask in the opening page of my title essay whether we can speak in the name of the humanities to define a necessary task for thought, and I clearly want to answer in the affirmative. But I do not want to hypostatize this institutional entity in quite the way your question might be taken to suggest. “The humanities,” I want to say, are a set of practices that find their bearing, in always singular and local forms, in answering to the ethico-political exigencies of our histories (which come to us in many forms, including events as terrible as the destruction of the World Trade Center). This formulation is a bit heavy, but it should be taken broadly; and as I said in the book, I see no reason to exclude some very traditional practices of philology and so forth. I am not interested in “purity” in this name. But where the humanities have a real symbolic claim, they involve practices with shared traits that I have tried to describe with an approach that involves a thought of language (and its limits), and I want to argue that their institutional place is worth claiming for reasons of an

ethico-political character. I believe that there were few such responses with broad resonance or reach in the public space because of the current institutional configuration of the humanities. There is inertia, to be sure, but also something more, as your question suggests. But I think I would rephrase this. My argument is that the very discursive grounding of the humanities has collapsed; in brief, I don't think they really have much of a "name" at this time, at least not one that many can claim. The result is a striking delegitimation in the public, symbolic sphere—not only have humanists failed to find a way to speak, they have been elbowed aside. (I tried to address a few words to this phenomenon in relation to the cultural politics of an organ such as *The New York Times*—the *Times*'s recent handling of Derrida's passing has offered a troubling confirmation of the points I tried to make.) And their effort to posture as "public intellectuals" in a few cases has only worsened the situation. Thus, while any number of writers and artists working in "the humanities" developed incisive, invaluable responses, those responses had no public purchase, no "resonance," as I have said. They could not gather significant communities of any kind, no matter how local. And few turned to those individuals for their contributions. (This is not to say that there were not all sorts of extraordinary gatherings, as I witnessed in my own community in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn—an area that is still considered a ghetto by many.) Consequently, "9/11" became the purview of the media and parties in the government. So, it is not that humanists held to their stubborn self-conception as an academic, corporate entity; it is rather that the disarray afflicting their institutional context neutralized their possible contributions and perhaps—in fact, I'm sure of this—paralyzed or undercut some responses.

You ask whether there could be another thought of the humanities "according to which the 'experience' or 'event' doesn't just automatically exceed, outstrip, or render obsolete the name and possibility of the humanities." Well, I guess that's exactly what I am trying to achieve. In a passage in which I tried to make a provisional distinction between "theory" (as a formal undertaking that might be "applied" to events) and thought, or what I called "fundamental research," I wrote the following:

Fundamental research diverges from much theory in that it is always seeking the limits of its language in responding to that to which it seeks to answer: those dimensions of experience and symbolic expression that summon it (as a kind of exigency for

thought) and to which no concept will ever be quite adequate. Such research is impelled by its own neediness and its sense of being answerable, whereas theory, governed by the concept, proceeds with ever-expanding appropriations; fundamental research proceeds from *encounter* (always from a sense that something has happened to which it must answer), and it seeks encounter. In theory, there are no encounters.⁷

So I suppose I could say that one way in which the humanities should define their form is in a thought of the event. Elsewhere in the book, I suggest that I see the task of the humanities as *making happen* the questions that should proceed from an event, be it historical, textual, or even somewhere in the new media. The practice of writing history, as Benjamin gives it to be thought, for example, is hardly a work of mourning. I might add that some of the theoretical work to which you refer in reference to 9/11 would be “humanistic” in the sense I am offering here, and this helps me underscore that I do not mean to speak in absolute terms—it goes without saying that something was happening in the humanities at that moment to some extent.

Let me add a concluding word on 9/11. I chose to evoke that date in the paragraph you have focused on because most of my title essay was written in the months immediately preceding it. I composed it during the moments when my infant son would fall asleep on a blanket next to my desk (in fact, I wanted to dedicate it to him with the phrase, “for Gabriel, who slept during the best parts” —I finally concluded he might not forgive me for that in years to come). I spent a lot of time wondering if my essay would prove up to the new configuration of events, convinced that we had passed a “watershed” moment, and I felt it was important to date the essay with the reference. I think I would speak of the “ethico-political exigencies” facing the humanities a little differently today, particularly in light of the recent elections and the gravity of the global situation. But I haven’t changed my sense of the tasks facing the humanities and the urgency of creating institutional spaces for them.

SMW: Since this has already come up, albeit in a brief reference, I wonder how the claim of language, upon which your thinking of “the humanities” rests, might affect the possibility of testimony or profession? As Derrida has noted, profession in its truest sense is not dependent on or reducible to a specific content, knowledge, or technical ability. And, elsewhere, he has shown how testimony emerges

as that which is radically heterogeneous to evidence. Evidence, of course, forms a crucial part both of contemporary university discourse and practice in the age of “quality assurance” and “excellence,” and underlies the advance of *technics* more generally (as your book repeatedly suggests). But how exactly does the claim of language in the humanities give specific or distinctive force to a testimony or profession which might re-engage or re-encounter the contemporary world, or, indeed, which might find within itself some sort of counter-force in relation to a number of contemporary issues and problems? In perhaps a rather more narrow sense, when compared to issues on a global scale at any rate, this question suggested itself to me primarily in light of my own experience of academic audit in the United Kingdom. The culture of institutional audit and public management in this country is one with which you will doubtless become more familiar as you leave the United States to join a Scottish university. Last year, I was responsible for coordinating the English literature subject area at my own university—a former UK polytechnic—during a period of audit conducted “internally” at the subject level (the level of the discipline) at a time when the institution as a whole underwent a larger audit conducted by the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency), the government-backed body responsible for such evaluation in the United Kingdom. Indeed, for a while it seemed likely that the “internal” audit for which I was preparing, along with my colleagues, was really just a “mock-up” of the real thing to come, since the institution had undertaken a “risk analysis” in which English literature figured as a likely candidate for the DAT (discipline audit trail) by means of which the QAA would assess the academic health “on the ground” (that is, at the subject level) of the institution in general. (And an unsatisfactory result in just one discipline, so we were told, would lead to the withholding of a vote of confidence in the university as a whole.) So the stakes seemed quite high, since although the QAA is seen as rather ineffectual in some quarters—particularly where one would be able to attain a little distance from the situation which I am describing—nonetheless the outcome of such audits (both “internal” and “external”) can produce very real effects at the level of funding, investment, strategic planning, and so forth. (I don’t mean to suggest, here, that judgments on the part of those responsible for “quality assurance” actually do very much to change the minds of hard-headed or streetwise managers who make decisions first and foremost on the basis of “income-generation”—but nevertheless a

bad result, if combined with, say, a picture of dwindling student recruitment in a particular discipline, even over the short term, and the effects of certain maneuvers undertaken on the basis of partisan interests or agendas within the university, can indeed have a genuine impact.) Now, one of the things that most struck me during this period was that, in the run-up to the actual event (the audit took place over a two-day period), I was kept extraordinarily busy with the preparation of bodies of evidence: program specifications which detailed degree structures and learning aims, skills maps which included specific claims about “learning outcomes” for particular parts and years of the degree in question, descriptions of individual modules written in standard format, files containing evidence of student feedback, external examiner reports, statistics on student admissions and performance, staff evaluations of their own courses based on such “evidence,” and so forth. But all the while, I was conscious of an atmosphere in which no one, “internally” at least, seemed to value what might be called my “testimony” (or indeed that of any other member of teaching staff) or saw fit to listen and make judgments on the basis of, let’s say, trust—or, indeed, responsibility in a perhaps more traditional sense. (If I remember correctly, none of the documents I was asked to prepare included space for a signature or, for that matter, the attribution of authorship.) I am not so much concerned or inclined to blame individuals for this state of affairs (who, indeed, would “sign” for their responsibility within this system?). More accurately, the situation was—and still is—brought about by the domination of a discourse and practice of audit in which an all too crude, narrow, instrumental conception of “evidence” is applied at the near absolute expense of “testimony.” This seems all the more ironic and ill-fitting in disciplines such as ours—literature, philosophy—where the question of judgment is not just unavoidable but perhaps more “properly” central to the very nature and possibility of the “knowledge” we produce: not just its instrument, then, but its very “medium,” in the sense indicated by Sam Weber. In one respect, one might even say that “trust” is structurally necessary and unavoidable in our disciplines (it would be easy enough to regrade papers to improve the average mark, for example, and thus to alter the picture of the academic health of a particular course), and yet such trust, however irreducible it may be, is systematically denied or repressed as the audit unfolds. (Although I should say that I felt it to be partially restored by those external academic colleagues—not connected to the QAA—to whom a place on the audit

committee was given, during the two-day event itself.) And so I'm very aware that, although I was called upon by various individuals and committees to speak, both in the buildup and in the course of the actual event, I was unable—I was not permitted—to speak in or with my own voice. Not that I particularly wanted to have recourse to some unreconstructed sense of the self, personhood, authentic voice, etc.—or even, at bottom, that I wished for a greater degree of professional respect or responsibility (although there were times when I certainly did). What really concerned me was that, in view of the standardized, uncontested discourse and practice of audit (as that of “evidence”), I was given no option but to adopt a “language” *to which no one took exception*. By this I mean, yes, of course, the whole process was treated as suspect and was even ridiculed “in private” by many of those who were involved (not just university teachers), but, still, it seemed, *no exception could be taken*, not in any seriousness, and it is in this sense I say that I could not speak in or with my own voice. But what would it mean, how could it indeed happen, to speak in one's own voice? Or, indeed, what would it entail, to find oneself compelled to not speak, to be made unable to speak, to hold in reserve, to remain silent or keep secret, even and especially by dint of certain attestations one is required to make?

One other remark on the dwindling fortunes (but also, perhaps, the last chances) of testimony. The continual rise of an “evidence-based approach” to academic audit in recent years now means that teaching is rarely inspected in the United Kingdom. The pedagogical relation, and the kind of “experience” or “event” to which it gives rise, unsurprisingly remains incompatible with the aims and objectives of “evidence.” Soon after the audit had taken place at my own institution, I gave a paper at University College, Cork, in which I tried to convey several of the points about “audit” which I've just made. But I soon found out that, in Eire, outside the United Kingdom, teaching *did* still enter into the equation. In fact, colleagues at Cork had to submit a portfolio record of their teaching performance to qualify for promotion. It seems that student evaluations and other kinds of evidence were not considered as reliable a source as a videotaped recording of the teaching itself. Leaving aside the question of surveillance which obviously arises here, the idea that teaching—as we would understand it, from the perspective of your book or, for that matter, from that of deconstruction—might be turned into “evidence” constitutes an extraordinary turn of events. And, with a further twist of irony, I discovered that the conference—and my talk—was

similarly being taped, for submission by the conference organizers in view—or in lieu—of the university demands placed upon them (I hasten to add that this was, to say the least, a wry gesture on their part). As I spoke, then, I was, in a sense, *becoming evidence*. What I had to *say* about testimony and evidence was, in a sense, *becoming evidence*. And yet not quite, not entirely. The appropriation could never be so neat or absolute. For what I was saying, along with Derrida, was that “evidence” can neither wholly assimilate nor utterly expel “testimony” (this is akin to the point about both the irreducibility and denial of trust I made earlier)—rather, testimony *is precisely that which takes exception* to the bodies of evidence which, while they increasingly seek to sideline or downplay testimony, nevertheless still cultivate it, even at the most minimal level, if only as an object of appropriation. And Derrida tells us, after all, that testimony cannot so decisively be separated from the technical apparatuses associated with “evidence” (testimony is composed of discourse, grammaticality, rhetoricality, language, all of which implies a technics from the outset), so that testimony is bound to drift in evidence’s direction, and—as that which is exceptional—contaminate its “purity.” Thus, an impure yet undismissible testimony remains, survives, to haunt evidence in all its technical manifestations (and it is with the question of technics, which has been raised between us already, that this issue may not look quite as narrow as I suggested earlier). The implications and effects of this situation are ones which I think we should begin to reckon with.

So, while all of this might encourage you to comment on the practice or idea of audit from the perspective of the American experience, I wonder how you’d see the relationships between testimony, profession, teaching, and evidence/technics, particularly in light of the claim of language, as you understand it, in the humanities?

CF: The example you’ve given of the mutation in our working conditions is chilling. I have not known anything quite like the evaluative pressure to which you were submitted, but at the same time I think we face very similar demands in our respective systems. My own university relies increasingly on a “bottom-line” accounting as it heads toward an “entrepreneurial” model that leads us into demands for evidence like the ones you describe. And I do not see any easy answers, any easy formulations concerning the nature of a “counterforce” that might proceed from a new thought and practice of the humanities. I do agree fundamentally with Derrida when he asserts near the end of “The University Without Condition” that “the force

of the event” exceeds the force of the performative. He continues there, as you will remember, by asserting the following: “In the face of what arrives to me, what happens to me, even in what I decide (which, as I tried to show in *Politics of Friendship*, must involve a certain passivity, my decision being always the decision of the other), in the face of the other who arrives and arrives to me, all performative force is overrun, exceeded, exposed” (235). When I speak of proceeding from an experience with language, I am trying to evoke an engagement with that force. (I try to make the link in describing what I call “Derrida’s engagements” in my second chapter.) My hope is that a practice of the humanities like the one I try to evoke can constitute a kind of “communication” of that force (though I mean this in the sense of communicating a disease, a passion, or laughter). But I do not dream that this force can be “opposed” to that of the demands of technocracy—not in traditional political (dialectical) terms, in any case. In fact, in evoking a “local” practice in my book (that is, one that answers what claims in an event), I am proposing a turn (away) from such oppositional structures. The contemporary demand that we, in the humanities, “be political” calls for such an oppositional structure, but I am convinced that a quick surrender to this demand leads to another forgetting of what is at stake in the humanities. I must be careful here, however, because I do not want to suggest in any way that we, in the humanities, should give up attending to politics, be they “academic” or of a more substantial character. Indeed, I have devoted a great deal of time to administrative duties and to efforts to create a humanities center at my university because I believe that one cannot ignore one’s institutional conditions. And I would extend this to the broader sociopolitical context: I was a great admirer of Derrida’s work with Greph (in fact, my first published work was on this topic), and I took the lessons I learned in his seminar for that group in 1975–76 deeply to heart. One must work in multiple modes, and on multiple fronts. One response to the kinds of demands you confronted in that evaluation procedure must be political, in the most everyday sense of the term. But I think those efforts must be complemented—or supplemented, if you will—by that other force to which Derrida points. The humanities must find new ways to be *compelling*, and for this one must start in local sites and singular occasions. We do not need a powerful new theory or a new promotion of the ones in place, we need a communication of the force of engagement that Derrida describes. I place more emphasis on teaching for this than does Derrida in “The University Without Condition”

(his focus there is more on the production of *oeuvres*, like his own), but I agree with everything he asserts. My point is that the humanities must be a place where the exigency of community happens, as I try to describe it in my essay on Granel; they must be a place where the most vital questions about being human occur. If that takes place more broadly than it does today, then the humanities may gain a symbolic purchase that they lack now. I believe also—but now I move to a project that is more one of “critique”—that those working in the humanities must find ways of demonstrating how the different dimensions of their fundamental concerns have bearing on the work of other disciplines. In my book, I try to make a philosophical argument for what I call “fundamental research”—I try to show that it is possible (I could go on about how this involves engagement with an “impossible,” but let us leave this aside for now). But I start, in the opening pages, by suggesting that such research entails showing how the thought that occurs in the humanities bears on the foundations of other disciplines. We need to demonstrate why the humanities are so critically important across the entire range of those practices that claim some knowledge or “savoir-faire.” And then there is a related but additional critical project to carry forward: we should continue to try to make it hard for the appeals to evidence you describe to pass unchallenged. I fear we cannot rely too strongly on this project of critique for the reasons I outline in my essay on Granel, but I do not think it can be abandoned, and I think we must pursue it more aggressively outside the usual disciplinary boundaries. So again, we must work on multiple fronts in ways that cannot be made, in every case, wholly coherent from a philosophical point of view. We must find ways to engage our fundamental concerns in always singular forms of responsive practice (this is where the compelling force will come from), and we must work critically and politically to broaden our institutional legitimacy and resources.

SMW: While this doesn't figure too much in your book, I wonder if we could talk a little bit about cultural studies. I hear in some of your earlier comments a sense, which I'd certainly share, that on occasion, the culturalist perspective has done little more than offer an alibi for the reduction and false resolution of real philosophical problems—or, to avoid the charge of disciplinary elitism, one might rephrase this to say instead, matters which call for fundamental thought. In the U.S. context, those associated with Derridean deconstruction have frequently showed little enthusiasm for cultural studies. And

this includes Derrida himself, whose essay “The University Without Condition” was originally given as a lecture to colleagues at Stanford University, and who in that paper rather hastily dismisses cultural studies as a “good-for-everything concept.” Tellingly, as we know, “the humanities” is preferred as a *name* (albeit with a host of complex implications and effects) throughout that lecture, as a heading for the kind of investigations in which people like ourselves are involved. We know, too, of course, Bill Readings’s diagnosis of cultural studies as a symptom of the dereferentialization of the university of excellence, and this image of cultural studies is often adopted, adapted or otherwise deployed by those in the United States who are perhaps most closely linked to Derrida. Elsewhere, meanwhile (I’m thinking particularly about the British “scene” now), cultural studies is being rethought by some (I’d like to include myself here), in ways which can at times bring it into a productive interplay with deconstruction (and not only deconstruction, but psychoanalysis and Deleuze too, among others—to go too quickly and rely on “proper names”). For example, by following Derrida’s reading of Mauss, where the thought of the gift marks a shift from “cold economic rationality” to a thinking of the “symbolicity” of this “rationality,” I’ve asked whether the conditions of possibility of cultural study or critique might be understood as founded upon the (im)possibility of the gift—which (however unaccountably) opens the possibility of all exchange, of exchange in general, yet which remains in excess of all economies. To the extent that the study of culture seeks to capture specificities that cannot be translated fully into an economy of exchange, I’ve tried to characterize cultural studies as not just a “good-for-everything concept,” not just the scene of a vapid interdisciplinarity or a false reduction of genuine philosophical problems, but *also* an excess built into rationalized and administered economies, or indeed what might be seen as “global” economy. (Elsewhere, for example, I’ve called it a kind of dream-thinking.) And this reconception of cultural studies fundamentally affects the question of teaching. For if to teach is always, inevitably, at some level, to *give an account*, then the rise of cultural studies as an economy of exchange—and a style of reckoning—opened by a thought of the gift may compel us in new ways to respond to the aporetic situation of teaching in general.

So, different relations or reactions to cultural studies may have something to do with the different disciplinary and institutional histories of cultural studies in different countries, the different effects it has produced, the different modes of reception it has encountered

or invited, or, in general, the “politics of” cultural studies in different places at different times. It’s perhaps too large a question, but how would you see cultural studies—its future in particular—in terms of the claim made upon us by the humanities?

CF: Near the end of the main essay in the book, I use a phrase that seems pertinent here. I note that the humanities are called for wherever a social usage offers itself (as usage) to the questioning I propose. This would seem to correspond to your effort to carry forward a thought of the “symbolicity” of cultural practice along lines suggested by Derrida. Cultural studies tends not to think usage at the level I am pursuing, but I see no reason why it should not. In general, cultural studies tends not to welcome a “fundamental” turn, as you note in your question—it avoids philosophy. But this is not true in every case, and I am very wary of generalization since I consider myself relatively uninformed as regards the latest movements in the field. Let me simply note that I recently went back to the work of Leroi-Gourhan for a project on ancient art and was quite inspired by his speculative gesture (and I have to add that my sense of inspiration was coupled by an almost equal disappointment in the “deconstructive” reading of his text offered by Bernard Stiegler in *Technics and Time*). The great speculative works in the “human sciences” of the twentieth century still offer immense challenges and possible inspiration to contemporary theoretical work. Thinkers in the humanities have to find new ways to broaden the reach of their questioning, I believe. This is partially why I tend to favor the designation “thought” over that of “theory.” But I’ll leave that debate for the moment and just say that I am interested in finding new ways to articulate and address the broad sociopolitical questions of this extraordinarily unstable time. Your undertaking seems to go in that direction. To the extent I grasp your effort, I can only applaud. If the gesture you are making “takes” in some manner, it will point again to the need for the kind of thinking I link to the humanities, even while it points beyond them. The task, I presume, is to do more than describe a particular field of study in a new way—it is to put into play the excess to which you point.

Notes

Introduction

1. Derrida, "Politics and Friendship," 148. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
2. Derrida, "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends," 75. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
3. Derrida, "Stops," 289–94.
4. Derrida, "Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis," 120. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
5. Derrida, "Negotiations," 18. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
6. Derrida, "Who's Afraid of Philosophy?" 187. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
7. Derrida, "Privilege: Justificatory Title and Introductory Remarks," 10. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
8. Derrida, "I Have a Taste for the Secret," 50–51 (London: Polity Press, 2001).
9. Derrida, "A 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking," 346.
10. Derrida, "Countersignature," 17–19.
11. The use of the term "belatedly" here deliberately resonates with my discussion, in the next section of this book, of the "belatedness" of the "counter" in deconstruction. However, this term "belatedness" is, throughout, deployed with a certain degree of irony or intended abuse. For the lateness of what is "belated" in deconstruction, or in counter-deconstruction, must be thought (as I try to demonstrate) according to an "other" temporality, one in which delay or deferral is just a part of the more complex temporal structure

of *différance* in which, as Derrida says in *Specters of Marx*, the “here-now unfurls” — perhaps even *before* its time. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 31. Here, *différance* in its “irreducibility” entails the “spacing of [a] promise and of the future-to-come that comes to open it,” which nevertheless cannot be equated simply with “deferral, lateness, delay, postponement.” Thus, *différance* also comes “without lateness, without delay, but without presence” — “it is the precipitation of an absolute singularity, singular because differing, precisely [justement], and always other, binding itself necessarily to the form of the instant, in *imminence and in urgency*: even if it moves toward what remains to come, there is the pledge [*gage*] (promise, engagement, injunction and response to the injunction, and so forth). The pledge is given here and now, even before, perhaps, a decision confirms it.” Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 31. As is hinted here, the pledge is, of course, also subject to the form or structure or movement of *différance*, in a way that radically complicates its own “here-and-nowness” as also just a bit *precipitate*, a little out of time with itself, not quite or not just “here” or “now.”

12. Malabou and Derrida, *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida*. My references here are to the translator’s note by David Wills. All further references to this book will be given in the body of the text.

13. For a fuller discussion — via Derrida’s “Mochlos” — of the counter-movement of the university as akin to that of a body experiencing “two-left-footedness,” see Wortham, *Rethinking the University: Leverage and Deconstruction*.

Chapter 1: Counter-Institution, Counter-Deconstruction

1. Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” 202–37. Further references will be given in the body of the text. On this complex negotiation with the traditions of the university, see the subsequent chapters of the present study, particularly those dealing with teaching deconstruction, the teaching body, and the question of the humanities. See also Kamuf, “The University in the World It Is Attempting to Think.”

2. Derrida, “The Deconstruction of Actuality,” 85–116.

3. The complex choreography that accompanies Derrida’s negotiation of the issue of educational reform and the future of philosophy in France from the 1970s onward is well documented in the series of texts collected together in Derrida, *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy: Right to Philosophy 1*; Derrida, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*; as well as in some of the interviews found in Derrida, *Negotiations* — particularly the interview of the same name with which the volume begins. The strategic calculations made by Derrida in view of the specificity, mutability, and often duplicity of a complicated interplay of forces surrounding such problems at this time are amply demonstrated in these texts.

4. Two key examples here are Weber, *Institution and Interpretation*; and Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature; or, The University in Deconstruction*. Both these receive particular mention in Derrida, “The University Without

Condition.” Other contributions to recent debates about the university include, of course, the highly influential Readings, *The University in Ruins*; as well as Wortham, *Rethinking the University: Leverage and Deconstruction*. Other figures associated with debates about the contemporary university include J. Hillis Miller, Nicholas Royle, and Timothy Clark (see especially Clark and Royle, *The University in Ruins*, published as a special issue of the *Oxford Literary Review*), Henry Giroux, Peter Trifonas, and Gerald Graff. Essays and interviews by Derrida, Hillis Miller, Sam Weber, Henry Giroux, and myself on the topic of the university appear in the second issue of the e-journal *Culture Machine*. Other recent publications of interest here include a special issue of *Diacritics* 31, no. 3 (2001), edited by Marc Redfield, devoted to the topic of “Theory, Globalization, Cultural Studies, and the Remains of the University”; and *Parallax* 10, no. 2 (2004) on the subject of “Auditing Culture.”

5. See Derrida, “Countersignature,” 7–42. In this text, originally given as a lecture at Cerisy in 2000, Derrida speaks of his love affair with the word “countersign,” and also indicates the role played by *contre* in its full and ambiguous idiomaticity throughout a variety of texts and motifs in his work—in particular, through terms such as *contretemps*, *contrepartie*, and *contre-exemple*. In each of these, the notion of opposition that is usually associated with the word “counter” is accompanied and complicated by a sense of proximity, of the *vis-à-vis*, which disrupts dialectical interplay or resolution. Thus the *contre* is against that which it is or, rather, that which it is *with*, according to a structure or logic that dislocates the spatial and temporal distinctions associated with a metaphysics of presence. Unsurprisingly, then, these terms fall short of acquiring the status of (or hesitate before becoming) full concepts or headings, at the same time as they resonate with everything that happens in deconstruction. (Including what happens to Derrida *vis-à-vis* the countersignature that he loves.) In a variety of ways, Derrida’s remarks in this text therefore resound in everything I have to say in the present chapter, especially about the “belated-alreadyness” or “already-belatedness” of the “counter” in deconstruction.

6. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 31. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

7. See Bennington, “Derrida and Politics,” 193, 198–99.

8. Derrida, “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends,” 67–98. Further references will be given in the body of the text.

9. Derrida, “Privilege: Justificatory Title and Introductory Remarks,” 1–66.

10. Derrida, “Negotiations,” 11–15. Further references will be given in the main body of the text.

11. See Bennington, “Derridabase,” 150. Further references will be given in the body of the text.

12. I further touch on this text in *Rethinking the University*.

13. See Derrida, “Negotiations,” 27. Also Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” 46–54.

14. See Wortham, *Rethinking the University*.

15. Weber, "Reading and Writing—chez Derrida," 85–101. Further references will be given in the body of the text.

16. See Ayto, *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins*, 140–41.

17. Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," 89. Further references will be given in the body of the text.

18. Derrida, "Nietzsche and the Machine," 215–56, esp. 250. Further references will be given in the body of the text.

Chapter 2: Teaching Deconstruction

1. During 1998 and 1999, Readings's *The University in Ruins* was the subject of heated debate between Dominick LaCapra and Nicholas Royle, in the pages of *Critical Inquiry*. In his "The University in Ruins?," LaCapra raised a series of objections and concerns regarding the generality and, indeed, the accuracy of Readings's description of the university's plight, as well as questioning the validity and robustness of the book's critical or theoretical "grounds." Royle's response, "Yes, Yes, the University in Ruins," sought to defend Readings's thesis, and drew attention in particular to the performative dimensions of *The University in Ruins*, whereby a certain tone and mode of address Royle felt LaCapra had overlooked in his reading of the book undermined the notion of, as LaCapra put it, "critical intellectual citizenship (a category Readings enacts in his own way without thematizing it)." LaCapra, "The University in Ruins?," 54. This notion of "critical intellectual citizenship" was one that LaCapra had posited so as to challenge Readings's insistence upon the end of the university and the nation-state as the grounds for the production of recognizable forms of intellectual practice. LaCapra's response to Royle, "Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes . . . Well, Maybe" was published in the same issue of *Critical Inquiry*.

2. The association Derrida suggests between, on the one hand, the institution of cultural criticism or of an academic and quasi-disciplinary discourse of "culture," and, on the other, various explorations of "*total social fact*" located within the "symbolicity" of economic reason, might well be re-examined via Bill Readings's discussion in *The University in Ruins* of Anthony Easthope's *Literary Into Cultural Studies*. Published around the time that saw cultural studies acquire, in Readings's terms, "professional disciplinarity," Easthope's book is described by Readings as follows: "In place of the 'old paradigm' of literary studies, Easthope offers a 'new paradigm' of Cultural Studies, which appears in order to replace the entire swath of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences as a generalized 'study of signifying practice' . . . the new paradigm is characterized above all by resistance to all attempts to limit its field of reference." Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 98. Of course, Readings is quick to note that "Easthope's is not the only way of thinking about Cultural Studies" (99) and indeed that "we cannot provide an account of what it is to do Cultural Studies that is theoretically

self-consistent" (97). Nevertheless, Easthope's book may be considered at least a symptom of the forces of re- and dereferentialization and, indeed, of the play of totalization and detotalization that assumes such a pivotal place in the disciplinary histories of cultural discourse and debate.

3. Alongside the more well-known writings of Paul de Man, Gayatri Spivak, and Bill Readings, other contributions to the question of deconstruction and teaching include Caudery, ed., *Literary Pedagogies After Deconstruction: Scenarios and Perspectives in the Teaching of English Literature*; and Trifonas, *The Ethics of Writing: Derrida, Deconstruction, and Pedagogy*. However, perhaps one of the best known and most productive—although now rather overlooked—books dealing with the question of deconstruction and pedagogy is Gregory L. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*. Ulmer approaches the question of Derrida's relationship to pedagogy most explicitly via a discussion of his involvement in Greph from the mid-1970s onward, while also concentrating on Derrida's essay "The Age of Hegel" and other scattered remarks of relevance in texts like *Dissemination* and *The Post Card*. Ulmer's main concern is to explore the possibilities of a grammatological pedagogy along Derridean lines. One interesting feature of this book, however, is to reconceive of "the scene of teaching" (a phrase given some emphasis by Bill Readings in *The University in Ruins*) in terms of the possibilities of certain kinds of theatricality. Such an approach might be contrasted interestingly with the interconnected work of Samuel Weber on institutions and theatricality. See the reissued edition of Weber's *Institution and Interpretation* and his latest book, *Theatricality as Medium*. For an introduction to Weber's work that begins to explore linkages between the question of the institution and the effects of theater, see Wortham, "'To Come Walking': Reinterpreting the Institution and the Work of Samuel Weber." See also Wortham, *Samuel Weber: Acts of Reading*.

4. For an invaluable discussion of the status of the "example" in Derridean deconstruction, especially insofar as it facilitates a rethinking of the political, see Naas, "Introduction: For Example," which introduces Derrida's *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*.

5. See, for example, Derrida, "The Age of Hegel"; "Otobiographies"; and "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand," discussed elsewhere in this book.

6. Here, Miller quotes from Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," in Kearney, *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*, 123.

7. Quoted in Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand," 168. In this essay, Derrida cites the translation by Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray of Heidegger's "What Is Called Thinking?"

Chapter 3: "The Fidelity of a Guardian"

1. The essay was first published in *Diacritics* 13, no. 3 (1983): 3–20. I allude here to the text as it is reprinted in Catherine Porter's and Edward

P. Morris's translation in Derrida, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, 129–55. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

2. A sense of this “history” from Derrida’s perspective is best reconstituted by reading in greater detail the various texts included in Derrida, *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy: Right to Philosophy 1* as well as those found in the second section and appendices to Derrida, *Eyes of the University*.

3. Derrida, “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends.” All further references will be given in the body of the text.

4. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 31.

5. Weber, “The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge.” See especially 230–31.

6. See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 125.

7. Weber, “The Debts of Deconstruction and Other, Related Assumptions.” All further references will be given in the body of the text.

8. Cited in Weber, “The Debts of Deconstruction,” 106.

9. Derrida, *Glas*, 14. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

10. The place of the teaching body is irreducibly singular—as we have seen, it is far from neutral or indifferent, without determination—yet this body is singular precisely to the extent that it does not gather itself into a unity: this is what we might mean by referring, here, to its virtuality or, better, its *actuvirtuality*.

Chapter 4: Auditing Derrida

1. All further references to this issue of *The Oxford Literary Review* will be given in the body of the text.

2. Kilroy, Bailey, and Chare, “Editorial Sounding: Auditing Culture,” 1.

3. Weber, “The Unraveling of Form,” 23.

4. The translation here is found in Weber, “Upsetting the Setup: Remarks on Heidegger’s ‘Questing After Technics,’” 59–60. Weber translates from volume 1 of Heidegger, *Nietzsche*.

5. Derrida, “Mochlos,” 29. Further references are given in the body of the text.

6. Bahti, “The Injured University,” 62. Further references are given in the body of the text.

7. Derrida, “Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name,” 3–4. Further references are given in the body of the text.

8. Derrida, “Demeure: Fiction and Testimony,” 27–28. Further references are given in the body of the text.

9. Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” 214–15.

10. Derrida, “‘Le Parjure,’ Perhaps,” 196. Further references are given in the body of the text.

11. Derrida, “A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text: Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” 191. Further references are given in the body of the text.

12. Derrida and Stiegler, “Echographies of Television,” 93–94. Further references are given in the body of the text.

13. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 211, 216. Further references are given in the body of the text.

14. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, 16. Further references are given in the body of the text.

15. Derrida’s reference to “Freud and the Scene of Writing” on p. 14 of this text can be found in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 227–28.

16. Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 127. Further references are given in the body of the text.

17. Derrida, “The Age of Hegel,” 1. Further references are given in the body of the text.

18. Greph had been “quick to criticize” the practice, inherited in a certain way from Hegel’s imperatives, of “beginning with teaching the content of knowledge, before even thinking it”—a teaching based on a mechanistic memorization as the prephilosophical pedagogic mode, which in turn assures “a highly determined prephilosophical inculcation.” Derrida, “The Age of Hegel,” 26. For Derrida, such pedagogy is deeply inscribed and ingrained as part of the statist problematics of education within modernity, denying or postponing (in the Hegelian version, among others) “access to thought—in its speculative form—of something whose content is already present [prior to this thought]. . . . In other words, philosophy proper is excluded, but its content continues to be taught, albeit in an improperly philosophical form, in a nonphilosophical manner. . . . This schema, so familiar by now, is one of the principal targets of the GREPH.” Derrida, “The Age of Hegel,” 31–32.

19. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 40–41.

20. Derrida, “The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils,” 5. Further references are given in the body of the text.

Chapter 5: The Claim of the Humanities

1. Derrida, “The University Without Condition,” 236. All further references will be given in the main body of the text.

2. Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 39.

3. Weber, “The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge,” 231. All further references will be given in the main body of the text.

4. I offer a somewhat different reading of Bill Readings’s book, in response to Weber’s, in my essay, “‘To Come Walking’: Reinterpreting the Institution and the Work of Samuel Weber.”

5. The reference here is not to the highly laden discourse of “quality assurance,” which has received much criticism among UK academics, but to a more fundamental notion of quality.

6. Derrida, “Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends,” 81.

7. Fynsk, *The Claim of Language: A Case for the Humanities*, xi.

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Index

- academic freedom, 35, 47, 57, 60–62, 72, 93–94
actuvirtuality, 20, 23, 26, 29, 78, 158n10.
 See also virtuality
agrégation, 2–3, 77
agrégé-répétiteur, 2–3, 77
Althusser, Louis, 2
American Declaration of Independence, 21, 36, 155n13
anarchism, 10–11
Aristotle, 117
artificiality, 26, 29
audit, 22, 85–96, 101–4, 109–11, 114–16, 118, 139–42
Austin, J. L., 63

Bahti, Timothy, 91–92, 158n6
Bauman, Zygmunt, 87
Beardsworth, Richard, 43
belated(ness), 12, 15, 29–32, 34, 43, 83, 131, 153n11, 155n5
Benjamin, Walter, 127, 138
Bennington, Geoffrey, 31, 33, 155n7, 155n11
Berloff, Michael, 88
Blanchot, Maurice, 128, 132
Bodleian Library, 104, 106, 109
CAPES report, 6
capitalism, capital, 25, 46, 64–65, 119, 125
Chatelet, François, 8
Clark, Timothy, 24, 85–86, 89, 155n4
Communist Party, 7, 31
contraband, 3, 29
contre, 1, 13–16, 21–22, 30, 155n5. *See also* counter
Cornell University, 3, 68–71, 76
counter, 1, 4, 6, 8–9, 10–17, 20–24, 28–43, 61, 104, 116, 139, 142, 153n11, 154n13, 155n5. *See also* *contre*
counter-institution(al), 2, 8, 12–21, 23, 25–29, 32, 34–37, 42, 73, 75, 121, 123–25, 131
countersignature, 13–14, 29, 32–34, 41, 155n5. *See also* signature
cultural studies, 22–23, 44–48, 53, 88, 144–46, 156n2

Deleuze, Gilles, 127, 145
dereferralization, 46–47, 76, 86, 112, 124, 145, 157n2. *See also* Readings, Bill; *The University in Ruins*
Derrida, Jacques: “The Age of Hegel,” 113, 115, 157n3, 157n5, 159n18

- Archive Fever*, 109, 111
Counterpath, 3, 15, 154n12
 "Countersignature," 14, 21–22, 155n5
 "The Deconstruction of Actuality," 26, 42–43
 "Demeure," 96, 98–101
 "The Double Session," 56
 "Echographies of Television," 100
Eyes of the University, 9, 154n3, 158n1, 2
 "Geschlecht II," 56, 64, 157n5, 7
Given Time, 49; *Glas*, 75–76, 80–81, 83
 "I Have a Taste for the Secret," 13–14, 17–19
 "'Le Parjure,' Perhaps," 97
 "Living On: Borderlines," 56
 "The Madness of Economic Reason," 49
 "A 'Madness' Must Watch Over Thinking," 13, 18
 "Mochlos," 16, 19, 38, 56, 91, 112, 118, 154n13
 "Negotiations," 5–6, 8–11, 32, 36, 38, 42
 "Nietzsche and the Machine," 42–43
Of Spirit, 64
 "Otobiographies," 56–58, 61, 64, 92–93, 95, 157n5
Politics of Friendship, 143
The Post Card, 79, 104–9, 157n3
 "The Principle of Reason," 35, 56, 68–77
 "Privilege," 9–10, 12, 31
 "Punctuations," 4–5, 7, 19
 "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text," 99
 "Sendoffs," 10
Specters of Marx, 30, 76, 154n11
 "Stops," 3
 "Structure, Sign, and Play," 3
 "The Time of the King," 49, 51
 "Titles," 10
 "The University Without Condition," 25, 27–28, 35–36, 72, 75, 88, 96, 120, 123, 134, 142–43, 145
 "Violence and Metaphysics," 54
 "Where a Teaching Body Begins," 2, 22, 24, 31, 75–79, 131
 "Who's Afraid of Philosophy?" 6–7
Who's Afraid of Philosophy? 31, 56, 154n3, 158n2
Writing and Difference, 159n15
différance, 8, 30, 33, 35, 43, 58, 78–79, 154n11
 disorient(ation), 16, 90, 92, 112, 118
 dissensus, 62–63, 95, 112
 division, divisibility, 3, 5, 37, 41, 74–75, 93, 95, 99–101, 104
doctorat d'état, 3
 dream(ing), 13, 17–18, 109, 143, 145
Ecce Homo, 57–58
 Ecole Normale, 1–2, 77, 83
 economy, economics, 9, 15, 22–23, 37, 39, 49–50, 52–54, 69, 75, 82, 85–86, 111, 114, 118, 124, 145, 156n2. *See also* exchange
 end-oriented, 69, 72–73
 Enlightenment, 58, 61–62, 64–65, 67, 71, 86, 112, 117, 123
 Estates General, 6–8, 13, 20, 26, 68
 evidence, 19, 22, 95–97, 99–104, 110–11, 139–42, 144
 Ewald, François, 16
 excellence, 22, 25, 46–47, 76, 86–87, 96, 102–3, 112–13, 115, 119, 123–24, 126, 139, 145
 exchange, 14, 21–23, 29, 36, 39, 48–52, 145. *See also* economy, economics
 Faye, Jean-Pierre, 8
 Ferraris, Maurizio, 16
 Foucault, Michel, 2, 38, 127
 Freud, Sigmund, 18, 79–80, 109–11, 132. *See also* psychoanalysis
 Fynsk, Christopher, 23–24, 99, 119–46
 Genet, Jean, 16, 81, 83
 German Idealists, 46, 50, 62, 66, 112
 gift, 12, 14, 22–23, 49–55, 64, 145
 globalization, global, 16, 20, 22, 25, 42, 45–46, 48, 62–63, 65, 87, 89, 119, 134, 138–39, 145
 Granel, Gérard, 128–29, 136, 144
 Grehp, 5–8, 11, 13, 20, 26, 28, 32, 34, 55–56, 68, 75, 77, 79–80, 114, 143, 157n3, 159n18

- Habermas, Jurgen, 46, 62, 112
 Haby reforms, 6, 56, 68
 Haver, Bill, 131
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 4, 56, 61–62, 81, 113–16, 159n18
 Heidegger, Martin, 4, 56, 64–67, 70–72, 90, 118, 121–22, 125, 127–28, 132
 hierarchy, 10–11, 78
 humanities, 14, 19, 23, 25, 27–28, 35–36, 49–50, 52–53, 65, 88, 119–39, 142–46, 154n1, 156n2
 Husserl, Edmund, 2
 Hyppolite, Jean, 2
- International College of Philosophy, 5, 8–11, 13, 20, 26, 28, 32, 36, 56, 68, 126
 International Parliament of Writers, 11, 26
The Interpretation of Dreams, 18. *See also* Freud, Sigmund; psychoanalysis
- Kamuf, Peggy, 24, 154n1, 154n4
 Kant, Immanuel, 5, 19, 70, 91–92, 112
 Keenan, Thomas, 36
 King, Rodney, 100, 102
- Lacan, Jacques, 127
 Laclau, Ernesto, 78, 158n6
 Levinas, Emmanuel, 54, 128
 literature, 13, 17, 79, 81, 97–99, 140
 London, Jack, 38
 Lyotard, Jean-François, 46, 85, 127, 129, 133
- Malabou, Catherine, 3, 15
 Mauss, Marcel, 22, 49–51, 145
 Miller, J. Hillis, 44–48, 62–63, 65–67, 87, 97, 155n4, 157n6
 Mitterand, François, 8
 monster, monstrosity, 58, 63–67
 Mouffe, Chantal, 78
- nation-state, 5, 25, 44–47, 62, 65, 67, 112, 156n1. *See also* State
 Nazism, 57, 64
 negotiation, negotiate, 4, 8–12, 25, 27–28, 34, 36–37, 39, 42, 64, 69, 72–74, 95, 103, 123, 154n1, 154n3
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 4, 38, 56–58, 60–62, 94, 129
 Oedipus complex, 79
 Paris, Matthew, 104
 pedagogy, 4, 47–49, 55–62, 78–79, 83, 92–95, 114, 131, 141, 157n3, 159n18. *See also* teaching
 performative, performativity, 28, 46, 55–56, 59, 63–64, 66–67, 70, 76, 85, 93, 97, 124–25, 130, 133, 143, 156n1
 Plato, 104, 107
 politics, the political, 1, 5–7, 24–26, 29–32, 34, 42, 45–47, 57, 62, 65, 68–69, 72–73, 78, 84, 86, 92, 102, 120–22, 129–30, 132–38, 143–44, 146, 157n4
 poststructuralism, 121–22, 132
 profession, 27–28, 36, 61, 69, 72–73, 75–77, 86–87, 94, 96–97, 104, 133, 138–39, 142
 promise, promissory, 29–30, 33–34, 54, 58, 89, 96, 99, 104–9, 114, 154n11
 proper name, 32, 33, 39, 57–58, 61, 79–81, 116, 129, 145
 psychoanalysis, 17–18, 79–80, 109–11, 145. *See also* Freud, Sigmund
- quality, 22, 27, 96, 102–3, 110, 115, 126, 139, 159n5
- RAE (Research Assessment Exercise), 27, 88, 113, 115–18
 Readings, Bill, 12, 46–48, 50, 62, 65, 76, 85–86, 111–12, 119, 123–26, 145, 155n4, 156n1, 156n2, 157n3, 159n4. *See also* *The University in Ruins*
 responsibility, 49, 53–55, 57, 63, 73, 75–76, 86, 95–96, 105, 118, 131, 140–41
 Royle, Nicholas, 24, 85–86, 89, 155n4, 156n1
 Russell Group, 88
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 2, 81
 signature, 14, 32–34, 41–42, 57, 103, 140. *See also* countersignature

- singularity, 8, 11–12, 30, 55, 59, 66, 69–70, 75–76, 82, 88, 93, 96–98, 128, 132, 136, 143–44, 154ⁿ11, 158ⁿ10
- Socrates, 104, 107
- Sorbonne, 2, 4, 7, 68
- sovereignty, 36, 74–75, 94
- spectrality, 26, 29
- State, 1, 9, 46, 58, 61–62, 72, 87–88, 98, 113–14. *See also* nation-state
- Stiegler, Bernard, 100, 102, 146
- structuralism, 7, 50
- subject, 17, 25, 38, 44–45, 47–48, 56–57, 63, 94–95, 116, 119
- teaching, 2–9, 10, 12, 14, 19–20, 22–23, 27, 31–32, 47–65, 67–68, 70, 75–80, 82–84, 87, 92–95, 101–2, 113, 117, 131–33, 140–43, 145, 154ⁿ1, 157ⁿ3, 158ⁿ10, 159ⁿ18. *See also* pedagogy
- technics, technology, 6, 15, 19–20, 27, 35, 42–43, 64–65, 67, 72–74, 76, 78, 87–92, 96, 98–103, 107, 109–11, 114–15, 119, 123, 125–26, 133, 138–39, 142–43, 146
- temporality, 11, 21, 26, 28–30, 32, 34–36, 42–43, 51, 97, 99, 114–16, 124, 126, 130, 133, 153ⁿ11, 155ⁿ5
- testimony, 12, 22, 89, 95–105, 107, 109, 111, 118, 132–33, 138–42
- UNESCO, 11, 26
- University in Ruins, The*, 12, 46–47, 76, 85, 87, 111, 123–24, 155ⁿ4, 156ⁿ2, 157ⁿ3. *See also* Readings, Bill
- virtuality, 9, 20, 23, 26, 29, 67, 76–78, 82, 84, 101, 124–26, 128, 134, 158ⁿ10. *See also* actuvirtuality
- vision, 3, 17, 25, 28, 70–73, 75, 77, 117–18
- Weber, Samuel, 24, 40, 76–77, 79–80, 90, 123–27, 140, 154ⁿ4, 157ⁿ3, 158ⁿ5,7,8, 159ⁿ4
- with-against, 1–2, 4, 6–8, 10–11, 16, 28
- Woolf, Virginia, 115
- Zylinska, Joanna, 24, 120

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